

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARY MANAGEMENT IN FINLAND, ROMANIA AND SWEDEN

Arja Ellen Mäntykangas

The University College of Borås, Borås (Sweden), Arja.Mantykanas@hb.se

Abstract

This paper describes and discusses the challenge of creating a theoretical framework for library management in different countries, namely in Finland, Romania and Sweden. Management as an academic discipline is by its very nature diagnostic and interdisciplinary, but how can a researcher overcome the aspect of different cultures in different countries being expected to be found? In this paper the author presents reflections from a framework used in a recent study of these three countries (Mäntykangas 2018). The framework was compared with building blocks and is based on the idea of managers' various levels of responsibilities, the highest level being contributions to society.

Keywords: library, managers, framework

1. Introduction

The point of departure of this paper is a doctoral thesis on library managers in three countries, namely Finland, Romania and Sweden (Mäntykangas 2018). Conducting research in the domain of management is challenging and also tends to generate various subsidiary questions. These, while not considered the main research question, nevertheless need to be resolved before the logic of the study can become clear. In this paper I will revisit this type of subsidiary question after I have concluded the study.

Management, as the general frame of reference, connotes diagnosis and a focus on solutions taking as its point of departure problems generated in practice (Bruzelius & Skärvad 2012, Jensen & Sandström 2016 among others). The link between practice and theory is a much-discussed topic involving a wide diversity of views. The researchers' position is sometimes described as otherworldly, as if "on lofty heights". The practitioners, on the other hand, may be described as being deaf to the knowledge that the researchers have gleaned.

2. Theory and practice

There is an old saying that nothing is as practical as a good theory. A well-functioning theory helps give structure to situations and shows them to be governed by laws, and more predictable than they might initially seem. Management as a field of study, however, is more complex. Management can be about a position in an organisation: it can be a designation of what supervisors do – management versus leadership. Management is a field of knowledge and an academic discipline; it is both practice and profession; and, management is about value-generating leadership and the governance of organisations (Bruzelius & Skärvad, 2012).

This complexity implies, in reality, that it is impossible to handle one aspect at a time on a timeline, but rather that in an event, for example, all aspects can play a part. To analyse and understand the event, the research must approach it from a multidisciplinary perspective. The challenge is obvious, in light of the volume of knowledge that different fields and subfields of knowledge produce annually. The researcher is faced with a choice between depth and breadth. The depth makes it possible to drill down into the event to reach its root. The breadth makes it possible to understand the dynamic of the event in question. This type of understanding is often referred to as “the big picture” (Chan Kim & Mauborgne 2005) connoting lofty heights or a helicopter perspective. The perspective shift or questioning of what is taken for granted is also part of a renewal process.

3. The libraries in the information society

The starting point of the present paper involves a focus on library managers. Libraries can be considered as living a quiet life as established institutions. The image of the library is still interwoven with symbolic values such as knowledge and silence. The libraries’ responsibility in a democratic society, however, is predicated on their keeping step with development in the information society and consequently with the ongoing digital transformation. Library leadership is a key piece of the puzzle in this transformation, being highly invested in the aim of creating and recreating well-informed citizens.

A map of the information landscape is presented below. It provides a good illustration of the complexity of information provision in the information society. The libraries’ role, too, is in flux, and library supervisors’ role is increasing in importance as well as in responsibility and the so frequently mentioned complexity.

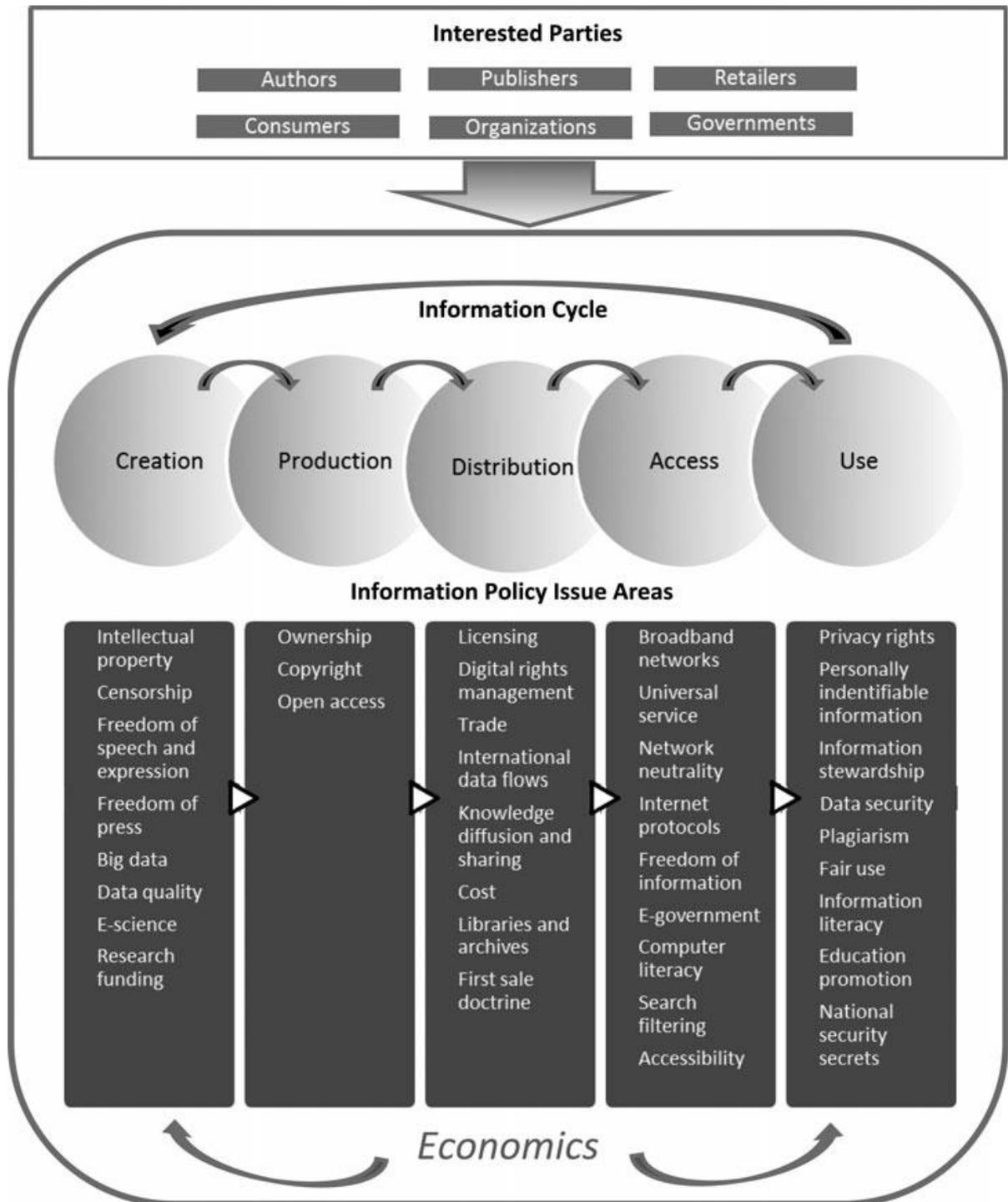


Figure. Information policy issues in relation to the information cycle. Source: Pasek 2015.

Digitalization is a force for change – perhaps the greatest such force of our time (Ilmarinen & Koskela, p. 13). It does not change things in a single country but rather in all countries. Granted, there can also be differences in how far different countries have progressed in terms of strategies and applications. Ilmarinen and Koskela (p. 14) point out that one person’s threat is another’s opportunity. From this one might easily

associate to competition between companies and competition between countries. Public libraries are a counterweight to such competition in their dedication to offering universal access to information and knowledge. Similarly, the digitalization and free flow of library holdings in a network of libraries is a form of international cooperative assistance. Moreover, language barriers (for example, between Finland and Romania) or different technological issues can naturally impede the ability to enjoy the benefits of this – but not entirely. The idea is to share library holdings with many more parties.

3.1. Libraries a symbol of peace?

The study on which these parallel reflections are based (Mäntykangas 2018) deals with the topic of public libraries. Management as practice is often associated with the private sector, corporations and the above-mentioned competition.

Public libraries are a part of a country's (knowledge) economy. They receive funding and are under an obligation to use this funding for the achievement of certain goals. Given that their primary mission is to provide universal access in the name of democracy (Mäntykangas 2018) we are inspired to reflect that libraries also represent peace: in light of their mission they can of course be considered peaceful organisations. Could they not also be a symbol of peace, similar to the peace dove? Libraries are found throughout Finland, Romania, Sweden, and the world generally. Generally speaking, it is easy to recognize a library anywhere.

Friction can arise between management, being associated with the private sector, and the public libraries' mission. Folger & Salvador (2008), for example, posed an interesting question regarding the selfishness of management theories in their article "Is Management Theory Too 'Self-ish'?" A focus on winning (well-informed citizens), however, need not be selfish. It can also be a matter of survival and sustainable development in the service of younger and future generations. It is reasonable that public libraries' management theory focuses on sharing its winnings, its profit, with everyone. This can also render their significance somewhat unclear. There are no immediate monetary gains to report at the end of the operating year. The gains are to be found with the patrons.

The role of library supervisor includes being a manager. Library supervisors are driven by the desire to realize a vision in which – or rather the conviction, that – well-informed citizens are essential in an increasingly globalized world. It is a moral and ethical driving force. It does not, however, exclude the need for knowledge about management and strategic thinking in the information society, in the increasingly globalized world. The terms "information-rich" and "information-poor" have become an integral feature of information society discourse since the 1970s. Still, the techniques by which these parameters might be measured are not yet fully developed (Yu et al. 2016). These terms have been criticized for seeming to refer to socio-economic factors, but this is not necessarily the case. The development of information technology has led to a situation in which a large part of the world's population has access to portable computers or to the Internet (for example, at Internet cafés or digital libraries). Information technology is also seen as a democratizing force.

3.2. Public and private libraries: case example

Hong Ma (2017) describes academic libraries' mission as essentially unchanged, but claims that "the way that libraries are operating is changing." There are new areas of focus, such as digitizing and providing access to unique local collections, organizing institutional repositories, and so on. The process is occurring in the complex environment as described by Hong Ma. In a way this argumentation mainly recalls in-house services, and a corporation's need to use intellectual capital within itself as in my understanding.

A comparison of a corporate library with academic libraries made by an information specialist at a private corporation revealed several similarities between the two libraries. The paper was written for and presented at a study visit to a company's department for competitive intelligence (Magnusson 2018):

Table. Differences and similarities between academic libraries and a corporate library. Created by Elinor Magnusson 2018.

Academic libraries	Corporate "library" (no physical library)
Clear target group with the same, specific goal	Clear target group with the same, specific goal
Procure databases	Procure databases
Training in databases / educating users in how to access journal articles through our licenses with publishers	Training in databases / educating users in how to access journal articles through our licenses with publishers
Walk-in users	Interaction with users is mainly by email / Skype – No physical library
Academic licenses to subscriptions/journal articles	Licenses with pre-paid articles

As noted in this case, there are several similarities between the two types of libraries. The differences in the holdings and the way the tasks are conducted are mainly that unlike university libraries a corporate library has no walk-in users; that unlike university libraries a corporate library has no physical library space; and that while university libraries have licenses to subscriptions/journal articles, a corporate library has licences for pre-paid articles.

The comparison between a public library and the corporate library here shows several differences:

Table. Differences and similarities between public library and corporate “library”. Created by Elinor Magnusson, 2018.

Public library	Corporate “library”
Target group consists of all citizens , no common goal	Clear target group with the same goal
Fiction and facts	Scientific scope
Walk-in users, public meeting point	No walk-in users, target group consists of internal personnel
Some training, often driven by organizations, e.g., digital skills for elderly	Internal trainings, new employees
Newspapers/magazines, both print and digital	Minimal access to newspapers/magazines

So while there are differences between the two library types, there are also several similarities. Management as theory can generally be applied to both, with certain modifications that can be considered local adaptations or theory localizations, to put it boldly (Mäntykangas 2018).

4. Concluding remarks

In this paper, the need arises for real-time comparisons as a method of investigating phenomena in the wake of globalisation. Digitalization creates the infrastructure for information transmission that takes place in real time across borders. Hernon (2013), defining the perspective of global (library) leadership, referred to “*the capacity to function across national cultures*”. The mission of the public libraries in Finland, Romania and Sweden is based on the idea of a universal right to knowledge and information (Mäntykangas 2018). Enabling libraries to fulfil their strategic potential in the information society, however, will require ever more collaboration between countries and between different types of libraries (Banciu 2018). The idea of looking at public libraries as creators of peace, however, is one that will require deeper consideration.

References

- [1] D. Banciu. Foreword. In Mäntykangas, A. E. “Contribution of library managers to the information society”. *Editura technical*, Bucharest, 2018.
- [2] L. H. Bruzelius and P. Skärvad. *Management: att leda verksamheter och människor* [Management: Leading Operations and People] (1st ed.). Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2012.

-
- [3] W. Chan Kim and R. Maubourgne. *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to create uncontested market space and make competition irrelevant*. Harvard business review press, Boston, Massachusetts, 2005.
- [4] R. Folger and R. (Bombie) Salvador. “Is Management Theory Too ‘Self-ish’?”. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 34, No. 6: 1127–1151, 2008.
- [5] P. Herson and N. O. Pors (Eds.). *Library leadership in the United States and Europe: a comparative study of academic and public libraries*. Libraries Unlimited, Santa Barbara, CA: 2013.
- [6] M Hong. Leading changes in library as an architect of technology infrastructure. In: *The LITA Leadership Guide: The Librarian as entrepreneur, leader, and technologist*. Eds. C. Antonucci and S. Clapp. 2017, p. 25-34.
- [7] V. Ilmarinen and K. Koskela. *Digitalisaatio: yritysjohdon käsikirja* [Digitalization: a handbook of business management], Talentum, Helsinki, 2015.
- [8] T. Jensen and J. Sandström. *Fallstudier [Case studies]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2016.
- [9] E. Magnusson, Information Specialist Competitive Intelligence, Group Strategy and Business Development, Essity Hygiene and Health AB. [PowerPoint presentation presented at a study visit], April 2018.
- [10] A. E. Mäntykangas. “Contributions of library managers to the information society”. PhD dissertation presented in 2017; Supervisor: Doina Banciu. Subsequently published in *Editura technical*, Bucharest, 2018.
- [11] J. E. Pasek. “Defining Information Policy: Relating Issues to the Information Cycle”. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 21, 3: 286–303, 2015