

What Challenges Are Library Leaders Facing?

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Abstract: In a recent research survey, approximately 250 Norwegian library leaders working at different levels in the libraries were asked about what they perceive as challenges in the new global world and how to collaborate and work in the future. Questions were asked about digitalization, technological changes, open access and social media, and how they rate as challenges. The analysis shows how leaders, both in academic libraries and in public libraries rate these challenges for their libraries, as well as for the library leaders themselves. This research is supplemented by findings from two studies made at Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania, where surveys of academics and their thoughts on open access publishing both before and after the implementation of a Institutional Repository, will serve as examples of a typical situation. This will highlight the contrast between the academics and the academic library leaders' perception of the future challenges. It is evident from this study that there is a difference between what is seen as important from the library leaders' point of view and what the "customers" – in this case academics – see as important challenges for the future. So in addition to facing the challenges of globalization and of global collaboration within the library world, library leaders and staff must handle how the users of the library perceive the same challenges.

Background for This Study

250 Norwegian library leaders working at different levels in the libraries answered questions about what they perceive as challenges in the future. The analysis shows how leaders, both in academic libraries and in public libraries rate these challenges for their libraries, as well as for the library leaders themselves.

This research is supplemented by findings from two studies made at Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania, where surveys of academics and their thoughts on open access publishing will serve as examples of a typical situation.

The Norwegian part of the data comes from an electronic survey sent out to all municipal, county and academic libraries in September 2011, the Brasov research was done with an on-line questionnaire, accessed from the research platform of the Faculty of Economic Sciences.

What Are the Results from the Leaders Being Asked about Challenges?

Of the 243 Norwegian respondents, 153 (63 %) worked in municipal libraries, 78 (32 %) in Academic libraries and 12 (5 %) in county/regional libraries. The county/regional libraries are in charge of the high school libraries, but do not normally have book collections or single users.

They were all asked about challenges. The question was formulated: «What significance do you think the following challenges will have for your library and for you as a leader in the future? ». Answers were given in one column for the library, and one for the leader. The number of responses differed between 178 and 201 to the different questions.

In table 1 we see how the leaders rated the significance for themselves and their libraries. The numbers are in % of leaders rating each challenge. The possible answers were «No significance», «Low significance», «Medium significance», «Some significance», «High significance» and «Don't know/Nor applicable» (N/A) .

For this paper the responses chosen were «High significance», «Low» or «none» were combined in one category called «Low» and the results given for both leaders and libraries. Then the «N/A» was estimated as an average. Most of the N/A's were quite similar for both «Leader» and «Library» – when there were major differences they are both being shown in table 1.

Table 1: «What significance do you think the following challenges will have for your library and for you as a leader in the future?»

	Leader	Leader	Library	Library	Li/Le
	High	Low	High	Low	N/A
Technological changes	66,7	4,5	87,1	0,5	0
Use of social media	34,9	9,2	50,20%	4	0
Recruit and keep	53,3	8,8	59,80%	2,5	36
Development of leader competences	55,3	6,6	53,30%	4,5	1,5
Accrediting	16,8	13,6	15,2	9,2	40
Quality development and -management	60,9	2,1	54,9	3,8	4,5
Userinvolvement and web 2.0	63,6	8,6	45,7	4,3	36,5
Economy	71,7	4,3	81,8	0	1
National qualification framework	12,6	13,7	16,9	7,2	25
Open access	26,8	13,6	33,3	9,6	13,5
E-books	42,2	10,8	59,7	3,3	1,5
Bibliometrics etc	11,3	28,5	12,8	21,3	22,5
Marketing value and impact of library	64,6	5,6	68,5	3,4	2,8
Information literacy for users	36,3	11,2	53,8	4,3	1,1
Digitizing own material	18,4	29,7	26,4	21,9	4,2

When we look at what the leaders perceive as challenges for themselves, we see that they rate economy as the most important challenge for themselves, and the second highest for the library. Technological changes are rated highest for the library, and the second highest for themselves, while Marketing impact and value rates as the third most important challenge for both leaders and libraries.

At the same time it is fascinating to see the differences between how the leaders rate the challenges for themselves against the challenges for the library. The same set of challenges have much higher significance for the libraries than for the leaders, and there is a slightly larger percentage also saying «Low or no significance» as seen for the leaders compared to the libraries. We must remember that it is the same leaders who answer both questions, about their rating of the challenges for themselves and for the library.

It is quite obvious that the challenges are rated as more serious for the libraries than for themselves. We can see this both in the relatively lower proportion of the «High significance»-answers, but also in the relatively higher proportion of «Low significance».

What Does This Mean?

The technological challenges are global in the library world, and concerns not only computers, but also the other different gadgets on the market. Norway is considered a technologically advanced country where most people have access to computers, Internet and mobile phones. At the same time, the municipal libraries often consider themselves to be special guardians for the disadvantaged members of the public, and this can also be part of the reason why library leaders see technology as a challenge.

Although Norway has not been hit hard by the financial turbulence of 2010-2011, there are still some economic worries. Some municipalities have reduced the budgetary amounts allocated to the libraries; some academic libraries are facing the exponential growth in cost of the electronic journals. For all libraries, there are challenges in keeping up the activities with the threat of reduced resources.

This is probably also one of the reasons that «Marketing the value and impact of the library» is seen as a special challenge for libraries and leaders today. Maybe it is on the background of the economic challenges it is seen as especially important to inform both the patrons and the political stakeholders, even though libraries normally have a high standing in the community.

Comparing Two Challenges for Academic and Municipal Libraries

In table 2 we look closer at the ratings for two of the challenges – Open access and Bibliometrics. They both had quite high N/A-scores in table 1, and we wanted to see if these issues were considered to be more important for academic libraries than for municipal libraries. Since the ratings in table 1 showed to be higher for libraries than for leaders, we look closer only at the how the leaders rate the significance of the challenges for the libraries.

We see here that there is a distinct difference between the ratings from the leaders of the academic libraries and the municipal libraries. The academic libraries have higher “high significance” and lower “Don’t know/NA”-ratings, and vice versa for the municipal libraries.

Table 2: Significance of two challenges – academic or municipal library. Response numbers.

	Some sign	High sign	Don't /NA	Total
Open access – significance for library: Academic library	19	33	1	61
Open access – significance for library: Municipal library	26	22	20	97
Bibliometrics – significance for library: Academic library	29	22	1	62
Bibliometrics – significance for library: Municipal library	14	1	38	98

The Brasov Surveys

There is still only about one third to half of the academic library leaders that rate these two challenges as of high significance for their libraries in the future. We can take a look at how some academics rate these challenges by looking at the results from the surveys done of academics in Brasov, Romania.

When the academics answer questions about the services of the library, they find that the documents offered by the university library do not satisfy their study necessity – the mean of the “satisfaction of the study necessity of the documents of the university library” is 2,28 on a scale from 1 to 5.

The acquisitions of the university library are not done strategically or according to rules for covering all study fields. In most cases, the development of the library’s collections is based on documents bought by the members of the community with funds from grants they have won. Their preferences are equally for printed and electronic documents. From 2004, the university subscribed to databases. The first database and the one with continuity is Springerlink. The acquisition criterion of this database was the low price and cross-disciplinary character. The members of the academic community were pleased with this product. Yet, there is still dissatisfaction because these products can be accessed from the university’s network only. The majority want access to be possible from home. That may be why the respondents accessed databases in a proportion of 48,1% a year.

The survey also shows that members of the academic community from Transilvania University have little information on open access journals and the publication in this regime. The majority of those who know open access journals have short or medium length of work in the university. In the part of the survey that looks at institutional digital repositories, 96,3 % agrees that “the institutional digital repository represents the essential condition for the international scientific research” and 91,5 % agrees that it is “necessary to constitute an institutional digital repository”.

Conclusion

Norwegian library leaders are facing several challenges, and the ones that are rated with the highest significance are challenges that come from the outside – economy, technology – or marketing to the surroundings. Some of the challenges – open access and bibliometrics among them – are seen as more relevant for the academic libraries, but even in the academic libraries they are seen as having limited significance. When we compare the ratings from the Norwegian library leaders to a survey of a group of Romanian academics, we see that the academics are much more concerned about open access and bibliometrics. Probably this would also be the case with Norwegian academics – if so the academic library leaders are out of touch with an important group of stakeholders. This may be the biggest challenge of all.

References

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