

A Personal View of Change at The Joint Theological Library, 1995-1996

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In September 1995 I commenced work as the Librarian of the Joint Theological Library in Parkville, Victoria. The Joint Theological Library includes the collections of the Jesuit Theological College, Melbourne, and the Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia, Victorian Synod. Its principal clients are the students and staff of the United Faculty of Theology, a teaching institution of the Melbourne College of Divinity, in which the Jesuit Theological College and the Theological Hall have combined with the (Anglican) Trinity Theological School. Prior to my appointment at the Joint Theological Library, I had been Law Librarian at The University of Melbourne for almost six years.

Making that move in September led me into a period of personal change. I had to become knowledgeable in the literature and bibliographic organisation of Theology and Ministry. I also needed to learn a new library cataloguing system. I had to learn to do without the support of colleagues working elsewhere in a large organisation (The Melbourne University Library), and work with greater autonomy and independence than before.

Yet many things have also remained the same. I travel no further to work than previously; the Joint Theological Library is on the rim of The University. I am still in a special library with an overwhelmingly academic clientele. The history of the Joint Theological Library intertwines with that of The University in some ways so cultural continuities exist. Many of the borrowers of my new library are staff or student members of The University. I have maintained contact with former colleagues in The University Library; and my new organisation offers me just as much, if not more, opportunity to practise my preferred methods of work.

Some of the chief characteristics of the personal change I have been describing were an ability to look into the future and anticipate the changes ahead; freely choosing to embrace these changes; having some idea of the methods I would use to deal with any problems; and consciously seeking to preserve some of the best aspects of my past situation. All of this, I think, almost amounts to an ideal model of change. If only organisational change, the sort of change most of us are grappling with in our libraries nearly every day, always shared these characteristics! How much easier the management of our libraries would be!

In the same period, my new organisation, the Joint Theological Library, has also been following a path of change. Partly, of course, this is attributable to its change of leadership, or the objectives I brought with me on my appointment. Of these objectives I would highlight two in particular. First, I had a commitment to quality management methods, so called, because of the ability they give to maintain an organisational focus on user needs. The University of Melbourne successfully introduced a quality approach to management in 1992. (See an account of this by Helen Hayes in "The management of change in libraries for achieving quality services", *ANZTLA Newsletter* no. 23 (August 1994)). My commitment derived from my experience as a participant in this process. Second, I was interested in the use of computers in library services, having been involved in enlarging the role of computers at The University of Melbourne Law Library.

But there were other important sources of change as well, in particular the staff and academic users of the Joint Theological Library. Staff contributed many ideas for the development of the Library's services in talks I conducted with them immediately after my arrival. The academic staff of the United Faculty of Theology were asked for a

contribution in a survey of their perceptions of the Library, which I conducted in November 1995¹. What emerged from both of these information gathering exercises was a list of aims and objectives for the future, the basis in fact of a Joint Theological Library strategic plan. The list was a long way from being a final edition of such a plan. Much more discussion of the ideas it included would be necessary before it could attain this status. Nonetheless it represented an agenda for development and change, which could support some early organisational activity.

Let me focus the rest of this presentation on only one of the strands of change that began in the circumstances I have been describing: development of the information technology of the Library. This is not necessarily the most significant development which has been taking place, but it is one that has already achieved a certain kind of completeness. Further, I think it has at least a couple of properties which give it relevance to a more general examination of organisational change. I shall try to explain what I mean by this before I finish. Some five specific goals, which had to do with information technology, had been listed in our draft Library plan. What were the principal issues they represented?

One was the developing obsolescence of our library system (Dynix release 135), which was showing its age in a number of ways. For example, the operating system had become outmoded; the company would no longer go on supporting it. Also, its indexing capabilities had been outstripped by changes to the structure of MARC records, which was a serious problem to the Joint Theological Library as a full member of ABN. A second issue was the need to give internet access to our reference, interlibrary loans and acquisitions staff. I do not think the internet has yet become a necessity for any library, but obviously it is becoming more useful. Third, there was the need to make our catalogue accessible in the offices of our academics. (The three colleges that make up the United Faculty of Theology are distributed over quite a wide area.) Here we were dealing with the effects on our users (their interest in remote access to our catalogue) of an environmental change (greater dissemination of computers). Later, after we were under way, another issue arose: the fact that ABN planned next year to sever leased-line access to the national database. To maintain the level of our membership of ABN (or later, World 1) we would have to put our cataloguing staff, at least, on the internet. This is the only purpose I have so far identified for which the internet will clearly become essential instead of simply desirable.

A small project team came into existence (myself and the cataloguing staff) which had the initial task of developing a detailed set of responses to the issues which we had identified. By and large we worked independently, but on several points it was necessary to get expert advice. We were very fortunate to be able to avoid having to purchase this advice. A Jesuit who was himself busy developing the information technology infrastructure of another institution was generous with his time. So also was the systems administrator of Ormond College, in whose buildings we are located. The first fruit of our work was a more detailed, and preferentially ordered, set of goals that we felt addressed our issues. These would be merged into the Library's developing overall plan. I present them all as follows:

1. Replace our Dynix cataloguing and circulation systems with the most recent versions of these systems.
2. Secure suitable levels of access to World 1 for all staff who need to use it.
3. Secure suitable levels of access to the Internet for all staff who need to use that.
4. Install a local area network which supports the achievement of the above goals.

¹ I used a model previously employed at The University of Newcastle, and described in Peter Sidorko and Charmian Mitchell, "Academic Survey at The University of Newcastle Library", *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 26 (3) pp175-182.

5. Open the computer catalogue to remote inquirers, either over the Internet or through the telephone lines (whichever proves to maximise effectiveness, while guaranteeing the safety of the catalogue).
6. Ensure staff are trained to be able to obtain maximum value from new technology installed.
7. Create a Joint Theological Library home page.
8. Acquire and install the Dynix acquisitions module.

I would like to make clear all of the advantages with which the project team began. Our situation was, I think, quite distinctive, and very fortunate. I have already mentioned the availability of expert assistance. Our links to Ormond College were beneficial to us in another way as well. Ormond had an ethernet line running past our door. This was connected to The University internet hub, and plans existed to upgrade this connection in breadth and speed. Though not essential to our plans, getting a link into this would obviously be highly beneficial. To achieve it, the interests of the college and the university, had to be properly addressed, and finally this occurred.

One strand of activity pursued by our team, which fell largely to me, was to keep the United Faculty of Theology community - users, academic staff, members of the Library Committee - informed of what was happening. I believe public relations of this sort can be quite critical to the success of any change. I think change should be explained to everyone who has an interest in the outcome, especially to persons for whom the project has financial implications. In our case, the means of doing this included circulars, verbal reports and meetings. The launch of Stage One of the plan in July (see below) was also a useful opportunity to involve a group of users in the project.

A later outcome of our work was an action plan dealing with the priority and capital intensive objectives on our earlier list, which had the approval of the Joint Theological Library Committee. This had two stages:

1. Installation of a local area network of three workstations, with a connection to the internet through the College-University link. We intended this to occur in the middle the year. This did in fact happen.
2. Installation of Dynix update version 152 (or 153, depending on whether it was ready at the time) on this network at the end of 1996. We are working busily on this stage at present.

What is the present status of our initial goals (see above)? The plan implements goals 1, 2, 3 and 4. Goals 5 and 8 await work that will occur after the gains of Stage Two have been consolidated. Goal 6 has been started, but we will have to retain a focus on this for some time to come. Goal 7 was achieved once the network infrastructure in Stage One was in place. (You will find the Joint Theological Library home page at <http://www.ormond.unimelb.edu.au/JTL>.)

I said before that our information technology developments appear to have some properties which may give them relevance to a more general examination of organisational change. The properties I had in mind are as follows.

1. Our changes to information technology were consciously undertaken within the library's established planning procedures.

I would suggest organisations have a stronger capacity effectively to respond to change if they have established planning procedures which allow their managers to evaluate new needs in the light of pre-existing ones, involve relevant groups of clients or administrators and introduce changes to work-flow, practices and procedures in an integrated and balanced way. Then the demands of the change on the organisation can be assessed against the other demands it is facing. Being able to do this is of course helpful to finance committees faced with requests for funds to develop responses to

change in their organisations. It follows, I think, that submissions to these committees should emanate from a fuller plan for the organisation.

2. They are examples of change that has been precipitated, if not wholly caused by, not abnormally large environmental change.

This is an argument for establishing a planning process rather than just writing a plan. The environment of our organisations will continue to change. So we will always have a need for systems that give us the opportunity to detect whatever change is occurring, to develop responses to it in a rational way and to evaluate such responses in a relevant context. The quality approach is not essential to achieving a capability of this sort. But it can be very helpful. Certainly a permanent planning process is an essential component of a quality approach.

To conclude:

In thinking about the future - the theme of this conference - I think we librarians will do well to retain a focus on our users' needs. Doing so places new technologies in an appropriate perspective and helps us to see the continuing value of traditions. Our users' needs are subject, of course, to the influence of environmental factors well beyond our control. However, libraries may themselves influence their users' needs by such means as the quality of their services and introducing new policies and practices. So librarians are not without all power to influence the future direction of their libraries. Perhaps, after all, organisational change may be executed in a way which includes some of the general features of model personal change, described with reference to my own case at the beginning. There may still be room for choice. It may not be unreasonable to maintain an investment in the best of our traditions.

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