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Where are we with the staffing transition from cataloging to metadata management...

Transition: Passage from one form, state, style, or place to another.

Transformation: A marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better.

It has been a good eight years since the Library of Congress sponsored the Bicentennial Conference on Bibliographic Control for the New Millennium in November, 2000. It was around this time that the term 'metadata' seriously entered the world of Library Technical Services as an operation that could transform cataloging in the more digital environment of the 21st century. It has been three years since the University of California Libraries issued the final report of its Bibliographic Services Task Force Report, ***Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California***.¹ It has been almost three years since Karen Calhoun's final report on ***The Changing Nature of the Catalog and its Integration with Other Discovery Tools***.² And it has been just over one year since The Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control³ recommended: "3.1.1.1 LC: Recognizing that Z39.2/MARC are no longer fit for the purpose, work with the library and other interested communities to specify and implement a carrier for bibliographic information that is capable of representing the full range of data of interest to libraries, and of facilitating the exchange of such data both within the library community and with related communities."

How have these recommendations, these think pieces, reactions to them, and the many others like them translated into the organizational lives of libraries, and the jobs and the work that is done in Technical Services? Are Catalog Departments becoming Metadata Departments (more than in just name only)? Are catalogers becoming metadata specialists? Is this transformation affecting the organization and focus of libraries? How do these translate into the daily operations and activities of research libraries?

I believe the answers to these questions are pretty fractured, in organizations and in the profession, at this point. But all these fractured activities actually define the process that is needed to work through this major transition. For almost all staff working in Technical Services in libraries these last eight years have undoubtedly marked a number of changes, although 'your particular mileage may vary' and indeed, some particular jobs may not have changed at all, depending on local priorities. But regardless of local circumstances, I believe that those operations that have traditionally been considered cataloging are well along in a transition that parallels the transformation of the content of library collections.

¹Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California Libraries. Final Report of the Bibliographic Services Task Force, 2005. <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf>

² Karen Calhoun, The Changing Nature of the Catalog and its Integration with Other Discovery Tools, prepared for the Library of Congress, Final Report, March 17, 2006. <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/calhoun-report-final.pdf>

³ On the Record, Report of the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, Jan 9, 2008. <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/news/lcwg-ontherecord-jan08-final.pdf>

Published print materials are still acquired and added to the collections and these are still acquired and cataloged pretty much as they have been for a number of years. However, much like radio when TV emerged, the print publications are no longer the library's sole and primary focus. Nor are they the sole and primary focus for the people who use the libraries. Likewise, the library's fiscal resources are increasingly committed to digital collections and the services that support them. This shift from center stage has generally changed traditional cataloging of books and serials to a commodity service now routinely tacked on to acquisition of the materials themselves. 'Shelf-ready' cataloging services are now quite common. As a result, a significant component of at least one person's job in most current Technical Services operations now includes managing, monitoring, and verifying the shelf ready acquisitions. But far less permanent staffing is needed to add these materials to the collections.

Rather, an increasing amount of staff time, particularly professional librarian staff time, is spent on planning and developing new models for cataloging operations. In the University of California Library system, planning for a 'Next Generation' Melvyl catalog over the last two years has built on the recommendations of the 2005 Bibliographic Services Task Force report with the aim of developing an improved discovery environment. As this new tool is developed, the goal is viewing 'UC cataloging as a single enterprise, eliminating duplication and local variability in practice, agreeing on a single set of policies, sharing expertise, and maximizing efficiency.'⁴ John Riemer and Linda Barnhart described this process in their June 2008 presentation to the CCS Cataloging Norms Discussion Group at ALA as moving to cataloging at the network level, accepting a "wiki," or dynamic approach to bibliographic control.⁵ The UC/OCLC Pilot Implementation group charged with working on a pilot to test this new union UC catalog in WorldCat Local has drawn on expertise from all the campuses. About eighteen task forces have been used to help analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate the complex bibliographic, technical services and other issues and workflows involved. Needless to say, this project has engaged and challenged an enormous amount of collective brainpower to build a 'Next-Generation' Melvyl catalog for the UC system.

The UC initiative is but one example of many engaging cataloging managers nationwide in the process of re-architecting cataloging operations. Certainly another example is the substantive work in process on the RDA front to reconstruct the standards for describing the resource content of libraries, including the legacy print and MARC-based catalog records. As Diane Hillman writes, the development of the RDA Element Vocabulary, for example, is a key step in 'separating elements (attributes/properties) from the instructions for application and to expose to others the legacy data and vocabularies we've developed as a community, to assist us and others to manage and share information'⁶. Every cataloging-related blog is tracking on this issue, debating the approach, the details and strategies. Indeed, redefining the rules for resource description is absolutely core to repositioning library-based cataloging in a digital information environment. The issues are huge: if not well considered, cataloging will not successfully evolve and will

⁴ Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California Libraries
<http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf>, p. 5

⁵ Linda Barnhart and John Riemer, A California Adventure: WorldCat Local and Next-Generation Cataloging Operations,
http://presentations.ala.org/index.php?title=Image:Riemer_Barnhart_Next_Gen_Cataloging_Presentation.ppt

⁶ [Diane I. Hillmann, Structures and Standards for Our Bibliographic Future, May 9, 2007](#) ppt.

truly be marginalized. If not forthcoming in a timely way, the rest of the information environment will move on and the library cataloging world will never catch up or even play a role. So the debate rages -- as it should --and all those who care and are committed to the principles of organizing collections for retrieval and preservation need to be contributing to and participating in the process.

Finally, there is a marked shift in research libraries to focus more staff effort on including products of local digitization in an integrated discovery experience, moving beyond the silo of a library catalog. It is this work that is actualizing metadata construction as an essential part of library operations, describing the growing collections of digital objects. The experience underscores the need to define more flexible standards that can be tailored to all the digital resources, those born digital as well as all the various formats being digitized, for the diverse audiences who will make use of them. It is the array of materials and audiences, and especially the extraordinary pace of the growth of both, that argues most convincingly for a new model of resource description that can link the contextual, semantic web together. And it is in the work of applying and defining metadata schemes appropriate for these that so much of the 'unprecedented levels of collaboration with peers and external partners'⁷ called for by Karen Calhoun in *The Changing Nature of the Catalog and its Integration with Other Discovery Tools* is happening in many libraries. Depending on the particular library organization, this activity includes staff 'formerly known as catalogers'. Many organizations have renamed their Cataloging Departments and absorbed this responsibility in the new 'Cataloging and Metadata' (or variation thereof) Departments. Others place the metadata work in the Digital Library side of the house, or possibly in the domain of the owning collection area. Regardless of placement, the process of defining digital projects is commonly a team effort that includes a member with a cataloging background and/or expertise. In the process of working through these projects, the role and organizational placement of metadata librarians is very much in flux as it is tested and defined and redefined. And the challenges Calhoun posed, to Lead, Extend, Expand are largely being taken up in these projects, if not yet all pulled together into a coherent new plan.

Clearly one model or approach does not fit all in this time of experimentation, and it's a good thing that it doesn't. It will be through all these task forces, discussions and debates of their work, projects and trials that our libraries will adapt and morph into the organizations they need to be to build and curate our digital collections. Essential to the process is the ongoing sharing of experiences that is now so well facilitated through our network of communications, publications such as Technicalities, blogs, wikis, and, of course, email and discussion lists.

⁷ Calhoun, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/calhoun-report-final.pdf>, p. 13.