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Review of "Library Management in Disruptive Times: Skills and knowledge for an uncertain future"

Submitted by Jon Knight on 25 February 2017 - 4:57pm
Review info:

Library Management in Disruptive Times: Skills and knowledge for an uncertain future
Edited by Steve O'Connor.
Facet Publishing,
London
2015
ISBN: 978-1-78330-021-1

[Tanya Butchers](#) reviews the Facet publication, "Library Management in Disruptive Times: Skills and knowledge for an uncertain future" edited by Steve O'Connor.

With a cover description that promises a book that "identifies the key skills and attitudes needed by the library leaders of today and tomorrow" I anticipated a collection of practical, experience-based chapters describing situations the authors had found themselves in, accounts of how they had approached the issues, the lessons they learned and reflections on what they would do differently the next time. As a current library service manager within the UK Public sector I hoped to be able to identify with those situations, reflect on the accounts and apply some of the lessons to my own experiences. Unfortunately this isn't that kind of book, rather it is a collection of nine largely theoretical, introspective articles from international researchers, academics or managers of large academic institutions, which reflect on research undertaken by the authors, things they have read about or things that may happen in the future. Articles include: "*Leading change: knowledge for success*" by Ian Smith; "*Management fads and fashions and their impact on the LIS community*" from Bill Fisher; "*The Five Rules of Engagement for librarians aux Ranganathan's laws of library science*" by Choy Fatt Cheong; "*Library management, disruption and consortia: an Australian example*" by Michael Robinson; "*No regrets; just lessons: economic crisis is changing our life and the management of libraries*" by Petros A. Kostaglios; "*Introducing agile principles and management to a library organization*" by Daniel Forsman; "*The role of professional associations in changing times*" by Susan Henczel and "*What is behind the meaning of disruption? Or, thinking of management strategies from the outside*" by Steve O'Connor.

Whilst each article in the book is interesting in it's own way, to my mind the collection doesn't present a coherent narrative and I have struggled to identify the target audience. Practitioners hoping to be able to identify with and learn from the experience of colleagues, are unlikely to find inspiration or new ideas here and as for students in the field of library and information, I personally feel that there are many other change management texts out there that will give the theory and reflect on the practice of this art in a more digestible and usable form.

For me the one notable exception is the article by Dr. Colin Storey entitled "*And the walls came tumbling down... The library profession confronts all-invasive new managerialism*" in which uses his decades of experience to proffer advice and hints for library managers, albeit in a slightly tongue-in-cheek manner. This is the closest to practical and usable advice that we get with several of the sentiments expressed chiming with my own experience. Indeed some of the comments gave me a less-than-comfortable pause for thought as I started to reflect on the statements and my own attitudes or behaviour, so not all is lost and colleagues may look forward to some improvements!

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