Records Management Special

The future of document, knowledge and record management in 2000

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Humanity, as a social being, is facing a historic and important moment; it is a moment of transition - we should rather say a period - and although we suppose we can predict how the evolution towards the future should develop, we also run the risk of making a mistake.

The Information Professional

"A study of the functions that a librarian understood in its generic sense of referring both to information scientists and archivists as well - will have to perform in the year 2000 and after is conducted. A flexible, multi-value and open education which affords the opportunity to train generalists and specialists is advocated. Similarly, it should allow changes of responsibilities and functions as well as the possibility to move up the career ladder. Professional positions should be tied to responsibilities assumed.

"An increase of specialised professionals is forecast both for the preparation of information and attention to users. Similarly, an increase in library service enterprises such as consultancies is forecast. Likewise, the increase of managing and organising functions is advocated, thus having a wide range of tasks to perform."

The fact of intending to talk about the structure and form of the profession of those who deal with the information, will present in the year 2000 and after entails to accept an important challenge. All sorts of new inventions or unforeseen discovery can completely change the predicted estimates.

The year 2000, it is not even tomorrow, it is the afterwards of these present times. On this account, here we will try to go deeply towards 'the year 2000 and after'. In spite of everything I have just said, the temptation of falling into that challenge is great and rather difficult to resist. It is not easy to resist a temptation like this where we are going to talk about the information professional, in short about the human being, however, I yield to it.

I yield to it, since mankind, every man of those who make humanity, is an irredeemable and unique being, destined to fulfill a mission, a role in the Great Theatre of the World. We are all actors, each one performing his daily duty. Each one with his own responsibility; towards himself as much as with his contemporaries.

In this great theatre of the world, where we all think to know who and how we are, even if we do not understand it, to paraphrase the lines of the play by Cladron dela Barca "Life is a Dream", we, the information professional, have been assigned a tremendous role. No matter where we come from, or where we are going to, we are the responsible persons for conserving and spreading human knowledge. We have in our hands the key of what is certain and what is uncertain, of what is false and what is erroneous, of what is real and what is unreal.

Whether consciously or unconsciously we can change the course of the world, simply by shouting up or by propitiating a specific piece of information... Naturally, we are falling here into ethical and deontological fields. It is not my purpose right now to enter into these questions. Integrity and honour should be assumed in the case of the information professional. Indeed, it has been emphasised the importance, the great importance, involved in dealing with information.

Let us see who is this 'information professional'. We all are - everyone of us, each human being - informants, information bearers in the broadest sense of the world. When we delimit the concept by adding the characteristic 'professional', we delimit as well as its field of action. Even so, it covers an extensive range, the wide range of those who maintain their existence and earn their living by handling, spreading and organising information, this to be taken in its most general sense.

For the purpose of this work, I would still want to restrict a little more, the concept of 'information professional' by solely keeping it for the 'librarians'. Librarians, understood as a generic denomination concerning those who deal with knowledge formalised in writing, whether manual, printed or computerised writing, and supported in parchment paper... magnetic tapes, optical disks, internet...

We will use the term 'librarian' and not documentalists, because it is common use in India. We would like to clarify that the information scientist should be a specialist within the librarians' professional field. Therefore, from now on we will talk about 'librarians'.
The library functions we can foresee will be concentrated in three main groups:

- Research
- Management
- Information Dissemination

Each one of these groups will be subdivided into other different groups, for example:

- Research
  - theoretical principles
  - philosophical-scientific principles
  - systems science principles
  - new methods of action
  - training and education
  - study systems
    - a) syllabuses, curricula
    - b) training institutions
  - professional categories

- Management
  - compilation
  - data processing-analysis
  - storage
  - archive
  - management organisation

- Information Dissemination
  - dissemination services
  - study and attention to the users
  - loans

In its turn, these groups will be subdivided, for example:

- compilation
  - selection and acquisition of funds
  - register.

- data processing analysis
  - theoretical studies
  - new classification systems
  - indexing methods-thesauri
  - cataloguing
  - abstracts languages
  - analysis
  - classification
  - indexing
  - abstract making
  - terminology.

- storage
  - of monographies (books)
  - of periodicals
  - of grey literature

- database construction (in any medium)
  - reference
  - textual
  - phonic sound
  - factographic
  - graphic and photographic.

- archive
  - techniques and processing for historical archives
  - administrative archives
  - conservation
  - restoration.

- management organisation
  - information policy
  - national
  - international
  - prospective
  - centre planning and organisation
    - sections
    - staff
    - service
    - standardisation
    - marketing
    - evaluation
    - price policy
    - planning - telematics - computer science
    - evaluation policies
    - statistics
    - legal aspects/legal documents
    - ethical and deontological aspects.

- dissemination services
  - on paper (generic sense)
    - journals, bulletins
    - periodical publications
    - telematics (on different media and format)
    - data base distribution
    - publications.

- research and attention to user
  - users research
    - personal visits
    - group visits - seminars
  - attention to users
    - user training
    - personal and individualised attention
    - consulting organisation
    - service to the community
    - encouragement to read.

- loans
  - individual
  - inter-library loans.
In my opinion, we have already mentioned enough library functions so that everybody could get overwhelmed. Enough as well so that those deciding to face them should think they will be devoting their lives to a profession which is progressing, with a great future and whose existence is secured, not only as a daily duty but also as the intrinsical question of its ‘raison d’etre’ is concerned. As long as there is someone materialising the result of his intellectual activity in a medium, there will always be someone who should be compiling, processing, keeping, and spreading the above mentioned intellectual activity.

**Classified functions analysis**

Following this nearly exhaustive list of the functions a librarian should fulfil in the year 2000 and after, we could establish the classes of centres existing in this time.

It would be the purpose of another study, the evolution of the classes of centres existing and to what extent some of them would increase while others would decrease, taking into account the different roles, territorial fields, thematic fields, activities of the existing centres, as far as internal functioning is concerned and also as their diffusion towards the external area.

I venture to assume that information processing and dissemination centralised services or libraries will increase, where the small public or private libraries could find some indexing and cataloguing routine work already accomplished. Consultancy enterprises will also increase as well as those devoted to computer and Internet service. In the same way, an increment will be observed in the archives, in the so-called administrative archives. They are the kind of archives of the sections, or management departments, where documents of internal use are kept, such as invoices, contracts, telephone receipts, etc., that will not necessarily have paper as a medium.

Nowadays the electronic mail is getting popular, and is archived in disks or tapes. It could be argued that these tasks may be performed by the clerical staff. And this is very true: In these archives, however, we will keep internal documents, such as technical reports, professional visits, professional travels, offprints of interesting articles. Therefore the functions which should be performed fall already under what a librarian should do. Likewise, we have to take into account the importance that the ‘grey (non-conventional) literature’ will acquire as opposed to the classical publications, such as books or magazines. Lectures, meetings, symposia, congresses, visits, interviews, will proliferate, each producing its appropriate papers.

We are already overwhelmed by the amount of notices and programmes we receive from different parts of the world, and we will receive even more when video conference, video telephone, electronic mail, and telefax...and who knows how many more different media, will be in use!

We have a very adaptable and extensive panorama in front of us, with an indeterminate series of interrelations and interconnections which act jointly and individually on all the foreseen library functions. Naturally, the types of centres, libraries or services that should be created and installed, will be affected in the same way.

We should not forget that society leans towards a society of services, where everything is bought ready made. But remember, someone had to test it before it is put on sale!

We have reached this important point, where we encounter the human being, who should start functioning all the collection of machineries and gears so that the ‘library system’ could work. The functions the librarians should fulfill and the ways and manners of how they must disseminate them; all this appears in this work as a very complicated thing. We are talking about a system which is at the same time evolutionary, dynamic, and open.

Every individual makes up a principal element; from whom the net will be constructed, in scales of successive complexity until we reach the total lattice. Each individual’s positions, in the different scales will depend on the degree of responsibility, always in a reverse ratio to the quantity, that is to say, as soon as responsibility increases, the number of individuals forming the upper category will decrease. Professional structure could be inserted in a triangle, or in a triangle, depending on the cases, where the positions of the principal elements should not be definite, unless otherwise stated. An upward mobility, with an exchange of functions, should be assured.

What we wanted to express with the systems science panorama which has been outlined here, is that the training of information professionals for the year 2000 and after should be a flexible and versatile one. New ways of education and training should be offered where categories anticipated in the library institutions should be covered. These ways of education and training could be state promoted or private, university or medium level education, basic education, continuous education.

In the same way the programmes of studies should offer the choice to go towards one task or another, having the possibility of becoming a ‘generalist’ or a ‘specialist’. 
The doors should be also open for those coming from other fields of human knowledge. The training and studies should be programmed in accordance with multi-disciplinary criteria, covering the foreseen functions the 'librarian' of the year 2000 and after should fulfil, with the assumed missions which have already been described.

In my opinion and precisely due to the diversity of activities already mentioned, the number of specialists will increase to the detriment of the generalists, because the specialised tasks will increase in order to cover the range of jobs to be fulfilled.

I think I can also foresee an increase, in relation with the present times, of professionals working behind the screen getting ready information which will be subsequently disseminated. Naturally, we will need those professionals in direct contact with the user, before the screen, giving consultation and advising services.

However, we should not forget that the user will have access to the most diverse databases, to references, and to text. We have an interesting panorama in front of us. It is complex, versatile, interdisciplinary-wide, as much as it is simple. Monovalent and monodisciplinary, in order to meet all the activities demanded in a modern society for information.

It is my wish that this work will throw some light on those of us who have in our hands the responsibility of the development and training of information professionals. We have already begun the journey in the year 2000...

"...the training of information professionals for the year 2000 and after, should be a flexible and versatile one... new ways of education and training should be offered."

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