GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

Report of the Continuing Professional Development & Workplace Learning meeting
How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future

May 30 - June 14, 2017

[Meeting was held virtually so no photo is available]

Contributors

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Introduction

Between May 30 and June 14, 2017, 13 librarians participated in a virtual conversation via Google Docs about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together we represent 338 years of library experience.

The 13 librarians represent a variety of public and academic libraries. All are members of the Continuing Professional Development & Workplace Learning steering group. The members come from around the world.

Given the group's focus on CPD, it is not surprising that the workshop participants tended to focus much attention on issues associated with workforce development. Most notably, we see the enhanced workforce training opportunities as key components of meeting many of our current challenges. A second core theme related to customer service: members voiced strong interest in overcoming challenges to better meet the needs of 21st century users.

A vision for libraries

Libraries enable literate, informed and participative societies. When we look at the future, according to the debates during the CPDWL virtual meeting, this means that

- All types of libraries (public, academic, etc) will continue to evolve to meet the changing information needs of their communities, increasingly serving as a safe place that the community can come together to not just find information but also to work with, share, and create new information.
- Academic libraries represent and embrace diversity both in our staff complements and in the lens we apply to our services. We work in partnership with faculty and researchers to provide the learning and research experience for all students and enhance teaching and research. We not only understand but deliver content and services that reflect other world views. We contribute to scholarship and the body of research.
- In five years we will have school libraries in nearly all schools. Small communities have co-operated and started /reopened libraries that meet the actual needs of the local population. Academic libraries are considered as a necessity for students' retention, the research process and in the strategic work of the mother institution.

The group also noted that:

- In the year 2022, libraries are indispensable to their communities. They are well funded because all levels of government recognize their worth. They are busy places where community members feel welcomed and enriched.
- In the face of progress and development, libraries will be virtual and challenging environment for meeting clients information needs.
- In the face of increasing prevalence of "alternative facts" and "fake news" libraries serve a growing role in assisting populations find and gauge the accuracy of available information
- (Academic) libraries help with* research and teaching, learning processes, and publication processes. Librarians have become an equal partner of teachers and researchers and collaborate closely with all other staff to achieve the goals of higher education institutions. Libraries are not longer only a service provider. Libraries are central to research, teaching etc etc… The academic library - which of course means the people working in the library, represents the intellectual heart of the institution, this offering a sustainable presence in the institution (ie beyond short-term project funding)
- Libraries are essential in all connections like communities, universities and educational systems. They take the lead in finding and reviewing facts and information. They will adapt their services to the needs of customers and sometimes even fulfill the needs before the customers know what they are looking for. Libraries will collaborate with every institution or organization that is useful to support their goals. Libraries will take the lead in Open Access.
- The scary bit: We are thought leaders. We are connectors. We are so intimately engaged with our communities that they cannot anticipate the future without us. A clear and strong understanding of the value and integrity of information and research (read: data-information-knowledge). However, this requires a dynamic relationship with the expanding world of 'data', with the shifting understanding of 'reality' and therefore with how the ever-changing world creates its own valid reality. Keyword: Quicksand
- In 2022 libraries are community centers, working not FOR communities but WITH communities to fulfil its need in information, understanding, free access, free expression, safe place for everyone.
- In 2022 libraries are no longer seen as places with books. They are interactive, engaging, social, and informative and staffed by librarians who define their responsibilities based on what is needed in their communities. (SS)

The core values of libraries (Q4):

1. Intellectual freedom

2. Meeting user needs

3. Access to Information and knowledge

4. Inclusivity / equality

5. Freedom of expression

Comments:

The group identified many core values. The participants had strong agreement around intellectual freedom and the interrelated issues of access to information and freedom of expression. Another core theme related to user needs: The group saw a strong focus on delivering exemplary customer service.

Libraries are extremely good at (Q5):

1. Helping our community members achieve their potential

2. Creating welcoming spaces

3. Giving equal access to information and knowledge

4. Making use of limited resources for the betterment of the entire community

5. Meeting user needs

Comments:

The group placed a strong focus on customer service as a strength: 8 out of 13 participants chose "helping our community members achieve their potential" as something we are particularly good at. We are very proud of both the collections and services we deliver and the physical spaces we offer those collections and services from.

Libraries should do more of (Q6):

1. Piloting non-traditional ideas

2. Advocating for community needs

3. Involving users (including potential users)

4. Kill off our "darling" projects if they aren't really working

5. Assessing the impact of our services and programs on our community

Comments:

The group had a spirited online discussion about things we could do more of or do better. Again, the focus drew heavily on customer service needs: The group felt that libraries should be more innovative, speak up more for communities, involve them more in our decision making, be ready to walk away from our own pet projects and evaluate the impact of our work more regularly.

Libraries should do less of (Q7):

1. Focusing on traditional services

2. Using "library language" when talking to users

3. Fearing to take risks

4. Being too humble

5. Buying material for "just in case" needs rather than sharing resources

Comments:

The responses to this question show a strong interest in seeing more innovation coming out of libraries. The group wants libraries to stop focusing on traditional services and being so fearful about changing current practice.

At the same time, the group wants libraries to be more aggressive and entrepreneurial in our approach. We need to market ourselves more aggressively and use a language that is meaningful to them.

Challenges and Solutions

The main challenges to society (Q8):

1. Terrorism / violence

2. Global warming
3. Lack of equal access to information
4. Lack of education

5. Poverty / unequal distribution of resources

The group showed significant consensus on the key challenges facing society. Terrorism figured very high on many participants' lists as did global warming. Issues associated with access to information, education and poverty also figured high.

The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

1. Not enough adequately trained library workers to support 21st century libraries

2. Budgetary constraints

3. Changing the view of what a library is

4. Changing perceptions about the value added benefits of libraries

5. Promotion of up-to-date services and changes in services

Comments:

Not surprisingly, the number one issue identified by the Continuing Professional Development & Workplace Learning Group was the lack of adequately-trained staff to meet the needs of 21st century users. Staff want and need more technical skills, project management skills and customer-service skills to adapt to new challenges.   Some members called out the absence of succession planning as an interrelated issue: Library workers need training and development support to be prepared to move into higher level positions within their organizations.

The main professional challenges (Q10):

1. Lack of continuing professional development opportunities

2. Stopping doing things in order to take on new work / services (5 votes)

3. Adding new competencies into the library field (3 votes)

4. Changing the traditional ways of thinking of staff and executing tasks (3 votes)

5. Resistance to change (3 votes)

Comments:

Again not surprisingly, the group identified lack of continuing professional development opportunities as a key challenge facing the profession. As noted before, new expectations are being made of the library workforce and the training opportunities are not keeping up. (For example, employers are increasingly expecting librarians and other library workers to bring high technical skills and strong social media awareness to the workplace: Mid and late-career library workers sometimes lack these competencies and struggle to find opportunities to pick them up.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the group identified resistance to change as another big challenge. By this the group recognized that library workers sometimes react with fear and concern when new changes are introduced. Again, more training and development opportunities can allay this fear and make staff more accepting of changes as they arise.

How a Unified Library Field can Make a Difference (Q11):

1. Libraries can operate more efficiently. We will all be working together to reduce duplication and share resources

2. Users would be better supported.

3. We would get a more united view on what the future library field is.

4. We will attract more and better candidates into the profession

5. Government funding will be increased

Comments:

The group saw many clear advantages to a more unified library field. Some of the answers focused on improved use of resources: we would reduce duplication and, as a result attract more government funding. Other answers related more to improving the services we deliver to customers (for example, collaborating with community partners to deliver services across library sectors).

Interestingly, other answers related to improving our understanding of our own profession. By coming together, we can better understand our value. We can convey that value better to others and, as a result, attract more and better candidates to our ranks.

The characteristics of a Unified Library Field (Q12):

1. Library workers are well informed about activities in other sectors and other parts of the world

2. Strong marketing campaign for libraries

3. Minimal duplication of effort. Individual libraries or consortia take on work on behalf of others

4. Common understanding of library strategies and goals

5. Negotiating for better conditions in all parts of the library field

Comments:

The group had a very clear picture of what a unified library field would look like. Individual members could speak with accuracy about activities in other sectors and in other parts of the world. This comfortable level of knowledge made marketing libraries and library careers very easy: Members of the profession could easily explain what their colleagues did.

This enhanced level of understanding also made libraries run more efficiently. Duplication was reduced and libraries could easily collaborate with each other to support mutual interests.

The focus of a unified library field (Q13):

1. Improving customer service

2. Reducing duplication and increasing efficiency through collaborative action

3. Improving the quality of working conditions across the profession

4. Attracting excellent candidates into the profession

5. Demonstrating the value of libraries to the world

Comments:

The conversation ended on a very positive note. The group identified several areas or themes for the unified library field to focus on: Top of the list was, again, customer service: the group saw the unified field as better equipped to enhance the services it provides to users. Other focus areas were more internal: the group saw the need to draw attention to the working conditions experienced across sectors and geographies in an attempt to enhance our colleagues' working experience and, ultimately attract new people to the field.

A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, through a Google Docs, during a two week process ending June 15, 2017. It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA on how a unified library field can tackle the challenges of the future.

Over the course of two years (2017-2018), IFLA will involve as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation. Participants are encouraged to continue the conversation in their own networks and organizations and share the results with IFLA. At the end of 2017, the first results of the workshops and online discussions will be turned into a Global Vision Report, which in turn will be adapted into concrete strategies, processes and work programmes in 2018.

To learn more about the global conversation, and download supporting materials to support your own activities, visit globalvision.ifla.org.

Stay tuned for news about the IFLA Global Vision discussion following #iflaGlobalVision and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on http://globalvision.ifla.org/.