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Hyperlinked Libraries

Michael Stephens

Editor's Introduction

Chapter 19: Hyperlinked Libraries introduces a library model that is welcoming and participatory by encouraging user input and creativity to create a transformational anytime, anywhere service dynamic. Michael Stephens, author of The Heart of Librarianship, emphasizes that the ability to share, collaborate, and reflect with information users while quickly responding to new technologies has become a necessary component of the information professional's skill set.

Information professionals in a hyperlinked world must learn to adopt and adapt with a continuous eye on innovation and knowledge discovery. Mobile devices and social media are essential to this process because they create continuous, decentralized, and transparent participation across the world. Stephens argues that the more librarians interact with new technologies, the more comfortable they will become with using them. This will ultimately improve the organization's services and help them foster new communities of users who will gather in the information organization to learn, create, and engage. Despite the increased reliance on technology, Stephens emphasizes that physical spaces in information organizations are not going away; instead, they are changing to include the technologies that people currently use at home, at school, and even at the office.

Hyperlinks, Stephens notes, can also be individuals, who connect with people in the community and facilitate interactions with groups and individuals. Essential skills for the information professional in the hyperlinked library are curiosity, creativity, and an always-learning approach that continually goes to the user for ideas, feedback, and engagement, as well as soft skills (or "heart" skills) such as empathy.

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Technological mechanisms for global communication and collaboration continue to change the way the world works. Businesses no longer demand employees and customers to be in any specific physical location to provide and receive premium services. Schools, colleges, and universities are offering courses virtually to students anywhere. Individuals are constantly engaged in conversation and expect to have their information needs satisfied immediately, on any device, and wherever they happen to be. Information is no longer bound to a form or a place. Information organizations, such as libraries, housing unique and valuable collections, works, and artifacts of local significance, and other information sources not yet digitized, must find ways to provide a seamless information experience between hyperconnected virtual channels and society's real-world facilities. Information professionals already

providing online services and digital materials must constantly watch for innovative solutions that could be included in their information center services and web presences.

Historically, libraries have been advocates for the protection and expansion of information access (see also Chapter 31: Advocacy). Today's libraries extend their foundational roles by becoming the primary inclusive space for the public to experiment with and use technological tools. To meet these changing needs and behaviors of their community, information professionals must now extend their knowledge and training into the online space, sharing, collaborating, and reflecting. Information professionals must think and act outside their organization, community, and even national boundaries to seek inspiration and support. A recent report from Pew Research Center indicated that 85 percent of Americans now own a smartphone, 77 percent have broadband access at home, 72 percent of US adults are social media users, and half of the public own some type of tablet computer.¹ In the next few years, the world will be using mobile services and devices that cannot be imagined today. The information organization that builds value and thrives will be fluid enough to anticipate and quickly respond to new technologies and user expectations.

One such model, the hyperlinked library model, builds this value by being welcoming, open, and participatory, while also incorporating user input and creativity. The hyperlinked library is human, and its communications and conversations, externally and internally, encompass a human voice. It is a playful model emphasizing collections, services, and spaces that evolve via user and staff participation in a transformational anytime, anywhere service dynamic. After completing this chapter, the reader should have an understanding of:

- the hyperlinked library model and its qualities of transparency, openness, and participation;
- the current landscape of continuous computing;
- the influence of communication technologies on information organizations and information services both online and on site; and
- the skill sets information professionals need to create viable, evolving information organizations.

The Hyperlinked Library

The hyperlinked library model is synthesized from data collected on emerging societal trends and burgeoning technologies used in information service as well as the writings of such authors as David Weinberger, Clay Shirky, and Seth Godin. Foundational to the model is Weinberger's "The Hyperlinked Organization" in 1999's *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, which explored how the internet was disrupting business and changing how things work within corporate structures.² In an article for *Serials Review*, the hyperlinked library model is defined as:

an open, participatory institution that welcomes user input and creativity. It is built on human connections and conversations. The organizational chart is flatter and team-based. The collections grow and thrive via user involvement. Information professionals are tapped in to user spaces and places online to interact, have presence, and point the way.³

A further exploration, from *The Heart of Librarianship*, defined hyperlinked library practice with these concepts:

- The library is everywhere—it is not just the building or virtual spaces.
- Hyperlinking subverts existing organizational structures.
- Our institutions should be flatter and team-based.
- Seamless service should be available across all channels of interaction.
- We must reach all users, not just those who come through our doors.

- The most powerful information services to date are probably found in the palm of everyone's hand.
- The path forward will always be an evolutionary one.
- Inevitably, there will always be some amount of chaos.⁴

Another component at the “heart” of the profession that could be added to this list is the role of storytelling. Stories have power, and hyperlinks demonstrate this through the concepts already outlined.

Hyperlinked library services are born from the constant, positive, and purposeful adaptation to change that is based on thoughtful planning and grounded in the mission of libraries. Information professionals who embrace the hyperlinked model practice careful trend spotting and apply the tenets of librarianship, along with an informed understanding of emerging technologies' societal and cultural impact. Information professionals communicate with patrons and potential users via open and transparent conversations using a wide variety of technologies across many platforms.

The hyperlinked library model flourishes in both physical and virtual spaces by offering stories of all kinds, activities, learning opportunities, and events that actively transform spectators into participants. In participatory cultures, everyone is in the business of advancing knowledge and increasing skill levels. The community is integrated into the structure of change and improvement.

The hyperlinked library is transparent when it talks and listens, practices inclusion, and keeps no secrets. The information organization activates processes to gather as much input from the entire community as possible, which heightens in patrons the expectation that communications with the information organization will be open and equitable. The hyperlinked library encourages all types of conversation and feedback about the organization (see also Chapter 30: Communication, Marketing, and Outreach Strategies). It is a move toward greater transparency when users are invited to share their opinions about how an information organization is performing and when the information organization listens and responds. Management shows evidence of active listening and responding to users and staff by implementing requested changes and launching new services, using careful testing as part of the plan for solid, incremental growth.

Because of the easy and ubiquitous communications possible with mobile devices and social media, these technologies make transparency more attainable than ever. Information organizations can share information about current plans and solicit feedback on social networks, which use the more naturally transparent and trusted conversation channels developed among peers and families. Published updates, calls for community input, and beta tests of new services delivered to the devices in users' hands enable the hyperlinking of all stakeholders anytime and anywhere.

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Continuous Computing and Participation

The current landscape is one of continuous computing and of always being in a conversation. Information has an active social life; creating and sharing ideas play out across networks and social sites. World populations are moving toward this ubiquitous digital connectivity with anytime, everywhere access, mainly via mobile devices, such as tablets or phones. Organizations no longer have a monopoly on packaging

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information, and information control is decentralized and distributed. Anyone can curate information and publish collections from anywhere, deliver content anytime, and share on a wide selection of devices in many different formats and multiple languages. User preferences for particular technologies are unpredictable; the heavily promoted complex nano-computers, head-mounted displays, and other experimental devices may never make it to mainstream adoption, but handheld devices of all kinds have become the norm for connectivity.

Information professionals who establish free, open, and well-publicized communication channels on mobile platforms, and who build these channels for user interactivity, will be rewarded with a growing, engaged community base. With patrons and potential users thinking and interacting on the move, information professionals must constantly study how information services are discovered, accessed, and used (see also Chapter 17: Accessing Information Anywhere and Anytime: Access Services). Communications have evolved from simple two-way interchanges into interconnected, multilayered flows. Adopting the hyperlinked library model means inviting patrons to partner with information professionals to revisit mission and values statements, set revised goals and objectives, and discuss the big ideas behind information services (see also Chapter 21: Strategic Planning). Communication can flow among the organization, information users, and all stakeholders seamlessly among mobile devices, virtual spaces, and the physical space of the library.

Throughout *Too Big to Know*, David Weinberger argues that the smartest person in the room is not the biggest brain or the whole group of people in the room but the room itself.⁵ A poorly constructed room can result in echo chambers and groupthink, but a well-constructed room can enable constructive conversations and continuous knowledge discovery. Weinberger suggests five foundational concepts to “help make the networking of knowledge the blessing it should be.”⁶

These tenets should guide the building of new outreach services with technology as well as participatory opportunities to learn and grow created by information professionals for their constituents. The “room,” as Weinberger calls it, is not only virtual, but it can also be in a physical space, wherever the community gathers. The following sections examine the hyperlinked library in mobile environments and as a physical space for learning, exchange, and growth. Technology creates a cyclical stream of opportunities that flow from mobile apps to brick-and-mortar and back again.

Five Concepts of Knowledge Networking

- Open up access
- Provide the hooks for intelligence (metadata)
- Link everything
- Leave no institutional knowledge behind
- Teach everyone

The Hyperlinked Library in the Cloud

When exploring the hyperlinked library model, the current state of continuous participatory computing, and the affordances of mobile technologies, information professionals must focus on what information organizations could develop as strategies for mobile access and participation. What avenues should be explored in relation to hyperlinked mobile services? How can information professionals find a place inside these emerging environments?

Collections Everywhere

A few years ago, the author discovered that a university library with a unique artifact from a songwriter in its special collection had digitized and showcased only one page of the lyrics on the library website. The rest is only available for visitors who travel to this distant institution. The university cited concerns about preservation and copyright as reasons why these documents could not be accessed digitally. Counter that unfortunate barrier to access with the impressive collection-focused apps from the Brit-

ish Library and the work done at New York Public Library highlighting various parts of the collection via iPad apps. The hyperlinked library opens up access to offer collections anywhere, especially an information organization's most unique and interesting offerings. Mesa County Libraries in Colorado designed a mobile application intended to educate their community about local flora and fauna and included capabilities for users in the field to add to the knowledge base via photos, notes, and shared updates posted directly from the app to social media.⁷

Information Professionals in the Cloud

As users spend more computing time on mobile devices and become increasingly familiar with saving and sharing content on cloud-based services, information professionals can harness the power of the data stored in the cloud to answer questions, share information, and collaborate with users. Huge amounts of data—images, video, status updates, reviews, and more—become a set of resources at our fingertips (see also Chapter 12: Virtual Resources and Services and Chapter 29: Data Management, Analysis, and Visualization). The groups and collections thriving at the media- and resource-sharing communities, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest, are examples of environments that hold opportunities for cloud content curation and management. These virtual storage houses can only become more findable and useful with the assistance of information professionals working to provide the *hooks to intelligence* via metadata and other organizational schema (see also Chapter 14: Metadata, Cataloging, Linked Data, and the Evolving ILS).

Hyper-local and Hyperlinked

An increasing number of the new social sharing apps on mobile devices incorporate geolocation in surprising and innovative ways. The interfaces can be messy, weird, and sometimes silly, but mapping content to a location offers a promise of discovering hidden relationships within the content that can be used to spot trends and expand information services.

With the most rudimentary location-based apps, it is easy to find specialty menu restaurants within specific distances from any geographic point via localized search. It is also possible to tap into the wisdom of nearby hikers while exploring a national park via app services like “Find Twitter users near me.” An interesting example that ties to archival practice and the sharing of images is HistoryPin, a mobile-enabled website that provides “a way for people to come together to share and celebrate local history.”⁸ The site includes a shared archive of a community's photos available via map interfaces.

Deciding how much information to share about personal location and situation on open platforms is an important privacy consideration (see also Chapter 37: Information Privacy and Cybersecurity). Information professionals need to develop more understanding about how much is too much and how little is too little and develop learning opportunities for users to help them understand these considerations as well.

The Hyperlinked Library as Place

It is easy to think that mobile devices and continuous computing will be the future of information services, and information will work solely in the cloud, especially if one pays attention to the usual “Who needs libraries in the age of Google?” inference in news reports. The information organization is and will always be just as important as its digital offerings. In fact, physical facilities have been in the midst of a pronounced shift from libraries as book warehouses to information organizations as centers for discovery, learning, and creation for a number of years (see also Chapter 3: The Transformative Information Landscape). Consider the following as models of hyperlinked library service in the physical space.

Library as Classroom

Almost a decade ago, the 2014 “Horizon Report” identified the *Elements of the Creative Classroom Research Model*, developed by the European Commission Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, as a method to frame the report’s issues, challenges, and technologies impacting education.⁹ The model presents the building blocks of a twenty-first-century technology-enabled classroom environment: learning by play/exploration/creation, collaboration with others, meaningful activities, and networking (see also Chapter 8: Literacy and Media Centers: School Libraries; Chapter 9: Learning and Research Institutions: Academic Libraries; and Chapter 10: Community Anchors for Lifelong Learning: Public Libraries). Applying this model to all libraries means they can serve as creative classrooms outside of the formal classroom, supporting learners by employing the building blocks mentioned previously (see also Chapter 18: Teaching Users: Information and Technology Literacy Instruction). This includes academic, public, special, and K-12 libraries where community-learning spaces help learners of all ages achieve goals, acquire new skills, and understand more about how the world works. These initiatives make the library a laboratory for exploration, via formal and informal programming, group activities, and experiential opportunities of all kinds. Many facilities also feature creation zones with requisite digital and 3D hardware to allow people to build things. Via the web and other communication technologies, there are potentially endless opportunities to connect virtually with people worldwide for discussions, lectures, and “field trips.”

The 2021 “Horizon Report”¹⁰ chronicles the unprecedented change of the last few years before, during, and after the pandemic for remote delivery of learning and the opportunity to connect with other learners from home, work, or on the go. “Widespread Adoption of Hybrid Learning Models” is one of the key elements of technological trends identified in the report that will impact higher education and beyond.¹¹

Programming in these spaces might be focused on enhancing or extending curriculum in the academic environment, such as the initiatives described by Keith Webster, dean of libraries at Carnegie Mellon University. These include makerspaces and gaming studios (see also Chapter 20: Creation Culture and Makerspaces), while also maintaining attractive, quiet areas for reflection and study.¹² The focus does not have to be specifically on high tech tools either. The Johnson County Public Library’s successful “Books and Butchers” program offered a chance for library patrons to learn from two successful butchers how a pig becomes a pork chop.¹³

Libraries have moved beyond simple phone or chat interactions. Some deliver programs and services that work seamlessly across modalities, for example, offering place-based programs that are simulcast via web conferencing to those who are watching from home or anywhere. Others provide online calendars for users to reserve a time to talk with a subject matter expert one-on-one. Video face-to-face applications allow the information professional to share a screen and documents with a user. Web-conferencing software also allows the user to share their computer screen, thereby permitting the information professional to conduct a true learning experience. The user can be walked through a search or a new database or shown how to download and install a new application. This is a powerful training tool.

Library as Community Space

“We designed our libraries for people, not books,” Marie Østergård, Project Leader, Dokk1, Aarhus Public Libraries, Denmark, said to an assembled group of librarians from all over the US at the Public Library Association Conference in 2016.¹⁴ She was describing the multiyear process of redesigning and building the new public library in Aarhus.¹⁵ The waterfront building design is based on the Model Programme for Public Libraries developed by Danish Royal School of Library and Information Science professors: inspiration space, learning space, meeting space, and performative space that overlap

and intersect. Action words for each sector of the model include “Excite,” “Explore,” “Create,” and “Participate.”¹⁶

Østergård reported that an average of four thousand people visit Dokk1 each day, using the space for work, socializing, meetings, and relaxation. Offices for community services are also located within the library building. At the intersection of meeting space and performative space, community members attend programs in meeting rooms and open areas related to learning, politics, art, and self-expression. Dokk1 promotes open dialogue between citizens and encourages the exchange of ideas.

Imagine this model used by public libraries globally to extend the mission of what libraries have always done: to connect people to the information and knowledge they need throughout their lives.

The Power of Stories

Storytelling—an ancient, community-building, revered, and always-relevant “technology”—is a powerful connector. Stories can bring people together. Stories resonate with everyone, and we can use them to better understand our communities and ourselves.

Libraries have always been about access to the stories of the world: selected, cataloged, and shelved waiting to be discovered and shared. Erik Boekesteijn, senior advisor to the National Library of the Netherlands shared this mantra regarding stories way back in 2006: Libraries should keep stories, share stories, and make stories. It still resonates today.¹⁷ Information professionals are experts at keeping, sharing, and making stories. Their ability to “make stories” means they can create their own record of events, ideas, knowledge, and memories of themselves, as well as the information user.

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Hyperlinked libraries should explore gathering and using a community’s stories to offer insights and understanding for all.

Consider the work of StoryCorps, a program that collects and shares the stories of diverse voices across the US. According to StoryCorps’s website, the stories have increased listeners’ understanding of a variety of groups, demonstrated the value of everyone’s experience, and reminded listeners of their shared humanity. Listeners can browse stories by location, collection, and year. The StoryCorps mission is to “preserve and share humanity’s stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world.”¹⁸ StoryCorps captures the stories of people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, and the disabled that often don’t make it into mainstream media. That is also a role for libraries. These efforts to preserve our collective story should be lauded and supported. The dialogue that stories can create benefits all who participate.

Hyperlinked libraries can provide inclusive and welcoming programs built around storytelling for everyone and harness simple technology to capture and share stories via audio recording in any space afforded. Consider the phenomenal popularity of podcasts. How might librarians share their users’ stories and their own in this space?

Hyperlinks Are People, Too

Simply, in current information environments of all kinds, and as reflected in the preceding models, information service first and foremost seeks to link people to information, each other, and the world. This means that hyperlinks can also be individuals. Similar to a way a corporation is viewed as a person, hyperlinks form their own entity that is like an individual char-

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acter. The information professional can be a connector, a facilitator, and a conduit for groups and individuals. They might lead in-person discussions or workshops on the timely topics of the day and take a step back as conversations grow to nurture understanding between stakeholders. They let the topics and talk evolve. Holding community discussions around civic education or civic literacy can bring people together in ways not imagined before.

TEXTBOX 19.1

Discussion Question

How could you use stories to improve library services or create new programming?

Hyperlinked Library Services and COVID-19

During the coronavirus pandemic, libraries and information centers pivoted from open buildings to exclusively online services and outreach. Some libraries converted all scheduled programming to web-conferencing software and invited users to join in. These included Zoom story times for children and adults, appointment-based one-on-one information sessions between an information professional and a user on the phone or via web conference, and many other creative service approaches to remaining visible to users. Many libraries ensured connectivity by providing internet access to connect users to digital information and resources. Anythink Libraries in Colorado made thousands of calls to library users to check in and talk. The constant in all the ups and downs of such an unprecedented time was the human factor that information professionals brought to the work. For the vast majority of library staff who were sent home to work, this was a new and challenging experience. The challenges and solutions borne out of the COVID-19 months may lead many to use those new skills and methods to reach out to their community and meet those users through whatever channel works best, in person, via the web, on the phone, by text, and whatever the next venue may be.

For more on the human connection, find inspiration in Alameda County Public Library's "Kind, Connected Humans" program, a "service where anyone could connect with another person and talk in a neutral space."¹⁹ This new service aligns with the library's vision statement of "Kind, Connected Humans" and offers anyone a chance to chat with a staff member.

The Hyperlinked Librarian: Skills and Roles

Embracing the virtual and physical aspects of the hyperlinked library means that today and tomorrow's information professionals need a skill set that reflects not only the foundations of library and information science but also the emerging trends related to the topics of this chapter.

Curiosity and Creativity

Two important qualities of an information professional working within these participatory spaces are that of curiosity and creativity. Curiosity about the world and how people create, use, and access information should define the field of information science. Curiosity should also drive ongoing evaluation of services and user needs (see also Chapter 5: Information Needs). When an information professional looks for the path forward for new services, technology offerings, or materials to provide, curiosity should lead to "I will ask the users."

Creativity helps information professionals look outside the usual thinking about what libraries do and how they do it. Creativity helps new ideas to form, such as creating a space for users to express themselves as in the Idea Box service created by Oak Park Public Library in Illinois. Rotating interac-

tive exhibits in a once unused café space engages the library's users monthly.²⁰ Creative information professionals across all types of libraries have remixed and reused the Idea Box concept within their facilities, adapting a bulletin board, white board, or similar to engage with constituents.

Always Learning

Information professionals should be competent, engaged, and always learning professionals. Learning on the job should be steeped in experimentation and play to problem solve. Information professionals should also engage in lifelong learning by seeking out professional development opportunities often, both formal and informal opportunities. An information professional's education does not end with a master in library and information science (MLIS) degree but should continue always. Participation in staff development days, workshops, and conferences is just part of the equation. The web has enabled information professionals to learn with each other on a global scale through computers or mobile devices. Programs such as those based on the Learning 2.0 for libraries model, originating more than a decade ago, offer access to online communities centered on reflection and learning about mobile devices, research skills, and more.²¹ Connecting with colleagues from around the world can enhance the information professional's career.

Soft Skills Are Heart Skills

Other skill sets are more focused on emotions and feelings. These soft skills include taking initiative, communicating face-to-face and across multiple platforms, showing sensitivity, and demonstrating professional responsibility. Compassion, empathy, and an "all in" attitude are equally important soft skills that add to our impact as professionals. *These soft skills are heart skills.*

The hyperlinked librarian approaches information work with emotional intelligence and understanding: offering a safe space for every person who comes through the doors to learn and grow, designing spaces for folks to come together to collaborate and exchange ideas, creating thriving digital communities, and providing participatory services to promote learning and well-being. Caring goes beyond what some might expect in a library. Information professionals take care of users through innovative services, such as offering access to food pantries in the library or a "Community Closet" stocked with personal items that some users may need.

Information professionals use empathy and put themselves in the shoes of the people they meet across a service desk or in the stacks or online. As stated in the book, *Wholehearted Librarianship: Finding Hope, Inspiration, and Balance*: "We are the heart of our communities, and that only works because of what the people who work in libraries give of themselves. The best [librarians] make that emotional investment because they believe in the institution and the communities they serve."²² Information professionals build spaces and services steeped in the Danish concept of *hygge*, a cozy feeling of belonging, and welcome all in: Libraries are for everyone!

TEXTBOX 19.2

Discussion Question

What ideas do you have to create a more community-focused library?

Conclusion

Information organizations continue to evolve and adapt as socio-technological changes occur. Exploring the hyperlinked library model as a platform for discovery, interaction, and participation is

just one facet of the rich and varied possibilities for the future. Delivering easy-to-use, unique, and knowledge-extending services to users no matter where they are may be one of the most important goals addressed as information professionals. The emerging participatory culture needs the traditional foundations of literacy (research skills and critical analysis), along with skills in networking, problem solving, and exploratory play. Information professionals can expand their practice by becoming knowledgeable guides in these new landscapes and seek to hyperlink opportunities for knowledge and growth for and with their communities.

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