

The Salzburg Curriculum

Transcript: Management for Participation video by R. David Lankes

<http://vimeo.com/50805047>

Library professionals need to manage themselves, their library, their organization. And management's gone through some major shifts. In fact, many people would now tell you that management is dead. But the idea that management's gone from very hierarchical staffs, it's gone from bureaucratic structure, to open, to flat, to matrix design, to all of these things. The Salzburg group really struggled with, "What does it really mean to manage in this era of participation. What are the core administrative skills of librarians?"

And so, there's a list, right? First of all, librarians need to understand institutional sustainability. They need to understand that as they fail and fail often, as they try new projects, as they create and bring the community together, they need to do it in such a way that they can maintain this effort, that they can be sustainable over time. That's things like, how do you get funding? How do you stay relevant? How do you diversify funding sources? Really, the idea of budgeting and bringing that financing in. That, as a professional, you need to advocate for the institution. Now, that assumes that you're working for an institution that you believe in. But the idea is that if you do truly believe in the value of the library you're working in, for example, or the information center, or even the company that you're a part of, you need to understand how do you advocate for saying, "This is what we do. This is the story that we tell. This is the good that happens, but we need community support in the form of funding, morale, equipment, whatever it is."

That requires a basic economic skill, things on how do you do budgeting, how do you keep track of costs, how do you project and model costs into the future? And that ethics and values are part of what it means to manage an organization. You cannot manage an effective library without doing it from the values you believe in. Strategic plans cannot be created without a larger sense of worldview and responsibility.

Eli Neiburger at the Ann Arbor District Library once had this great idea, put out electric suggestion cards: tell us how we can do better. And the electronic suggestion card that he got and he loved and I loved the most, which was, how can the library improve? And it was, "More pie and prostitutes." [laughs] It's funny. And we begin to say, "Wait a minute. Is that really what we want to do?" More pie and prostitutes might bring a lot more people – probably different people – into the public library that's been there before, but probably doesn't match what the mission goals and values of that organization are. Now, pie might. I mean, the idea is that we've got lots of cafes now. It's working really well. Prostitution might, actually, in other places where it's legal. But by and large, what we're talking about is when you manage, you manage from your core principles.

Sharing. That sharing is a core management skill. That we talk about the benefits of sharing and working together across institutions, but we also understand that barriers, as permeable as they can be and we want them to be, also play a role. Who's a librarian and who's not a librarian? Which service area is this? When we define the community, where are we blocking that out? And so, it becomes this really, really interesting play: where you want to build nice fences around things, and when you want to blow the fences up. And what are the benefits to doing either of those activities?

That as a professional you must collaborate with interdisciplinary teams. You must be able to work with technology staff, yes, but also social scientists, anthropologists, the museum down the street. You need to be able to work with faculty. You need to be able to work with your principal. We need to understand that no one profession can do it all.

Librarians are really implementing a larger mission than what they're capable of doing. That's one of the changes in new librarianship. The idea that the libraries are seeking goals, are seeking outcomes within their community that is larger than they are individually able to produce. Rather than reduce the goals and mission, rather than reduce the vision and say, "This is all we can do, this is all we'll do," in fact, new librarianship says, "No no no no no. Go big or go home." Go big, and then find the partners to make it happen, from the political, to the administrative, to the community, to the neighborly. Whatever it is, we collaborate to attain this larger mission.

And so, collaboration not only happens across domains but within the domain. A good librarian is able to collaborate with other librarians. And we *teach* it as well, so a good community member knows how to collaborate with other communities.

If you've ever gone into a college course or even into a business setting, they've said, "Great, we're putting together a team or a work team around Topic X, a task force. Go for it!" What they do is give you a mission and a room and hope for the best. You know that collaboration is not as simple as getting together and saying okay. It requires a discussion of who's gonna do what. What are the benefits? What is the style of the group going to be? Are we going to have one person who's in charge? Are we all going to be in charge? Are we going to split up in our separate ways and come together at the end? How to collaborate is a skill that librarians should be able to teach and that libraries should be able to promote within their platform.

And finally, a library professional needs to understand assessment, analytics, impact. That is, we talk about libraries helping communities improve by achieving their aspirations, achieving their dreams. But do we know if that's happened? One of the problems that public libraries have is that they're sort of loved to death. They're a romantic organization. The old stereotype of the library is a bookish place with shushing librarians and quiet. You know, that might be out of date, as I hope you're seeing through these modules. At the same time, it's a warm fuzzy. It's a nice image: the idea of walking into mahogany-lined, massive pieces of gothic architecture and sitting by the fire with your favorite book is a wonderful vision. It sounds really enjoyable.

The problem is that it's almost impossible – particularly in, say, a public library – to find a service that *doesn't* sort of have a nice feel to it. You know? It's like, "We're gonna read to kids." "Aww." "We're gonna read to seniors." "Aww." "We're gonna do a knitting group." "Aww." It has this great sort of, you know, "That's really nice." The problem is that "really nice" doesn't really mean "really effective." "Really nice" doesn't mean necessarily that it had great impact. It's hard to, in many settings, find something that doesn't fit into this broad scope of new librarianship, but we have to understand that while we need to try lots and lots of experiments very quickly, we also need to stop and say, "Which ones of these are worth keeping, and which ones, time to die?" And so, one

of the problems that many, *many* organizations not limited to libraries have, but certainly that libraries have, is killing projects. We're great at starting them, we're great at creating ideas for them and having these aspirational dreams. We start them and someone falls in love with them, and when do we know it's time to pull the plug? That's part of, as a professional - librarians need to be able to assess these services, see from the data whether they're working, and ultimately assess their impact.

This is important. Librarians are a professional class, and as professionals, they need to work in ambiguous settings where we can assume that they'll be managing others, and these are the core skills of what you can expect from library managers.