

Radical Management and the Modern Information World

Henryk Hollender

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends. [Slide 1] It is a honor and a thrill that I can speak to such a distinguished auditorium. Indeed, today's technical libraries have the widest possible scope of activities, simply because there is practically no subject one could not study in a university of technology. My own background in a "regular" university library in Poland means that I have never worked for a school which would offer technology or fine arts. As a speaker I will then be unable to take you too far, but I am happy if my neutrality implies a slow yet steady progress of our discourse and keeping of a common denominator for the whole of its duration.

Let us start with a statement that libraries are doing very well, and academic are doing better than the others. They are doing in affluent countries, where they can afford adopting cutting-edge technologies, in transition countries, where they have proven able to support new economic and social process, and in poorer countries, where they offer a solid core of services and remain a reliable part of educational scene.

Most of all, libraries have managed to encompass various formats of information and never went lost when major sectors of the public opinion declared that the commodity called technology provided the actual and ultimate access to information. We constantly hear that statement, and whatever in it is meant by information, those who negate the need for libraries' mediation in information transfer, probably never mention knowledge. Yes, you can receive a freshly-taken picture via your cellular phone while riding on the bus, but you won't read *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* or the Periodical Table on that bus, save author anything like that. You won't probably do even when using a "full" computer,

browsing endless files brought in by your Google. It is libraries, perhaps only libraries, which, while dedicated to technology and logic, are able to go beyond them and add value, which together with technology and logic builds information services and helps organize knowledge. It is librarians' joy to see how individuals communicate and create, and to help them out in being innovative, sincere, and aware of how small their contribution to knowledge generally is.

Across the world, libraries are not given equal chances. [2] About 28% of this Conference's participants are coming from those non-European countries, which have been long leaders both in librarianship and in technology. Another 30% are the coming from the "old" part of Europe, also with a beautiful record in those areas, indeed for centuries and millennia. Yet another 26% are coming from the "new" Europe. In this otherwise diversified part we will find libraries which could easily compete with those in the equally diversified "old" Europe; basic trends are obvious, and quality standards are more and more commonly observed. The remaining countries are even more diversified, and it would be very difficult to assign them one single label.

While the necessity to rely on technology makes it very difficult for those libraries which do not receive adequate funding to perform as well as those which are lavishly funded, and there is no chance for a new Antonio Panizzi to reorganize information and communication with card files, there are no libraries in the world which would admit that they are getting too much money. And whatever little money you are using, you can spend it well — or not. Your expensive database may be a hit or a failure, your books may not circulate, and your home page may be unfriendly or pretentious, no matter what you paid for it. Contrary to a superficial observation, market products are not completely finished when purchased by the library. Information professionals are not yet in the position of doctors, who used to design their medicine, but now prescribe commercially manufactured drugs. Our commercially manufactured products go through various stages of "localization", appear to users in various formats, settings and parameters. If we talk about the added value, there is indeed much to add. And there is also a room for some losing.

Despite wisdom libraries show in organizing knowledge, knowledge may get somehow organized without libraries. [3] It is possible that the Internet users will in a few years have at their disposal improved search engines, and that those search engines, designed by information professionals and drawing on experience

accumulated by libraries, will not be maintained or controlled by them. For several years now Google scholars have been doing quite well in tertiary institutions, and some day soon it may be possible to collect data necessary for term papers and perhaps even work on dissertations not only without going to the library — we wanted it and we have worked towards that, haven't we — but also without accessing resources provided by any library system. And the Internet users will not be interested in who is providing given resources. If open access materials dominate scholarly communication — and again, this is what we actually demand — and if commercial products become tailored for direct usage by individual clients and affordable for them, institutional libraries may become ignorable. And fall in oblivion.

We often say that the library — be it an independent institution or be at an outlet of a far-flung, invisible coalition or corporation — makes a place, which provides a direct interpersonal contact, without which there is no communication. Yes, our added value is very much in library premises that we layout and maintain. Librarians indulge in repeating things like that (to quote Michael Keller, Stanford University Libraries): "...We will still need physical libraries because people want to meet with one another. They want to work on projects collaboratively, and they also like to work in clusters and groups. So providing the opportunity for people to meet one another and to find information in a mediated way will continue to be important."¹ [4] But people are becoming picky and their occasional need to consult a printed book they can satisfy in a big bookstore. In a bookstore, too, sipping coffee, they can discuss a project with friends. Generally, libraries are uglier and less friendly. We may see tens of new library buildings each year in the United States, we may see a few in Germany or Poland, but we do see none in some neighboring countries, and even newly erected buildings or refurbished rooms are seldom as attractive as bookstores tend to be. Running a public space is not easy, it takes a special skill and a feeling, a flexibility on order rules, and money, and commercial institutions are normally better in all of that. [5] Many traditional libraries are poorly furnished, many rich libraries show bad taste in their furnishing and what they display. And even if we manage to run a library, in which clients are taken care of like in Marriott Amsterdam, a library which is very much a communication in itself, orderly and cozy, diversified and transparent (the safest example is a relatively small library though, Gütersloh Public in Nordrhein-Westfalen), the customers may still be not impressed because they perceive

libraries through their persistent stereotype, and the stereotype has it that libraries are boring and difficult to use. [6]

The success of a library, and in the long run the reversion of that stereotype, depends heavily on how libraries and information services are managed. Are we equipped for substantial improvements? We used to believe that our work was a little less risky than that of a business executive, because it was not tested by the market. On the other hand, we used to consider it more complicated, because we did not offer a product but a process, insusceptible for quantification. Now we go for both complexity and quantification, we provide many diversified products and processes, and there is apparently no piece of managerial knowledge which we should consider ignorable. We have many valuable and widely read sources of this knowledge; in Poland, for instance, it is a book by a Cracow librarian and educator Jacek Wojciechowski.² [7] But in our professional journals management issues by no means dominate, and library management courses in library schools tend to be densely imbued with general management science, with a particular stress on the history of the discipline. Also, library directors are people with various backgrounds and many of them never had an opportunity to study management in an form. Library managers with in-the-job training in management are the most common category. It is only to be guessed, or researched, to what extent it is also the profile of library managers in other Central and East European countries, or all transition countries, or perhaps in many other countries and regions. If the science is practicable and practiced, it is yet another issue.

I've already expressed my conviction that libraries are generally well-managed and successful, and libraries in this country provide good examples of that, especially when compared to health service, justice, school system etc. But this statement, although shared by many,³ is based on wide personal experience, and not on research. The hard fact is that we in Poland have very little scientific investigation into what libraries are undertaking and what's their performance, and when the chance for change appeared in the early nineties, libraries had to themselves predict future, write down strategies, and make quality-oriented choices. No our own Follett reports, no government leadership, no scholars' initiative. The other fact is that academic libraries received then substantial help from the Mellon Foundation, Open Society Institute, State Research Committee, and Foundation of Polish Science (Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation also assisted some research libraries), and some of my Western European colleagues believed that

similar money would have had a chance to come to them only on a strictly competitive basis. Yet another fact is that the very governments in Central and Eastern Europe spent very little on libraries, especially in tertiary institutions. [8] The LIBECON statistics from the year 2000 have it that in EU countries academic libraries spent the average of 197,000 euro per year on the population of 1,000; in EU accession countries it was nearly 52,000 euro, and in the Eastern Europe – 41,000 euro.⁴ Libraries in Poland, with extensive online services, which also cover full-text provision, are an extraordinary achievement in this context.

But since we already agreed that services do have to continue improving, let us see if there is a chance for that. The funding in the new EU countries will not change for good dramatically in the years to come. My caveat is that libraries in most countries of the world, and in transition countries in particular, will have problems with making the necessary next steps. This is mostly because we run extensive systems depending on engineering as well as on understanding of social aspects of knowledge and communication. This is very hard to combine, and it probably requires a new type of managers even more than a new injection of money.

The manager's obvious response to this increasing complexity is delegation and outsourcing. The manager has to compose the strategic whole out of elements both within and without her direct control — those that she perceives and analyzes in detail, those she sees from a distance, and perhaps those she does not see at all. [9] Our duty is not to miss anything important, but where the importance ends? The more sophisticated our system is, the more obvious it becomes that direct managerial control is impossible and undesirable. How do we make sense in translating the detail into the general, and vice versa?

The very “translation” is actually the essence of management; it is practiced widely and mostly intuitively. Also, we have techniques to collect and process information, to model real processes, and to respond to them with decision and implementation. But in practice, how do we keep the correct distance between the reality and the model, between the manifestation and the narration? What do the managers know and see? [10] How do they come to understand what they cannot sense? What do they think is important? How do they decide to end their office hours? Can they afford leaving any process completely out of sight, by delegating it on purpose to experts, to God, or to anarchy, or even by not acknowledging it exists at all?

Every manager has to select her priority. Let us look at this model of stratification of processes in a library. [11] It is beautiful if this whole structure is transparent to the library manager; she easily moves up and down, does not get piled up with irrelevant data, and does not depart from the concrete, which is the customers world and playground. It happens sometimes, though, that instead we receive lots of C. Northcote Parkinson, and lots of folklore. [12] In countries like Poland, where public librarianship is no controlled profession, some library directors are local level politicians and councilmen, some others — businessmen, teachers, artists. Good guys or not, they might have not heard that not all the books were fiction, not all the catalogs were author/title. They think they will have expert librarians to do the nitty-gritty for them, but expert librarians can hardly agree upon a single issue. Some library directors think they are cultural creators: they collect treasures, they organize events; events are living, stacks and files are dead. Another type love the money, and never set to anything else; some are successful in drawing the money to the library: a very good skill indeed if you also know how the money should be spent. Yet another type rule people, and not process — they see to it that they have their loyal groups among the library staff and they are interested only in what these are doing. And there are also library managers who are very fond of their own managerial skills, so they turn their system into a big autistic office, all defined by a vicious circle of clerical routines which have no purpose and no customers. And, last but not least, many library directors have neatly divided responsibilities with their deputy directors, and never even take a look on what the trusted partner does. This happens also, alas, in the academic world.

Some library managers come to their position with the background in technical services, or acquisitions, or special collections, or reference, and cultivate these areas while neglecting the others. When you want to discuss with them a certain detail, which you think plays an important role in the whole of the puzzle, they say it is not their duty, not an issue for the director, we cannot control everything, can we? A wholistic, well-balanced, comprehensive style of library management is not what we actually see all around.

As a result, many areas may be given away to tacit processes and informal leaders, uncontrolled by anyone. I am sorry to admit that library automation and database administration are the most important of those areas which too easily are delegated. [13] Technical services are coming just behind. On the other hand it

more and more often happens that automation, online services, and — perhaps — digital projects do occupy a high position on the list of a given library's priorities. Then, unfortunately, it is likely that content issues are a little left behind. Content issues would typically include collection building, but these days we “build collections” mostly by providing access, don't we? So the new nature of our services makes them very susceptible for accidental losing: the composition of our databases, the users' profiles which the databases are supposed to match, the cataloging and retrospective collection policies, the issue of subject access... The library director with a heart for computing finds them a little inessential, they are not a real challenge for him. The library director without that heart (and that background) finds them too close to that hermetic realm of writing code, and tends to bury them under a deep layer of issues more apparently and more superficially “bibliothecal”. It can be predicted that modern libraries, increasingly depending on technology, will have problems with balancing of technical and social focus in their strategies, in their budgets, and in their day-t-day operations.

Probably Total Quality Management is the response to most of these problems. [14] TQM is not a trend, it is not just one more conception in management or an academic theory; it draws on several intellectual and practical sources, it actually consists of several theories and influences other ones, and it is difficult to bypass it when we take a serious look on our organization or system. In Polish literature there is a good introduction to TQM applications in library science by Ewa Głowacka.⁵ Still, the book is more on the very TQM as an intellectual construct than on libraries, and several examples which are offered to the reader are neither concrete and detailed, nor recent. And when we turn to Wojciechowski,⁶ we receive no recommendation on which management theory he finds the most applicable (and at the same time, to be sure, we receive no recommendations for better catalogs or software vendors or types of library consortia etc.). This is more a book on libraries as organizations, based on experience and common sense. Does anything fill out the obvious attitude gap between Wojciechowski and Głowacka? Can we follow a theory without loosening our grip on practice; can we manage scientifically but tap whatever inspiration is available around, and see what theory makers are permitted to leave out for the sake of purity of their models?

There are many excellent managers among us, and they are probably able to take that inspiration while remaining very practical; they need not feel that the alleged gap impairs their skills. But can a beginner, a student, a librarian expecting a

promotion improve her potential by studying management? There is a common belief that yes, this is hot and timely. But what is management? There are many books on business wizardry, as the theme of management science, for obvious reasons, easily produces a popular halo. An intelligent person can benefit from this too, but we would not perhaps recommend it for everyone. The typical management science literature is very theoretical and very general; the evidence it is based on is normally taken from the business world, where the final product is much better measurable than in knowledge services. A successful text used in tertiary institutions, like *Fundamentals of Management Science* by Efraim Turban and Jack R. Meredith⁷ will be too hermetic to include it in an information studies syllabus. Bibliographies note over 200 book with a subject heading “management science” — which one do we chose? I used — for my own reading and then for my classes — something which seemed a common sense solution, that is a clear and step-by-step narration titled *Management*, by Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert, published also in Polish.⁸ [15] I have to admit cynically that the book is good also because it does not require any mathematical skills from the reader. So we discussed issues like leadership, decision, control, structure, departmentalization, mission, goals, strategy and planning, power, change, communication, human resources, and so on, and I still do not know if I provoked new thoughts, save developed new tools in the students.

And this is not really so because, again, the reality described in the book, wherever there was any reality to describe, was coming from quite another a world than that of information work and non-for profit organizations. Perhaps not even because the students’ imagination was a little immune to general concepts and their visualization that management book are full of. [16] What seems more essential is that somehow the methodology of management violates the personal experience of librarian. She has the right to perceive her realm as continuous, and the management book want her to divide it into discrete pieces. Management methodology is imbued with diagrams and flowcharting, with statistics and figures. The librarian intuitively rejects it as segmentation. Is this to mean that information routines are more continuous than, say, routines in company administration? My answer is also going to be intuitive, and I will be happy to be informed that the issue has actually been researched. Yes, in a sense we in knowledge management, including traditional and non-traditional library services, have to deal with phenomena which can hardly be modeled the way business

operations are, mostly because of their continuous nature. When we provide sources, when we pick-up materials worth digitization, when we try to profile users or collections, when we take hard decisions on pricing models of e-journals or investment in retrospective conversion, or features and functionalities of our OPAC, our attitude is very qualitative. We can draw a flowchart on how the decision is to be taken, but we will actually not, because we'll be able to do it only in easier cases. In more difficult cases we will rely on a professional consultancy, and it will not pay; we will just take a decision before the flowchart is ready. We can do a system analysis of our organization or a department, but we have this bad feeling about the system analyses which we studied that they missed the point, partly because they were blind to huge quantities of ongoing informal process, and partly because even for the core formal process they somehow lacked resolution.

Any science has its language, verbiage, slang. [17] The corpus of works on management has lots of it. Having been oriented on the business world, professors of management mastered the skill of combining the open verifiable scientific discourse with creating of the atmosphere of ritual and initiation. Management requires passwords, which you know or not. You number ISO standards, say SWOT or PERT, draw us a fishbone, circles, arrows, and by your PowerPoint machinery you're the wizard and the chosen. But what was appealing to Japanese industrialists in the fifties, what now excites a part of the youth as a new lifestyle, does not necessarily have to let you better understand your own field. We information workers do need abstract thinking, quantification, professional management information systems. We need very sharp observation and very daring generalizations; social responsibility and merciless logic. And lots of statistics and indicators, too. What we do not necessarily need, however, is the specific culture which apparently accompanies it all in the current practice of management teaching and dissemination.

There is then a need to standardize the management knowledge the libraries, so that we speak more or less a common language — like those that most of professions have. And we believe that TQM is the correct response, especially along with a carefully selected set of performance indicators. I am happy to know that academic libraries in Poland since 2002 jointly collect standardized data on their core activities. [18] It is to be hoped that comparisons based on this data will allow for improvements and corrections on the local level as well as for policy making and financial decisions on the central level. Comparing of libraries should

invite comparing of consortia. We are still pretty heterogeneous a company; few standards and practices are accepted widely enough to call them really ours; best practices, to which some devoted themselves, are not the best for everybody, and professional public discourse safely bypasses issues which might cause argument. Examples? [19] For ten years now authority control is successfully practiced in Poland, but many libraries turn their backs on it, and the position of the National Library was pretty vague until recently. The same with shared cataloging. Open stacks visibly increase the number of transactions and add a new intellectual dimension to a library visit, but many do not think it is important and some experts safely criticized open-stack libraries. Document delivery? Interlibrary loan? Remaining underdeveloped; not much planning, no wide-ranging projects. Special collections and electronic documents in OPACs? Tools are present, but initiative is scarce. Books belong to catalogs, online resources to Web pages, antiquarian materials to well-hidden stores and informed keepers, and the three do not merge easily. Services for minorities? Poland, the biggest immigrant admitter among the former COMECON countries and soon one of the biggest in European Union, has merely studied the problem. Orientation on the customer? We all dig it, but some libraries' bye-laws look like in a deeper freeze than their card catalogs.

Let us take a look at one very important issue. How many library consortia does the nation need? [20] We have plenty now, and most are oriented on joint purchasing of a database or service. We can easily identify more rational attitudes, like this one (South African) — several consortia of very rich programs and one “superconsortium” above them. Numerous are problems which would be better solved if managers had similar background and style of work. Perhaps it is enough to say “adopt *some* management theory, be aware that your work is subject to conceptualization”. Or perhaps we have to seek the best theory.

I personally discovered a deep penetration into the nature of organizations, leadership, and administration in a book by Samuel A. Culbert and John J. McDonough titled *Radical Management*.⁹ [21] The book is now forgotten and I will not enter into a fight that it has to be given a new lease on life. Perhaps the authors had students who elaborated on their ideas and whose work I did not happen to trace down. What's beautiful about the *Radical Management* is that it purportedly is a “how to comprehend” and not “how to” book. Another term which comes to mind is “humanistic” (like in “humanistic psychology”), but it is by no means a revolutionary treatise. *Radical Management* is merely a critique of an

attitude called rational (“the rational model allows people to justify what they are doing while key components of their operation run deficiently”).¹⁰ [22] According to authors, “some of the critical skills lacked by managers operating with the rationalistic mind-set are: (1) skills to decode and respect the subjective interest of each individual [...], (2) skills to decode and respect the way the system actually functions [...], skills to decode and respect the behavior of and individual who lacks a meaningful relationship with the system.¹¹ The manager is urged to understand the “dominant reality” of his organization; the goal of the management is to “upgrade the dominant reality and make it a strategic one”.¹² Now I read it with a feeling of some bitterness: correctly or incorrectly I understand that authors are telling me what I suspected, namely, that performance of an organization cannot be any better than the organization is as a social and political construct, a complex set of processes that we are more often unaware than aware of. But Culbert and McDonough give us a chance to make the most of a given organization as a whole and still reward individuals who belong to it. “...The radical model [...] assumes that organizations and systems have subjective dimensions and latitudes in operation that cannot be comprehended or predicted until they are questioned with respect to a particular individual who has specific talents, limitations, and need for context”.¹³

Perhaps we never acquire that comprehension if we eagerly focus on some aspect labeled prematurely “the key”, or arrogantly dismiss some issues (and some opinion) as not belonging to what the director should busy himself with, or stick to a very rigid and structured management theory, which Culbert and McDonough would call rationalistic. Indeed, to a library manager raised on standards and benchmarking, as well as to that raised on hierarchy and formal order, Culbert and McDonough may sound a little laid-back in their acceptance of the subjective element in the organization. I am not then telling you that *Radical Management* is the ultimate manual which will guide the librarian towards satisfaction of his customers, his staff and his own. But we do have to take a critical look on most of the mainstream teaching of management. Let us see how it is easy to deconstruct it! [23] When we delete from it (1) the element which cannot be sensibly made operational within our discipline, (2) the element which is common sense, and (3) element which actually belongs to economics, there is not much left. Let us pay more attention to economics: performance indicators are doing as well within this

realm as within management science. We can be very good library directors by being economists and not necessarily management experts.

I don't know if the conception of radical management just briefly referred to is radical enough to serve as a survival kit as well as the best business advice for competitive environment — and we need both. But we do have to be radical in our efforts to combine many levels and many virtues in our managerial practice. On the highest level, we have to take responsibility for the future of literacy and the future of knowledge. Even if paper is no longer involved, scholars will keep producing tons of knowledge, but whatever can be accessed at a strike of a key, can be lost in a very similar way (by which the absence of striking should also be meant). On the lowest level, we operate systems — understand them, design, run and repair. It is no excuse that they are so complex, and they will not become any simpler in the years to come.

I would be then recommending that we take the essence of Radical Management not by following all the advice prescribed in the book, but by imagining how beneficial it would be to understand and control our organization as a whole. [24] We really have to understand our organization, and we normally are not too close to that. We have to find methods to decode its external and internal process, so that understanding does not involve intake of redundant data. We have to see the tiniest detail, and harmonize all the details towards the overall quality. And then we have to forget the detail — in a sense that it does not keep us busy, and not in a sense that we lose our grip on it. It is the time to think big.

Our organization has to be liked and accepted, but whatever in it is unbearable, has to undergo a profound change. We have to accept the customer, but try to alter profoundly the unacceptable. We always have to consider what are we actually responsible for. Understanding and responsibility are key elements to the success of libraries. Only organizations which provide information and not knowledge can more or less safely do without them. [25]

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How to Digitize Eight Million Books. A Conversation with Michael Keller. "The Book and the Computer",

<http://www.honco.net/os/index.html>, Feb. 5, 2004.

² J. Wojciechowski: *Organizacja i Zarządzanie w Bibliotekach*, 2nd ed., Warszawa, Kraków: PWN, 1998.

³ Cf. E. Dobrzyńska-Lankosz: *Wczoraj Fantazja, Dzisiaj — Rzeczywistość, Czyli o Komputeryzacji Polskich Bibliotek Akademickich Słów Kilka*, In: „Stan i Potrzeby Polskich Bibliotek Uczelnianych. Materiały z Ogólnopolskiej Konferencji Naukowej Poznań, 13-15.11.2002”, Poznań: Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Poznaniu, 2002. For more dramatic a picture, however, see R. Quandt: *The Changing Landscape in Eastern Europe: a Personal Perspective on Philanthropy and Technology Transfer*,

⁴New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, and A. Lass, R. Quandt, eds., *Library Automation in Transitional Societies: Lessons from Eastern Europe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. _

<http://www.libecon.org/contacts/contacts.asp?sector=tertiary&table=01&country=7>, May 26, 2003. Cf. A. Androvič: *Oestlich vom Paradies, Informationsversorgung am Rande der elektronischen Gesellschaft*,

<http://conference.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/archiv/2002/lectures/Androvic.pdf>

⁵ E. Głowacka: *Studium Zastosowania Kompleksowego Zarządzania Jakością (TQM) w Bibliotekoznawstwie i Informacji Naukowej*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2000.

⁶ Cf. note 2.

⁷ The last edition I was able to note is the 6th, Burr Ridge, Ill.: Irwin, 1994.

⁸ Polish translation: J. A.F. Stoner, R. E. Freeman, D. R. Gilbert: *Kierowanie*, 2nd ed., trans. A. Ehrlich, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 2001.

⁹ S. A. Culbert, J. J. McDonough: *Radical Management. Power Politics and the Pursuit of Trust*. New York, London: The Free Press, 1985.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 208-209.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 152.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 214.