

22 April, 1970

To: Mr. Malcolm Stilson

From: Joseph Shoben

SUBJECT: Your piece on the management of a generic library

Thanks much for the copy of "Management in the Generic Library." This thoughtful statement strikes me as helpfully provocative; and the society-oriented conception of "the ministry of knowledge" has all kinds of rich and novel implications in it. Let me urge you strongly to develop these implications fully and articulately as one of the major bases for our discussions here and for the development of our Library over the next few years.

My own concerns (and my own convictions) become most strongly engaged in the gap between your first formulation of the contemporary library's mission and your leap to the processes of management. Organization remains a tool, a device for accomplishing ends. When it becomes an end in itself, it becomes a politicized substitute for socially significant work. See Chris Argyris's analysis of the Department of State on this score. Quite agreeing that "flexibility and a tolerance for ambiguity" are vital desiderata among today's managers, I'd like to encourage your clarifying the goals that these qualities are to serve. I don't mean, of course, the specifying of every gritty detail on the target; I do mean an outlining of the target's shape and color and of the distinctions between bullseyes and outer rings. In what, broadly but clearly, does the ministry of knowledge consist?

More documents of this kind will move us along more rapidly and more fruitfully to the ideas and the programmatic translations of those ideas that are terribly important for us. Right on, Malcolm! When can we expect the next installment?

cc: Dean James Holly
President Charles McCann

MANAGEMENT IN THE GENERIC LIBRARY

The academic library is rapidly losing its image as a storehouse of knowledge wherein scholars spend years researching a single idea. With the advent of new materials and new goals in education, the library has been forced to adopt a new look. It has become the generic library. Library managers now find themselves with a new responsibility to meet the needs of an activistic, educative society .

Where before the basic function of the library was as a servant to those seeking knowledge, (i.e. directing the patron to the location of information) the generic library has taken on the task of promoting activities conducive to learning. It actively encourages the students, faculty and community to join in the total use of learning resources. Service has now become ministry, the ministry of knowledge.

Library managers, in this new ministry, can no longer be primarily concerned with the purely technical aspects of classifying, cataloging and circulating the collection. In using highly structured, formal policies and procedures, they have, in the past, confused ends with means, structures with efficient informality. The library organization has moved beyond the dominant concerns for productivity and practicality in a narrow sense. Rigidity, frustration and apathy can be abandoned as expensive prices to pay for organizational practicality. To meet the increased flexibility and to encourage individual growth and open system relationships, the manager of the generic library should also develop flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity.

The ambiguity will develop from the lack of a strict organizational structure based on high status congruence. Competition within groups is eliminated and is replaced by relatively high cooperation. Working relationships of a more informal nature are encouraged. The library organization is less formally structured. The library manager needs to explore procedures that help build effective mutual influence relationships between status levels. Supervision, which formerly influenced downward, now influences laterally and learns while interacting. Relationships between individuals become informal, practical and less frozen structurally. Interaction can be encouraged so as to extend beyond the confines of job requirements. Mutual influence is stressed leading to a high opportunity for nonrequired interaction and individual autonomy.

With the acceptance of certain kinds of uncertainty and ambiguity as beneficial, the management of the generic library will generate a new excitement in its pursuit of administrative excellence.