

The Future: Seers, Peers, Fears and Cheers

Telling the future is problematic. Either you're a seer who, in classic mythology, tends to favour doom and gloom scenarios like King Oedipus killing his father, marrying his mother, and bringing disaster upon his kingdom. Or you're a carnival clairvoyant promising meetings with a tall, dark, and handsome stranger and a life of happily after ever. If you've already met and partnered with said handsome stranger, then even better times are promised. If you've hit a rough patch, then happily ever after is just around the corner.

So what do these two models of prediction have to do with the LIS industry? Can we foresee with confidence the death of our profession and therefore,

like Oedipus blinding himself, fling ourselves martyr-like upon our swords? Or should we believe that our handsome stranger will be revealed as an institutional partner who will never, ever leave us even when funds are low, for better or worse, richer or poorer?

Sure, we can sift through tea leaves to foretell our future, but future forecasting is shorter than it used to be. Jobs now exist for positions that were unheard of even two years ago. People come to the LIS profession often via accidental routes. An entire series of books is based on this concept, including *The Accidental Systems Manager*. Notable LIS leaders give engaging talks where they mention they were tapped on their shoulders for positions they might not have ever considered and thus zigzagged up the career ladder. These opportunities are difficult to plan for beyond being in the right place at the right time with

Future gazing – what libraries can be

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's estimated resident population is projected to increase to between 33.7 million and 62.2 million by the year 2101 with current growth trending toward the 62.2 million mark. Along with these projected increases comes the need to project the growth in library and information services. Libraries will need to grow and shape themselves to the needs of the 22nd century library patron. Futuristic visions of libraries and societies can vary from dystopian to utopian places, from gizmos and gadgets that we are already seeing for libraries such as makerbots, robotic retrieval services, and augmented reality. But what other changes will we see?

Libraries will continue to be spaces for community engagement. Performance spaces will be an integral part of the main library. From providing instrument libraries – grand pianos, orchestra instruments, electric guitars, and drumkits to mixing studios and amateur filming resources, the library will be there to encourage creativity and exploration of ideas and objects that would otherwise be beyond the financial scope of an individual. Storytelling will expand beyond children services into weekly readings for adult patrons who will also be able to use their mobile apps to download oral histories and their favourite fictional characters with whom to spend a day at the library. On one day they may choose to hear the migrant story of a local historical figure and on another day they may download a current horror author's tour app of resources for writing.

Robotic retrieval systems will progress past storage systems into automated robots scanning open shelves (and vacuuming them too) to retrieve items George-Jetson style. RFID technology will negate the need to shelve in any systematic order and

mobile devices will locate items that have been placed wherever the patron felt the item best served the public.

Start-up centres will be housed within libraries to foster entrepreneurship within a community as well as to assist in minimising isolation for those that would otherwise work alone. This would include providing spaces for writers and artists. Librarians will be the coordinators of spaces, resources, information, and reference materials, technology experts as well as the facilitators of cultural conversations both in physical services as well as online services. Community will physically work on a micro-level, but will virtually appear to patrons from around the world.

Importantly, a multi-functional space will also need to meet the varying needs of its patrons. In the early 21st century libraries have shifted away from the silent spaces they were in the previous centuries and have embraced noise. However, there will be a correction back towards libraries as quiet, though not necessarily silent, spaces. In an ever-increasing urban space, with smaller homes for large families and shared housing among students and city workers, patrons will be seeking quiet, reflective spaces within their community. Common spaces will foster mingling among patrons, but ever-increasingly libraries will also provide the user-dedicated silent floors, noise cancelling headphones, breakaway nooks, and study rooms so that they can access the resources they require in the thinking environment that is conducive to reflection and creation.

The future of libraries is looking bright.

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the right mix of humility and self promotion. But can you actually plan for serendipity to happen to you?

Oedipus and his parents were fated to tragedy. Can we be fated to succeed? No, although we can plan for it up to a point, control what we can control — our individual behaviours and performances — and accept that our professional futures might be more random than we would perhaps like. Libraries do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of societal and economic cycles. We have a history that stretches back to ancient times. Longevity alone, however, does not guarantee continued existence. Just ask the ribbon weavers.

The LIS profession is not a manual one in the same way as weavers were. Its mixed cerebral nature and hands-on approach means that those within are remarkably adaptable and familiar with disruptive

technologies, from medieval manuscripts to print books to electronic books and databases, and social media.

One of those adaptive traits is a survival mechanism, and that includes helping both us and our library clientele to survive. As unfashionable as such community obligations are now, they underpin the LIS industry.

Oedipus and his parents were destined for calamity. The LIS profession is not.

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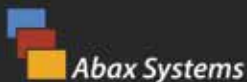
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