

Will the Choices We Make Define Us?

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Abstract:

A central message in the Harry Potter series is choice and how Harry's choices defined who he was and helped him navigate good from evil, right from wrong and where his loyalties lied. Specifically, Dumbledore tells Harry, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Having the ability to make choices separates us from other species and being able to make professional choices separates us within economic and social classifications especially in relation to having control of your circumstances. Choice also comes with ethical considerations within a profession and how that profession is coveted by stakeholders and those with cross discipline relationships.

Keywords: libraries | ethics | COVID-19

Article:

*****Note:** Full text of article below

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A central message in the Harry Potter series is choice and how Harry's choices defined who he was and helped him navigate good from evil, right from wrong and where his loyalties lied. Specifically, Dumbledore tells Harry, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Having the ability to make choices separates us from other species and being able to make professional choices separates us within economic and social classifications especially in relation to having control of your circumstances. Choice also comes with ethical considerations within a profession and how that profession is coveted by stakeholders and those with cross discipline relationships.

Introduction

At this writing, the phenomenon surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is upon us and is expected to impact our lives for years to come. With these expected changes to the way we live, the way in which we operate both personally and professionally, and the way in which our profession moves forward, we will face many choices: be it individually or collectively within the profession. This pandemic has created in most individuals a level of high anxiety and emotional tolls, enhancing concerns about wellbeing and safety issues. Thus, come the choices as individuals in how we react to our organizational needs and how decisions made by others are supported or ignored. These new directions with COVID, in terms of finding solutions for modified conditions while expecting to be cared for as individuals, can create an environment for individual choices to be made as organizations contemplate how to provide service to stakeholders under these circumstances.

R. David Lankes writes about the "New Normal" expected in libraries and thus the profession. He identifies the changes he expects to see, which he calls the "how" but also delivers a strong argument about not changing the "why". Protecting our fundamental and enduring values is a choice that will define who we are and how this profession will be defined in the future and so we need to be mindful of our professional ethics during these hard, professional choices.

Looking for Solutions

The professional literature has started seeing many contributions toward research and analysis over what services and methods have been impacted the most and a variety of solutions are surfacing. Ithaka S+R organized five roundtables for academic library leaders to discuss and share what are highlighted as the largest concerns for leadership to be addressing during this time of disruption and uncertainty. This was summarized in an article by how leaders are guiding in their libraries today (Lutz & Schonfeld, 2020) and drew on these topics related to managing employees:

- Physical health
- Emotional health
- Technology
- Professional development

These topics all came with organizations trying to make informed decisions while addressing employee concerns, but it still leaves employees with choices to make.

What about Professional Ethics?

Many of the choices that library staff are having to make relate to our professional ethics to serve our patrons and communities. Recent articles decrying the forced opening of libraries against the comfort level of the library staff have surfaced and juxtaposed against the gruesome reality that some people didn't have a choice or say in the matter.

Regarding how ethics can impact choice, the Josephson Institute for Ethics identifies 3 principles for making decisions or expressing choice when facing ethical dilemmas. The first one, *help when you can, avoid harm when you can*, is certainly at odds with the current situation of limiting contact. The second principle is ethical behavior over non-ethical behavior, which creates a choice challenge in applying our enduring values. Many library staff are known for providing physical services during this crisis, such as curbside or on demand, until forced to stop by their affiliated institutions. Josephson's third principle allows for a violation of an ethical principle for the benefit of a larger or long-term principle. With COVID that just makes choices harder for those who want to serve but also want to comply with regulations and restrictions being applied.

Hatwalne's column, discussing the Dumbledore quote, makes the point within a modern society context that in almost every crucial crossroads in our career or life, we will be faced with many options, and ultimately what we choose will reveal more about who we are and what we value. Within this pandemic situation, many libraries are struggling with organizational issues and how to continue with services and with manpower issues from lost or reduced positions as well as individuals who choose not to participate in figuring out how to effectively move forward.

In talking about making choices, Leslie Ye presents the psychology behind these choices and she puts it in a broad playing field of free will, choice being the ultimate expression of free will. Choice includes recognizing the sacrifice of not making certain choices and it inherently is also about satisfying basic needs, once again an important consideration in a health-related crisis.

Ye also addresses rational choice theory in which having bias toward something can lead to a bad choice or tainted judgement over an issue. These biases, in this situation can come from lack of trust from our leaders, fear of health concerns, anti-administrative sentiment, or not wanting to be told what to do. These types of bias could impact the long-term health of our profession if library staff make choices away from our professional ethics and don't bring libraries back to the table appropriately.

Broadly, choices about going back to work, engaging with stakeholders, supporting administrative or leadership decisions can be seen as either positive or negative overall. What is important is to not let a biased attitude toward any of those issues influence our future choices to adhere to our professional principles. Helping to find solutions is a critical choice that we need to be making to ensure libraries survive this pandemic and have positive outcomes for our stakeholders and communities.

When you aren't given a Choice

This discussion of choices should also include consideration for those who aren't given a choice. Contributions to professional literature also include criticisms to governments and professional associations for overlooking library workers who have undergone layoffs, furloughs, or suffered from budget cuts. In these cases, choices have been limited or non-existence related to professional contribution and those ethical concerns are more focused on the basic hierarchical needs addressed by Maslow. In Maslow's Grumble Theory, he classifies motivation and professional concerns as part of a

hierarchy that starts with physiological and safety needs. Library workers who are experiencing the negative side of this pandemic, as Callan Bignoli points out in her article *Don't Leave Workers Out of the Library Narrative*, move their choices to more immediate concerns of health and safety. It is understandable hard to make good professional choices when the issue is about self-preservation and the choice is taking out of your control.

The End will be Different

Once again, the professional literature related to how libraries are adapting to the COVID-19 response is varied with actions taken and expected outcomes unclear at this point in time. This will take innovation and creativity in expanding and embellishing our resources and services into something that our stakeholders' value and desire. I wrote in 2012 about innovation and change and how it is important to change our perception. To be innovative requires definition, research and a willingness to make different choices in order to impact the end-user by adding value to existing products and services.

We are in a time of hard choices as we fight to protect our families, our financial stability but also our profession and reputation. As those choices are being made it is important to face your biases that might influence you. Also, remember your professional ethics that will drive your passion for what you do and why. Within these issues, it will not be possible to eliminate all the inequities or shortfalls that will fall on many but a proper recognition of those issues to be corrected is appropriate.

Make informed choices and recognize the choices of others around you. Recognize what needs to be done within the larger levels of government and/or larger institutions. Recognize who our choices influence: your patrons, students, stakeholders who have counted on you, and your institution in many ways. Choose to be positive and find positive solutions and outcomes..... These choices will define us going forward, perhaps more than our skills and knowledge.

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