

# How sustainable is our profession ?

A personal view

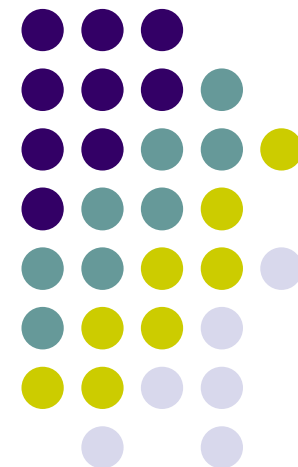
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# Outline



- Personal view
- Doom and gloom?
- Changing professional landscape
  - Partnerships and Stakeholders
- Professionalism
  - Definitions and scope – what is a profession/al?
  - Attributes and identity
  - Identity and work
  - Meaning
- Sustainability

Where are we now?

# Doom and gloom?



- “if libraries didn’t exist, they would not be invented now” (Fintan O’Toole, quoted in the Presidential Address, AGM, Library Association of Ireland, 9/03/2006)
- “it is clearly the case that the public view of libraries is that they are no longer relevant in a digital age” (O’Connor, 2006).
- “The library service is nearing a crisis point after suffering years of funding cuts, deskilling of the workforce and recent threats of outsourcing” (Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis, *The Telegraph* 29 June 2011  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/3757567/Library-service-nearing-crisis-point.html>)
- “My sister reads a lot of books but she wastes a lot of money buying them and then never looking at them again. Is there sort of, like, a video rental place for books?” Do we need to, like, sort of, worry about the profession’s image when the real world has got as bad as this?’ (Swaffield, L. (2008) Media watching, *Library + Information Update*, 7 (4), p.48)



# Hope on the horizon?

- “The closure of so many libraries and the slashing of budgets is certainly a bleak prospect, but I am inclined to be optimistic. Alongside the death of the library (a worldwide phenomenon) there are **grounds for hope** (Robert McCrum, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2011  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/may/12/libraries-crisis-literary-culture-thriving>)
- “2011 has been a dismal year for the UK's embattled libraries, but help is now finally at hand. The 208,000 members of the Women's Institute have thrown their weight behind the campaign to save them” (Alison Flood, *The Guardian*, 10 June 2011  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jun/10/women-s-institute-battle-save-libraries>
- “ librarians need to embrace positively the challenges of creating and sustaining relationships based on active partnership with their customers...moving beyond merely ascertaining need and providing for [it]...into a two-way collaborative relationship reliant on purposeful and relevant communication strategies” ( Broady-Preston, Felice and Marshall, 2006) [cf ‘the **embedded** librarian’ May 2011]

# Changing professional landscape

(Broady-Preston, 2007-2011)



- “Blurring (or demolishing?) boundaries”
  - Generic – UK Government Panel on Fair Access to the Professions – July 2009 report
  - Information Profession – Impact web2.0, 3.0, 4.0 on sector boundaries –
    - hybrid vs blended professional
    - “disconnect” academe and professions
  - Levels of practice – glass ceiling shatters?
- Governmental drivers
  - ‘Big Society’ – connected communities
  - Employability: Relationship HEIs and employers
  - Transferability (e.g. Bologna)
  - Recognition work-based learning – development of competency frameworks and occupational standards
  - Emphasis on skills – ‘can do’

# Work based learning: employability



## Definitions (HEA Research)

- Immediate employment
  - Acquisition of a job?
- Immediate employability
  - Acquisition of skills?
  - ‘Work readiness’?
- ***Sustainable*** employability
  - USEM: “a blend of **u**nderstanding, **s**kilful practices, **e**fficacy beliefs and **m**etacognition” (Knight and Yorke, 2005).

# Skills and competences: definitions



- **Concise Oxford Dictionary** definitions:
  - **Skill** – ability to do something well
  - **Competence**
    - a sufficiency of means for...
    - able to do
- “if we can think of a continuum ranging from just knowing how to do something at one end to knowing how to do something very well at the other, knowing how to do something competently would fall **somewhere** along this continuum” (Pearson, 1984).

# LIS Profession: partnerships and stakeholders



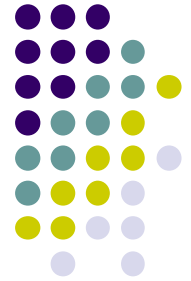
## Stakeholders

- Government (International and Domestic)
- Employers
- Professional associations/bodies
- Educators – the “library schools”
- Individuals – librarians

## Partnerships and new dynamics?

- Collaborators or competitors?
  - Work-based learning (Sector Skills Councils; Professional Associations, e.g. CILIP)
  - Sub-HE education (UK = FE Colleges)

## New model of professionalism?



“in a web 2.0 world, the "closed shop" model of professionalism is dead in the water. The fundamental transition of the "information society" is a transition from traditional forms of authority to a much greater focus on community: on collaboration and personalisation with traditional barriers broken down. For a web 2.0 model of society, we need a web 2.0 model of professionalism – not just in our use of technology but in our culture and ways of behaving.” (Bob McKee, July 2009)

**Presentation outlines research work on related themes**

# Definitions and scope



- Is key question – what is a profession? [Cf Feather (2009)]
- Oxford English Dictionary defines a profession as:
  - an occupation in which a professed knowledge of some subject, field, or science is applied; a vocation or career, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification. Also...as mass noun: occupations of this kind. (2009)
- Of greater interest/significance is NOT exploration determinants/attributes/qualifications per se, BUT an investigation of role of professions and individual professionals in context of:
  - Societal change
  - “Radical transformation” [cf. Ackroyd, 1996 and Hotho, 2008)

# Definitions and scope: key question



NOT exploration determinants or attributes, BUT

How do professions position themselves and respond in  
context of:

- Changing nature professions
- Relationships at macro and micro level
- Relationships professionals and society, including issues social identity and self-esteem

# Attributes and Identity



- Attributes professions vs occupations – old hat?
  - Payne = 5 attributes; Feather = 4 attributes
  - Concept of “social meaning”
    - a collective professional culture and integrity, developed and maintained through formal and informal groups; such formal groups including professional associations, and educational and research centres.
- Contemporary views:  
NOT
  - “traits” ( how should a professional behave?)OR
  - “functions” (what should a professional do?)

# Professional identity and work: views



- Professions
  - construct and use range techniques and practices to gain, legitimise and maintain control over professional work to obtain dominance over other groups and privileged economic/ social status (**accepted view – cf Abbott, 1995**)
- BUT Professions under scrutiny - UK 2009 Panel on Fair Access to the Professions concluded that:
  - “for all the progress that has taken place in recent years by government tackling poverty and disadvantage and all the efforts that have been made by the professions to expand the pool of talent from which they recruit ...many professions are still unrepresentative of the modern society they serve...Most alarmingly of all there is strong evidence, given to the Panel, that the UK’s professions have become more, not less, socially exclusive over time”

# Contemporary views organisational behaviour/context



- 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations characterised by CHANGE and FLEXIBILITY in relation to:
  - Organisational behaviour
  - Individual behaviour within organisations
  - Moves towards multi-disciplinary, inter-organisational working especially in health sector – professional identity = barrier?
    - Public recognition
    - Self-esteem
  - “generic workers” – loss of sense of self
  - Inter-professional groups – lack of clarity of function? Rivalry?

# Concepts of Identity



- **Compatibility** (Dual/multiple)
  - Individuals have capacity to function with several identities concurrently and in harmony – all contributing to sense of self
  - gender?
- External professional loyalty = organisational threat?
- **Trade-off strategies**
  - “pull” professional loyalty may dilute organisational loyalty
    - Freedom to exercise professional autonomy/expertise/standards
    - Conflicting loyalties – organisational vs professional authority
  - “lean and mean” competitive environment lessens loyalty – impact downsizing, reconfiguring pension schemes, cause employees to seek commitment elsewhere (“stick” or “push”) (See Alvesson, 2000; Pate et al 2009-2010)

# Identity: need and search for fit?



“pervasive human desire to identify with the social system of which we are a part” (Rousseau, 1998)

- Concept of “fit” – (Pratt 1998) NB values and culture match
- Macro vs micro response:
  - Professional loyalty (macro)
  - Group/project/team loyalty (micro) NB dilemma – want strong team ethos but not at expense wider organisational loyalty
- Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel 1972)
  - Identification and differentiation – integral to self-identity and worth (definition of self in relation to groups)
  - Multiple selves – self categorisation theory – emotional significance (Turner, 1973)



# Meaning

- Recap – thus far – looked at individuals ascribing ***meaning*** in relation to ***identity***
- **BUT** – professional (group) identity rests on ***shared meaning*** and ***understanding***
- ***Meaning*** in relation to ***identity***
  - **Constructed reality**
    - **Social constructivism** – mind constructs reality in its relationship to the world
    - **cognitive constructivism** – emphasis on ways in which individual builds up knowledge
    - **Social constructionism** - discourse as the vehicle through which self and world are articulated (Gergen; Foucault)



# Sustainability: Definitions

## Dictionary:

**Sustainability: from the verb to sustain meaning: to hold up; to bear; to support; to provide for; to maintain; to sanction; to keep going; to keep up; to prolong; to support the life of.**  
(Chambers Concise Dictionary)

## **Sustainable *Development*:**

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.  
(Brundtland, 1987)

# Types of Sustainability



Two core ideas present in the literature:

A sustainable system or process must be based on resources that will not be exhausted over a reasonable period (sometimes expressed as the 'long term')

A sustainable system or process must not generate unacceptable “pollution” externally or internally

[Adapted from University of Reading, ECIFM *Definitions*  
<http://www.ecifm.rdg.ac.uk/definitions.htm> Accessed 29 June 2011]

# Where are we now?



- More research needed:
  - profession and professional – wider applicability of health and personnel professionals
  - Identity – gender and professionalism
  - Meaning – definitions/ philosophy
  - Empirical work – development of methodology
- Fundamental questions/issues
  - Is librarianship still a discrete profession?
  - Do librarians possess a set of unique skills, competencies and knowledge?
  - Is it significant/important if the answer to the above questions is NO?

# Finally...



- Key strengths (profession)
  - ADAPTABILITY (***Sustainability?***)
  - Positive attitude to change
  - Library brand = strong and positive
- Hopefully a starting point for further discussion/debate
- Thank-you for listening – happy to answer questions either now or in the future
- Contact – [jbp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:jbp@aber.ac.uk)