Learning from Past Mistakes:

How Nigerian Libraries Can Leapfrog to the Twenty-First Century by Avoiding the Errors Made in the Developed Countries

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Preface: My Unusual Career Path

▶ Many, including Prof. Chinwe Ezeani, UL at UNN, have spoken on "The Library of the Future" (NLA Enugu State Chapter, Annual Conference, 2013). I have a somewhat different perspective because of my own professional life.

▶ After 3 U.S. degrees in Poli. Sci, became a librarian at UI, 1976.

▶ Worked as a librarian/taught Library Science in Nigeria and Kenya, 1977-1988.

▶ 1988 to U.S. for further studies, stayed and worked for 20 years.

▶ Returned to Nigeria Jan. 2009.

▶ Became University Librarian, Godfrey Okoye Uni, Feb. 2010.

▶ Have been seeing past errors repeated here; would like to avoid them so we can begin to catch up with the advanced countries.

The Fallacies That Led to Mistakes

► The "Paperless Society" is imminent.

► Books will soon disappear.

► Libraries are for print materials; everything digital belongs to ICT.

► Ergo, libraries and librarians will soon become irrelevant.

► The library building is a dinosaur.

► The old folks – whether users or librarians --can't learn the new technologies.

► Where libraries and ICT converge, the technologists should be in charge.

► We can predict the future.

The Paperless Society is Imminent.

▶ F.W. Lancaster. "Towards Paperless Information Systems," *CERN Document Server* (New York: Academic Press, 1978).

▶ In fact, computerization generated more paper, not less – the ease of printing, revising, printing the wrong thing, etc.

▶ Libraries first tried to make printing free, then could not keep up with the cost.

▶ At my last U.S. university, student fees each semester included an initial printing allowance. Any student who used that up could buy additional batches at cost recovery rates.

▶ Here: Best to think of printing as equivalent to photocopying; provide networked printer, charge as if for photocopying.

Books Will Soon Disappear.

▶ ALL THE INFORMATION ONE NEEDS will be digital and free. We'll be able to discard existing collections.

- All new publications will be digital

- All past publications, archival materials, etc. will be digitized rapidly.

▶ Therefore, there is no need to build more traditional library space; instead we'll be converting old libraries to new purposes.

▶ The transition has been much more gradual, partly because digitizers discovered the copyright issues involved.

▶ Journals were among the first library materials digitized – easier to use for research.

▶ Improved reader interfaces have made e-books more popular.

- It is still a rude shock to many to discover that not everything they need is online and that many online resources cost money.

Libraries are for books, digital information sources will managed by ICT staff.

- ▶ One assumption was that keyword searching would find everything needed on the web.

- ▶ Another was that ICT personnel would be able to give users all the assistance they needed.

- ▶ The result as the Web exploded was a multi-million-volume library with no catalogue.

- ▶ In fact, users need libraries and librarians for access to proprietary resources, for assistance in locating the information they need, in evaluating the information sources they find and in such related processes as understanding copyright, citing sources and identifying potential avenues of publication.

Ergo, libraries and librarians will become irrelevant.

The Library building is a dinosaur.

▶ As everything is digitized and researchers work from elsewhere, library buildings will have to be adapted for other uses.

▶ As libraries did get public computers, they were put in a separate space.

▶ In Nigeria, we usually find a separate e-library, often organized outside the library unit.

▶ In fact, the library as space is even more important than before. What we need to do is rethink the character of our spaces.

- Make the environment attractive, so that people want to be there to do their work, or they will try to do everything from home or office.

- Integrate technology into all we do – computers everywhere, not segregated; single point of access to all resources.

- Make the library the cultural center of the community or campus: bring in meeting rooms, lecture/concert hall(s), art exhibition space, etc.

- Provide varieties of user spaces and seating: varieties of seating, quiet and soft conversation spaces, group study rooms, etc.

▶ Above all, build all new structures to be as flexible as possible, so the they can be adapted to meet future needs.

▶ Many users will still work from their own spaces.

- Provide a proxy server for any IP-authenticated resources so that users can get access wherever they are.

- Provide online guides and services for them.

▶ Meanwhile, market the library and its services (both onsite and remote) aggressively.

- The public image of the library will not change without us helping people to see how it has changed.

- Use multiple methods of communication, appropriate to the community you serve.

- Avoid being defensive. Too often librarians appear to others to be whining that they are not appreciated. Instead communicate enthusiastically.

The old folks can't learn the new technologies.

- ▶ In fact, almost anyone can develop new skills if challenged to do so. Overseas, many retirees who never needed ICT for work take classes to be able to do their personal business, from online banking to genealogy research to producing the church bulletin.

- ▶ The assumption has been that librarians and library users who grew up in the analog world are helplessly stranded there. For example, many NUC accreditation teams insist that libraries duplicate online resources with print "for the professors."

- ▶ In libraries, this often means a divided staff: the "traditional" librarians and those who have gained the new skills.

- ▶ Two strategies that can help those coming late to the world of ICT:

- Try to schedule training sessions for when the skills will be needed and therefore practiced immediately. New skills that are not then practiced will be lost. Make sure you have competent and friendly assistance for those new to online resources.

- Identify the 'first adopters,' those who are eager to explore new ways of doing things. When others see their successes, they'll want to join in. The first adopters can then help with training their colleagues.

▶ Meanwhile, the 'traditional librarians' skills are still badly needed, just updated in mode of delivery.

- Librarians have the collection development skills to select the most cost-effective proprietary resources (i.e., anything that needs authentication for access).

  - Learn how to detect pitfalls in vendor licensing terms and to negotiate better ones.

- Help build consortial endeavours to lower the cost of essential resources.

- Librarians have the bibliographic control skills to make the new information sources findable; what we need to do is to provide one-stop access (e.g. via website) to all our resources then provide multiple modes of entry (social media, etc.)

- Librarians have the refence skills to help users do effective searching.

- Librarians have the collection development skills to select the most cost-effective proprietary resources (i.e., anything that needs authentication for access).

- Librarians have the instructional skills to provide in-person instruction on using the full range on information sources and in creating online guides for users.

- ► Library schools must ensure that their students gain a full range of ICT skills, not just searching. (Our library gives a preliminary ICT test as part of the short-listing of applicants.)

- ► Be prepared for constant retraining to cope with future changes. For employers, this means invest heavily in staff development.
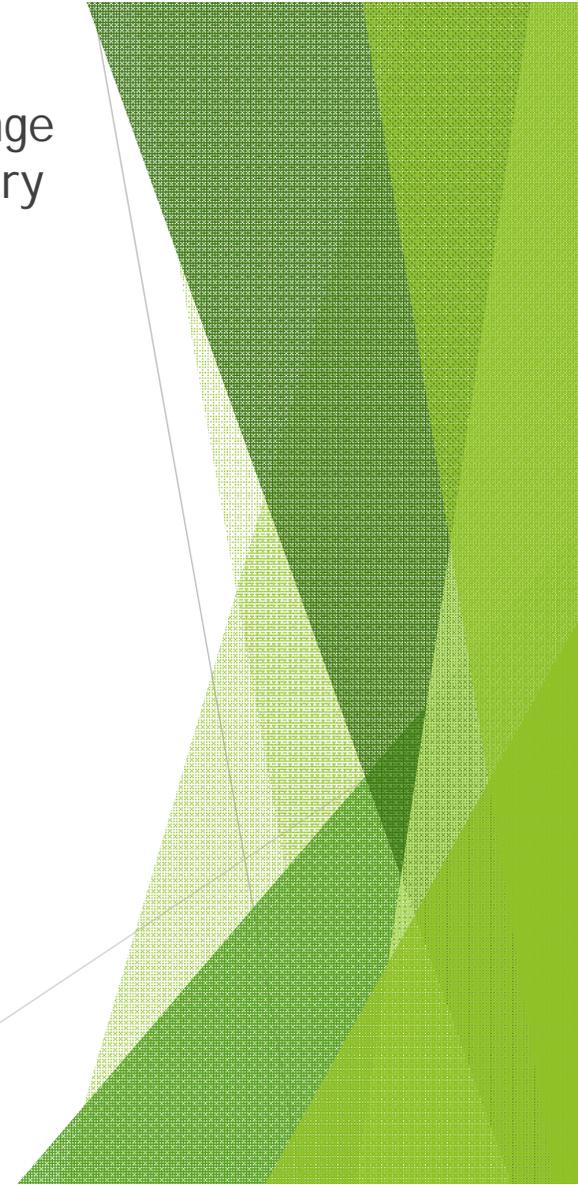
As libraries and ICT converge, the technologists should be in charge.

- In the 1990s, institutions tried several models for bringing the library and ICT closer together. The most disastrous that put the library under ICT.

- Among the problems encountered were differing professional cultures and professional jealousies.

- Increasingly, overseas, a parent institution will have a "chief information officer, often the librarian. (In public libraries, the director is naturally in charge of all services.)

  - In general, librarians have developed more management skills than ICT personnel, a professional culture of service and a resulting focus on the end-user, and a perspective that takes in the overall mission of its parent institution.

  - The chief information officer, must have a reasonably sophisticated understanding of the key issues and problems in both libraries and ICT.

- Whatever the organizational structure, try to bring the two groups together physically, then work on helping them get along.

- Internally, adjust organizational structures to meet the changing environment and staff resources.

- Coordinate planning. Develop joint services, e.g., a common help desk. (Users often can't tell whether they need ICT or library assistance.)
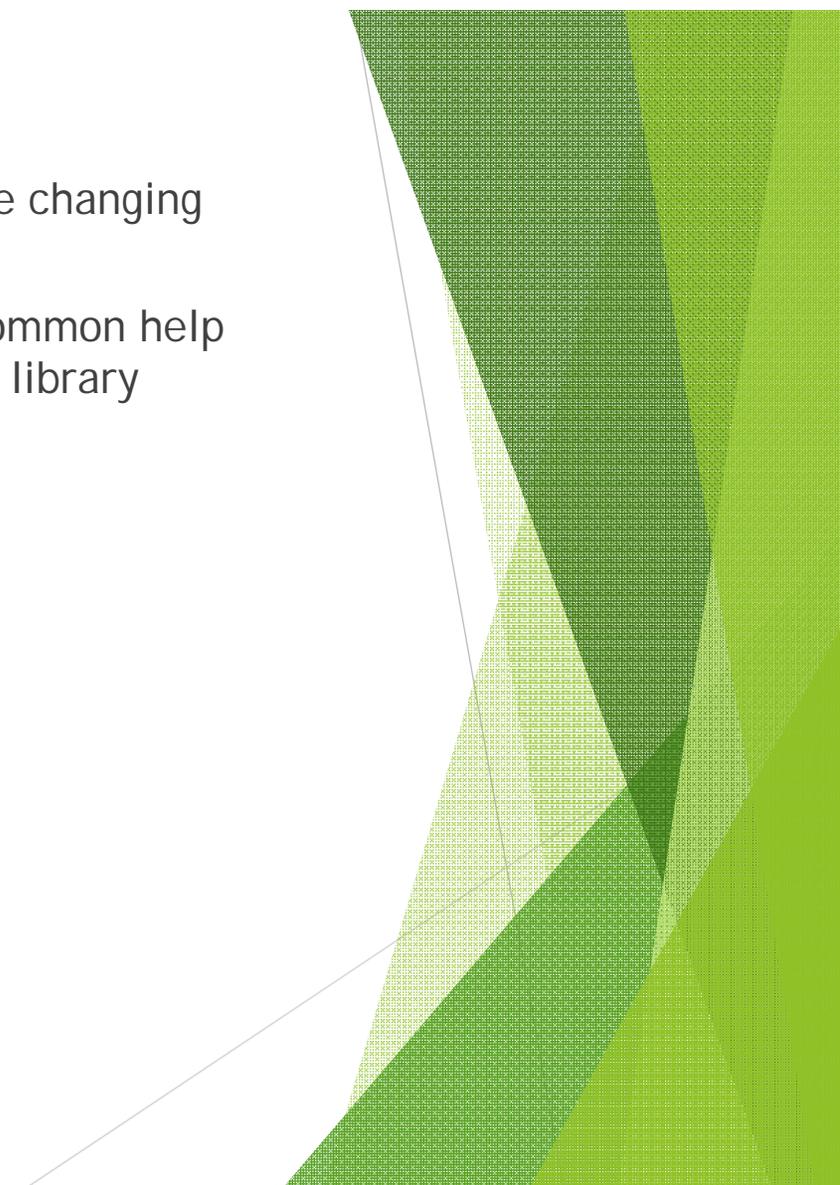
We can predict the future.

▶ The popularity in the 1980 and '90s of "futurism" as a specialization.

▶ Our first fallacy is a classic case in point; many touted technologies never take off, others take us by surprise. Consider the fax, which failed when first introduced but then became standard a decade or more later when the technology became more important.

▶ New applications appear with even less predictability; consider the rise of the social media or Uber.

▶ The only predictable thing is constant change.

▶ Hence the watchwords are 'vigilance' and 'flexibility.'

So what does all this mean?

Librarians must position themselves to be a central part of the information revolution. To do this, they must gain both a broad understanding of information technology and a wide range of specific skills and how they apply to the essential role of libraries – helping their publics to find, get access to and use the information resources they need. They must be prepared for an ever-changing professional world. If they fail in this project, they will find themselves swept aside by those who can function in the new environment, even if not as well as a fully-qualified librarian.