

Introduction to the Symposium on Management and Operation of Information Groups and Centers*

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Received June 20, 1969

Although there have been a plethora of papers on the detailed techniques of information operations and on descriptions of facilities, the literature on management objectives and on the relationship of specific operational components and policies is relatively meager. The papers in this symposium were selected for their discussion either of management aspects of operating an information facility or of individual features crucial to their effective operation. The facilities cover a spectrum of information activities, such as document centers, abstracting services, industrial information services, and government information and data groups. In viewing the management aspects, the papers in this symposium consider the following operations: document acquisition, including library material, proprietary literature, and government reports; analysis of documents for storage, retention, and distribution, or for classifying, indexing, and abstracting; communication of information by translations of foreign material, awareness bulletins, bibliographies, and comprehensive literature analyses; design of information and data systems; unique applications of computers for information retrieval; personnel recruitment and training; and a variety of other operations which may require writing talent, nomenclature knowledge, or editorial skills.

From among the many specific features that are necessary for the effective operation of information facilities in general or for the fulfillment of particular missions, the following were selected for presentation: continuous evolution of a classification system, coordination of separate efforts under agreed guidelines, dealing with material with selectively restricted distribution, user feedback, data evaluation, and computer selection.

The information facilities and operations discussed in this symposium are creatures of choice, not the results of mere happenstance. The initial choice derived from the recognition of a need and from the willingness of the parent organization to pay to satisfy the need. The continuation and growth of information facilities are contingent upon their success in fulfilling the changing needs within the economic limits imposed on them.

Successful management of an information operation requires both an awareness of the larger goals which are being supported and also a continuing rapport with higher management or the sponsor and with those whom the facility serves. Successful management implies creativity in the design of systems, proper attention to the component parts, control over the contents, efficiency in the use of people and time, and subject area knowledge important to the environment being served. It further implies the recruitment of qualified personnel and the establishment of an environment that encourages professional growth with suitable rewards and challenges; it implies methods for measuring the contributions of the information operation and of its personnel.

A key management function is communication with those who finance the information facility and with those who are served by it. Good communication is needed for controlling current operations and planning for the future, for determining objectives from a number of alternatives open, for efficient use of the resources that may be available, for reaching rational decisions. Management must be committed to the success of its parent organization or to the goals of its sponsor.

Because the papers of this symposium are based on extensive experience and a high degree of success, they should contribute to a better understanding of the management and operation of information groups and centers.

*Presented at the 4th Middle Atlantic Regional Meeting, ACS, Washington, D.C., February 13, 1969.