Book reviews


Here is a title calculated to make the casual browser sit up and take notice. The management guru meets the library service? The terminology conjures up memories of one of those high-earning management best sellers which have become commonplace in recent years, Gifford Pinchot III’s ‘Intrapreneuring’. In it the author considers how large organizations can maintain the flair for innovation associated with small enterprises. Stirring and subversive ‘commandments’ instructs the would-be intrapreneur to:

Come to work each day willing to be fired
Circumvent any orders aimed at stopping your dream
Remember that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission

and more in like vein. How is this applicable to library and information services?

On examination it turns out that the title is intended more to hook the attention than to reflect a content which provides a version of Pinchot for information workers. This is a vigorous – and invigorating – canter through the range of management skills and analytical procedures which will stand the librarian in good stead in the increasingly competitive and changing situations encountered in organizations today.

The book clearly aims to stimulate practising librarians to be energetic, proactive and outward-going in their approach to promoting libraries and taking advantage of the opportunities provided by developments in information and communications technologies to increase the value placed on information services. “Unfortunately some librarians have been slow to realise what is happening and to grasp the opportunities that have arrived. Their behaviour remains as it was before, reacting to events rather than leading them and providing traditional services that could, frankly, have been provided even had much of the technology of the 20th century not been invented” (p. ix).

On the other hand, one might respond, many librarians do react to developments, quietly and industriously working away to implement new ideas and techniques. That word ‘quietly’ reflects one of the weaknesses. As the authors note: “Too often we find that the information service has really wonderful systems and services but no-one in the organization seems to be aware of them” (p. 40). To encourage practitioners to avoid such a situation, the book deals with activities such as networking, internal infor-
mation audit, communication and presentation, team development, and internal marketing and promotion. *En route* many topical concerns are touched on, including quality and performance management, creating service level agreements, convergence of computing and library services, and knowledge management.

The authors repeatedly draw attention to the relevance of their text for academic and public libraries, but their main focus is on special libraries catering for internal organizational members – not surprising considering their backgrounds in the Health and Safety Executive and the Home Office.

Inevitably, given the range of topics dealt with, the treatment of each one is brief and would be inadequate, in a teaching context, for developing any depth of knowledge of any one area. However, the pulling together of this wide range of organization and information management skills provides a usefully integrated picture of what is ideally required of information workers in the contemporary world.

As the book is aimed at ‘LIS managers and professionals’ it is not surprising that some features may disappoint those involved in education for information. The blurb tells us that the text incorporates ‘cross-sectoral case studies’. In fact these are brief illustrations of no more than two or three paragraphs and insufficient for analysis or discussion. In addition there is a fairly extensive ‘Further reading’ section, containing some interesting texts and web sites, but, although they are arranged in chapter sequence, there are no direct citations in the text, so the reader may have to infer which source has been incorporated into a particular discussion. This approach has obviously been adopted so that the powerful flow of the main text is not disrupted and the reader distracted by numerous citations.

In summary, this is a vigorous – almost evangelical – presentation of the activities and skills required by the effective information worker, useful as an adjunct to some of the more academic works, but unlikely to become a set book.

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This is not another book about index languages, instead it offers a clear discussion of indexing and abstracting as processes. It begins by addressing fundamental issues such as the principles and procedures involved in indexing, the consistency and quality of indexing, the types of abstract and the abstracting process, as well as the evaluation of the system. It then goes on to provide an overview of wider issues relating to the automation of the indexing and abstracting processes, the indexing of non-traditional materials and the implications of the Internet for the future of indexing and abstracting.
As well as providing a general introduction to the issues, the book includes discussion of the research which supports our current level of knowledge in these areas. This enables an individual initially to obtain a grasp of the basics of a particular topic, with the option of pursuing specific issues in more detail as and when required.

In this new edition the structure and content of the first eleven chapters from the first edition appears to have been subject to relatively modest alterations. The original text has been updated with discussions of more recent research and new references provided where appropriate. Given that these chapters are concerned with the basic principles of indexing and abstracting there would be little value in completely rewriting them and the changes made ensure the currency of the discussion.

Some of the later chapters have been expanded more significantly, for example there is now a much fuller discussion of the indexing of imaginative literature, and two new chapters have been added. The first of these addresses an area of growing interest; the indexing multimedia sources. This is essentially a literature review covering issues relating to the indexing and retrieval of visual and audio materials. This provides a useful overview of the work being carried out in this field, however, it lacks that discussion of the basic issues which makes the other chapters so useful.

The second new chapter looks at ‘Indexing and the Internet’. This provides a consideration of indexing from the point of view of the search engines, with some discussion of ‘intelligent agents’ and hypertext as indexing. Something which shows up particularly well in this context is that Lancaster keeps things in perspective, identifying both the potential and the problems associated with the new technology.

The final chapter, considering ‘The future of indexing and abstracting services’ has, of course, had to be completely rewritten in the light of the development of the Internet. Lancaster looks at the implications this has for the delivery of information services and the role of indexing and abstracting processes.

The references have been updated to include new research but older materials have been retained. This is important to provide a historical context, as well as acknowledging that much of the work is still relevant today. References are given in the form of a bibliography at the end of the book. Whilst this is a useful format, enabling browsing of the references, I would have preferred to see references also provided at the end of each chapter. Confining the references to a single bibliography means they become rather divorced from the text in which they are discussed.

Indexing and abstracting exercises are provided, as well as ‘A tutorial farce in one act’ on the subject of abstracting. I am not convinced the latter contributes a great deal to the book, however, it may appeal to some.

Since the book is principally aimed at the student, it is a pity that the glossary has been excluded from the new edition. A quick reference guide to unfamiliar terminology can be helpful for someone getting to grips with the field, particularly since terminology in the new text is not always explained. The index appears comprehensive, providing useful contextual detail where topics occur in a variety of situations.
Style and presentation

Lancaster has a clear and concise writing style. There are some complex issues under discussion but these are conveyed in a way which should be readily understood by most readers. Frequent use of diagrams, charts and examples helps to illustrate the points under discussion. It is unfortunate that in the chapter on printed indexing and abstracting services the way in which figures are dispersed within the text means the discussion may be several pages away from the relevant examples, whilst those same examples are embedded in text to which they have no relevance.

My only reservation relating to the general style of the work is that in some of the research reviews there are occasions where the text becomes almost an annotated list of research with little development of the discussion. One is left with the desire to know more: why a particular project has been mentioned, how this relates to the other research included, what are the implications of the research, etc.

Overall, the presentation of the material is good, however, some of the illustrations have text reduced to a size which is too small to read easily. In a few cases this is exacerbated by rather feint or fuzzy print. Whilst many of the figures are merely intended to be illustrative, rather requiring a study of the text itself, it seems desirable that illustrative material should be clearly presented.

General consideration

When teaching indexing theory the first edition of ‘Indexing and abstracting in theory and practice’ was one of my standard textbooks and this new edition continues to provide a good introduction to the major issues in the field with pointers to reviews and research literature which can be followed for more detailed discussions of specific problem areas. The updating of the discussion is important for giving access to more recent research and the new chapters help to widen the student’s awareness of more recent developments outside of the traditional indexing and abstracting situations.

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The ambitions of this book are set out in the introduction:

The purpose of the Handbook is to provide a link between information professionals and the new world of information-related work ... The Handbook
will also have a role in the teaching and learning of information management and in the continuing professional development of personnel and its intended audience:

Readers of the book are profiled as librarians, information industry personnel, document managers, records managers, archivists, network specialists, and others in the information chain such as publishers and information providers to which the blurb specifically adds information analysts and knowledge managers. That seems to take care of pretty well everyone, and there is certainly something for every reader who is concerned with the management of information services.

The chapters are written by a comprehensive mix of practising librarians, consultants and academics, and generally they try to make their contributions relevant to all library sectors. They include some well-known names, Jo Bryson, for example, on finance management, and who else should deal with copyright but our new LA President, Graham Cornish. Their contributions are organized into a number of broad categories identified by the different section headings as: Strategy and Planning, The Service Infrastructure, Managing Resources, and Access and Delivery. Two strong themes run across these divisions: developments in and implications of technology, and strategic management.

The impact of IT is a major preoccupation of most library and information professionals, as well as many politicians, and these chapters are probably the ones which will generate the strongest interest. Terry Beck looks at “The technological future”, but bases his comments firmly on current initiatives, such as the National Grid for Learning. Other chapters deal with electronic publishing (the implications of electronic information for copyright are also examined in the appropriate chapter), the Internet, intranets, leading finally to Colon Steel’s examination of “New paradigms in access and delivery”, which seeks to penetrate further into the future. He draws on an eclectic selection of sources – some of them, such as David Puttnam, rather unexpected – to examine the implications of technological development for information services. He draws a parallel between banking and LIS work and forecasts the same process of ‘downsizing’ facilitated by outsourcing, automation and online transactions. But he also predicts the growth of specialists in organizing knowledge and the development of niche markets. Intelligent agents will replace ‘intelligent librarians’; traditional divisions between specialist practitioners, such as cataloguers and reference librarians, will become irrelevant. Information educators will no doubt be interested in examining the implications of these ideas for course design to meet the future needs of the profession.

Technophobes can avert their eyes from these chapters, for there is also material on the vital human side of the organization: Peter Stubley discusses customer care and John Pluse champions human resource management.

The indefatigable Ray Prytherch, as well as editing this book, has written the chapters on strategic management. Librarians tend to have moved from an indifference to formalised planning to a passionate enthusiasm, judging by the number of planning
documents which are emanating from different library services. The treatment here covers strategic and financial planning, including environmental analysis, the general approach to strategic management, and performance measurement. These chapters like all the others, provide extensive lists of references for further reading, including web sites, and draw on both general management and LIS-specific sources which will be valuable in the educational context.

Charles Handy has opined that the public sector tends to embrace private sector management approaches just as the private sector is abandoning them. It would have been useful if these chapters, based on the classic private sector strategic planning models, had referred to the shortcomings which have been encountered in the private sector, and considered the situational factors in the public sector which do not conform to the requirements of private sector models – but this latter omission is perhaps a consequence of a dearth in the literature.

The reference to knowledge managers on the cover prompts the reflection that this currently glamorous, and allegedly highly paid, area of information work receives rather less attention within the book than its current profile would warrant (it appears in the chapter on Information Auditing), but that probably reflects our uncertainty about exactly what it is and whether we can lay claim to it.

The dust jacket declares that the book “will become a standard reference on best practice for professionals and students”. It is not so much a reference work – although there is a brief directory of organizations (the basis for selection is not made clear) and a glossary – as a readable collection of summaries of recent developments, in some cases tending towards brief literature reviews, in others text-book-like advice on practice. As such it provides a valuable resource for LIS education, both for students and academics. It is particularly useful for providing an overview of trends in those areas which might be related, but not central, to one’s main interests. The reader will be hard pressed, on turning to the index, to find an issue of current concern to the information professions which is not present. In short, this is a very useful addition to the personal or institutional library, for the management shelves rather than the reference section.

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The On-The-Job Sourcebook for School Librarians is an inspirational and easy to use handbook, and as Tilke comments in his preface “it is practical rather than theoretical in intent, so that what is suggested is achievable”. Still, his friendly tone of voice understates a powerful message – that school librarians “ensure that the school library
is a central pillar that rises above the foundation and supports the entire structure of the school’s activities”. The purpose of the book is always clear – to understand one’s professional role in the light of the school’s culture, to enhance the use of organizational knowledge and to deliver value to the students and teachers who use their school library.

The first section (chapter) provides an overview and identifies issues such as the multidimensional roles of the secondary school librarian: the provider of a service in the institution, a manager, a promoter and marketeer, a tutor and teacher and an evaluator. Sections 2–6 are concerned with issues such as putting policy into practice (particularly strong), library development planning, action planning and evaluation and monitoring. Section 3 focuses on management – running a meeting, applying for funding, managing the budget and managing information and communication technologies. Section 4, the curriculum and the library, speaks of departmental liaisons, working with individual members of staff, developing an interest in examinations, supporting vocational courses and lesson planning and evaluation of information skills. Section 5 discusses collection development policy, types of resources, policy for use of the Internet, and marketing and promotion. Particularly useful for new school librarians looking for an identity is the specimen job description (with its action verbs) in Section 6 reproduced with permission of Hertfordshire Schools Library Service, as well as the suggested criteria for evaluating library management systems. Validated courses of qualifications for school librarians in the UK are also included in this section.

Tilke does make the point early in this work that because there is no statutory basis for the provision of school libraries in the UK, nor enforceable guidelines for evaluation purposes, areas such as funding, staffing, access and extent of role vary from school to school. Formal and informal, external and internal infrastructure support is therefore becoming of utmost importance to secondary school librarians because network building is an inexhaustible source of proactive ideas. Seeking formal support from organizations like the influential School Library Services is advised, and Tilke encourages the librarian to spend time analyzing how the individual institution functions and to pay attention to the school’s decision making culture, starting with the headmaster. Environmental scanning is advocated as an information handling skill. Knowledge of the school’s management style and decision-making culture is vital to being effective as a school librarian. Strategies for the use of communication skills such as compromise and negotiation are developed within the framework of day to day problems and concerns such as the health and safety of students, as well as discipline matters.

At the end of each section a list of references points to a list of professional resources. These direct the reader to further information and sources of help. The resource list is in three parts: Organization, Services, and Publications, and citations are numbered accordingly. The format is easy to use. An index is also included.

The existing literature base on the subject of school librarianship will benefit from the addition of On-The-Job Sourcebook. The title could just as well be Knowledge Management for Secondary School Librarians. For those involved in information
studies education, it gives a glimpse into the ‘real world’ type of school libraries which new graduates will inherit. Creating a ‘work smart’ individual is part and parcel of Tilke’s aim. Tilke is clearly ‘the school librarian’s librarian’. His advice is practical as well as meaningful. The work is highly recommended for all secondary school librarians’ professional collection shelves. Head teachers, advisers, school inspectors and other involved in school policy-making will also find it of interest.

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Part-time workers have traditionally had a raw deal. Until the 1993 Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (known as ‘TURER’), ‘normal’ employment was defined as full-time permanent, nine to five, 48 weeks per year. All protection and benefits were framed in the light of that model. TURER recognised the changing face of employment and the increase in part-time workers for the first time by extending employment benefits to anyone working over 8 hours per week. In spite of this change in the law, it takes much longer for attitudes to change. Although employers will now carry out their statutory responsibilities, part-time staff still tend not to be taken seriously in terms benefits of employment such as training.

According to a DES survey, the number of part-time workers has been growing rapidly and will reach 31% in 2006. 45% of women workers work part-time. In librarians, ‘flexible’, in the shape of permanent and temporary part-timers, job shares, home workers, temporary full-time, term-time and annualized hours represents 40% of all workers.

Training has now achieved respectability in libraries and their host organisations as a result of government funded initiatives such as Investors in People and the Chartermark. In spite of this, training is still viewed suspiciously by managers. Many managers remain unconvinced as to its benefits, largely because the benefits are difficult to quantify, with the result that when budgets are tight, it is viewed as an expendable item on the balance sheet.

The scenario is a familiar one. The most promising member of staff, the rising star has just handed in her resignation, having obtained a better paid/more challenging job elsewhere. The manager can only think of the large amount of money that has been spent training the individual and sending her on expensive courses. The manager might reflect sourly that other organisations will benefit from the investment. (One might argue about the soundness of this view – equally the manager could employ a
new member of staff who has already received extensive training at someone else’s expense.)

Given this accountant-like attitude to training, and the poor status of part-time and temporary workers, it is unsurprising that the training of these staff has been neglected. They argue that to neglect training of these workers is to ignore quality and (because most temporary workers are women) equal opportunities issues.

Goulding and Kerslake suggest number of other practical problems likely to confront even the enlightened manager:

- Difficulties in scheduling training
- Perceived lack of enthusiasm on the part of the workers
- Higher turnover of staff in this group, leading to less completing a programme
- Difficulties in releasing workers from usual duties
- Disincentives for part-time workers to train because only full-time workers are promoted.

But, they point out, some of these barriers are also perceived by the workers themselves, along with poor communication of training opportunities and the financial difficulties – extra childcare costs for out-of-hours training – of taking part.

As the series title suggests, this publication is a training guide aimed at managers who are dealing with the issue of part-time workers for the first time. As with all the books in this series, a very practical approach is taken. Objectives, set out in the Introduction, suggest raising awareness of issues and making known various training techniques plus providing assistance with formulating strategy. Opening chapters discuss the nature of part-time and temporary staff and how their needs differ, how systems within the library may be organised to support the training of part-time staff. After a chapter outlining the obstacles to be overcome, outlined above, the guide goes on to examine different types of training available to part-time and temporary staff and how Continuing Professional Development and qualifications training opportunities should not be overlooked. Chapter 6 is a summary.

The publication is successful in achieving its objectives of fully exploring the issues and suggesting a way forward in formulating policies. Even so, I felt myself to be strangely dissatisfied with this publication. I felt that a manager would be looking for some answers, not just more questions. How, for example, do you communicate effectively with part-time workers? To ‘plan meetings for maximum attendance’ still misses out those that cannot attend, for whatever reason. What do you do about them? If communication is an issue, how do you overcome resistance to training that is a result of low morale (which can be a result of poor communication)? To some extent the questions are addressed through the Appendices, but I was still left wondering whether this would be taken on seriously by library managers. It seems to be written very much from the perspective of this group of workers – hey, look at me, I have needs too – rather than from the perspective of busy managers with a lot to cope with. I do not think it really understands the constraints that most current-day managers are operating under. I felt that the most useful parts of this publication were the Appendi-
ces, which contain information on how neglecting part-timers needs could possibly lead to a contravention of equal opportunities legislation. They also contain a useful model training policy document and case studies which illustrate how the principles of fair training might be put into practice.

One of the appendices is a useful list of references.

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Books on Team Management are plentiful, but not in the field of information and library work, although as Bluck notes in his Introduction, “team management is not new in libraries”. As an introductory text to the topic this is a good starting point, and the author clearly knows his way round the main management writers on the topic. Here is Adair’s definition of a team showing the interdependency of individual, task and group. Here too is Tuckman’s model for the life cycle of a group – Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing. All good stuff which most people would have got in their library school management lectures. This book is useful in bringing it all together for those who threw their notes away.

Chapter one is a useful reminder of the rationale for using a team-based approach to the organisation of work – it encourages responsibility lower down the hierarchy and improves communication. The advantages, which concentrate on better generation of ideas and consensus decisions, are listed, together with the problems which arise in unhealthy groups. The second and third Chapters discuss the needs for establishing an appropriate organisational structure for implementing team management, and the need to train staff in order that they ‘buy in’ to the new way of doing things. This chapter goes into quite a bit of detail about how to go about the training. The next two chapters, ‘Understanding teams’ and ‘Team Skills’ suggest topics which might be included in staff training sessions: definitions, purposes, a brief discussion of what makes a team effective, or (more importantly) ineffective. At this point I began to get interested, thinking that here I might find some useful discussions of how things might go wrong and what we might learn from it. But no. The author suggests that a useful activity might be for team members to consider, “How does it measure up to the agreed ideal of the effective team? Does it show any characteristics of an ineffective team and what are they?”

Yes. And then?

I found myself increasingly irritated as I read on. For me the book raised more questions than it answered. Management has to be learned through experience and for ‘pro-
essional librarians and training officers’ the need is for case studies which they can relate to, so that their own circumstances can be illuminated by reference to analogous situations. If I was anything other than a new professional, I would be insulted by this book. I also felt increasingly that the author was given a remit and then did not know what to write about. He solved it by writing “everything I know about management”, hence sections on decision-making, effective meetings, effective communication which are undoubtedly team concerns, but not covered in sufficient depth to be meaningful.

Chapter six is an examination of the need for appropriate leadership skills and mentions in passing the management of change. For me this is what the whole thing is about. If you are going to introduce the concept of team-working into an organisation where it did not exist previously it involves a massive change of culture. I recently heard a businessman say that any change was 70% planning. Such a change can only be achieved with a great deal of planning, something which is only referred to in passing.

I think for me the author approaches team management as some kind of theoretical exercise that staff must learn about somehow in isolation from the jobs they are doing. He even suggests that impending change is “an ideal opportunity to put real or imagined library case study to a group of team leaders. How would their teams react to a sudden cut in public library building, or a massive increase in student numbers?” The things he talks about are real life. Team leaders are dealing with and reacting to these issues every day. Would it not be better to focus the training on reviewing how they deal with the daily crop of issues that arise?

The final chapter looks at teams and convergence, but again at such a superficial level as to be unhelpful.

Some of the appendices are useful, I suppose, in that they illustrate how one particular training organisation went about designing a training day, and again a useful list of references.

This series is invaluable to students of information and library studies, and for new professionals who find themselves working in small units in isolation. I have reservations about whether they are suitable for professional librarians and trainers with any experience. Frankly, if I was a trainer and I did not have knowledge of most of the content of this book, I would consider I was failing in my job. Somehow it just does not succeed – it is neither textbook, nor training manual and as ‘a guide’ is of limited value.

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