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ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Get connected: Network Theory for Library professionals

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LEAP – one small step, one giant leap

Get Connected: Network Theory for Library Professionals

While Library professionals are creating a welcoming and vibrant local library environment, I want to argue that networking is vital to the vibrancy of the profession, to professional development of the library professional and the richness of the lived library life.

I will be using network theory to suggest that networking can add an incredible depth of richness to the local library experience.

I will be touching on "small world theory" – who are the connectors in your community? Who are the people who have the time to connect to other people in your community? Small world theory arises out of the 6 degrees of separation phenomena; that through just 5 steps or 6 degrees of separation we can connect to almost anyone on the planet. How can we use this in libraries to connect ideas and learnings?

I will also talk about "lifecycles of emergence", which is an idea that networks change the world, or, in our case, libraries, through a fourfold process – name, connect, nourish, illuminate. The world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what is possible.

I will then talk about 'thick networks'. As George Monbiot has written "creating what practitioners call "thick networks": projects that proliferate, spawning further ventures and ideas that weren't envisaged when they started. They then begin to develop a dense, participatory culture that becomes attractive and relevant to everyone…" How can libraries and library professionals become the creators of these "thick networks" and how will that change how we do things?

Lastly, I will touch on "Modality and Sodality" theory. A modality is an organizational structure that is designed for long-term stability. It establishes routines and typically stays in one place for an extended period. Libraries are an example of a modality. A sodality is a group structure that is designed for mobility and trans-local activity. Their goal is not permanent residency, but seasonal, itinerant residency, that is marked with transition and travel. We, as library professionals, can be seen as a sodality.

Networking is vital to the continuing health and development of libraries.

My talk on networking and network theory is relevant to the Leap stream of the conference, as it will argue for connecting both within and, especially, outside of the profession to enrich our own professional development and the development of the profession as a whole.

Get Connected: Network Theory for Library Professionals

I want to begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the Country on which we learn, meet and work together, and commit to building relationships, respect and opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and pay respect to leaders past, present and emerging.

I also wish to acknowledge that the basis of my paper came out of a blog post from an emerging church missional leader and pioneer Jonny Baker from London in his blog post on networking. He was blogging on networking amongst emerging church leaders across the UK and on reading his blog post, I could see the parallels with what we as leaders and emerging leaders in the library world have been and are continuing to do.

As in all aspects of library work we continue to stand on the shoulders of giants, however in this case, the giant's shoulders I am standing on is not from the library profession but the lessons learned I think can apply to our profession.

As library professionals at all levels in the library we are focussed on delivering excellence and doing good in our local neighbourhoods and libraries and seeing our communities transformed. In this paper, I will be focussing on four aspects of network theory that can add an incredible richness to what we are doing locally.

These four aspects of network theory are:

Small-world Theory

Lifecycles of emergence

Thick networks

And

Modality and sodality (or Mods and sods!)

This thinking about networks can be applied both within the locale – that is networking with others locally, and more widely to make connections in networks beyond the local that can enable ideas to both flow in and out and grow the profession.

To unpack those four aspects then we will start with small world theory. I am sure you all have heard of the Kevin Bacon Game, which is, for those of you who might not have heard of it, a game based on the "six degrees of separation" concept, which posits that any two people on Earth are six or fewer acquaintance links apart. Movie buffs challenge each other to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and prolific actor Kevin Bacon. It rests on the assumption that anyone involved in the Hollywood film industry can be linked through his or her film roles to Bacon within six steps. The game requires a group of players to try to connect any such individual to Kevin Bacon as quickly as possible and in as few links as possible.

A friend of Jonny Baker shared with him his excitement of discovering that he can show a relational connection from him to someone to someone else and so on until he connects to Elvis Presley in 5 steps or 6 connections. It often takes people by surprise that there is that level of connectivity. Welcome to small world theory.

So what is the big (or small) deal? In the real world, we connect to a relatively small number of people. In fact, there is a so-called rule of 150, or Dunbar's number, that states that the size of a genuine social network is about 150 members. When you add in all your close relatives and those of your partner, the actual social network is smaller than that. However, this is not a "closed" network and most of your network of friends and connections will also have their 150 people who they connect with and these open networks with their social connectors bridging the gaps is how the Kevin Bacon game works.

It has been found that it is better for individual success to have connections to a variety of networks rather than many connections within a single network. This is how most networks work - a mix of dense and sparse connections rather than everyone linked to everyone. These people who focus externally are connectors. Most people are quite happy existing in a small world but connectors often hold an astonishing level of connectivity across small worlds. Six degrees of separation works because these people create huge short cuts and it's often these connectors that people start thinking about unconsciously when looking for that connection in a conversation to establish common ground.

In Clay Shirky's book 'Here comes everybody', there is a story of a firm that had new management and a piece of research was done to see which managers came up with the most creative solutions. The discovery was that those that were least locked into their own department brought the most creativity i.e. lots of their connections were external. As he put it, *bridging capital puts people at greater risk of having good ideas*. In any network, there is a balance to be had. The temptation is to want to keep it tight - i.e. relate to people with similar passions/interests etc as you share concerns, struggles etc. but the network will stifle if it is too tight - it needs random elements and connections that are totally different to bring a creative edge. I think it is counter intuitive.

In terms of networking, I guess it is obvious why we are talking about this. Social media tools mean we are relating in small worlds and connectors all the time without even thinking about it. And the scale of networking response/influence can be on a huge scale when things start to flow. The great thing is that none of us can really control it and we are all severely limited in our relational capacity so we only ever see a part of the whole – we can simply participate and get in the flow as it were.

As library professionals and leaders, we connect to many other library professionals through social media following all sorts of library people across the world. However, we are all singing from a similar hymn sheet. We need to also connect with Galleries, Museums and Archives people as well as spread our network reach out into the creative industries such as sound recording studios, events people, social networkers, craft brewers, artisanal bakers, foodies, coffee roasters and more. We need to tap into many ideas and show that libraries and that what we do is relevant and that we are willing to learn from diverse sources.

To underscore this, I have in recent time's forged links with Studios 301, the newest and largest music sound recording studio in the Southern Hemisphere and one of the top 5 music recording studios in the world. I am currently seeking to link craft brewers and libraries as I think that they have something to teach us about market specialisation and niche marketing. I have also attended the first GLAMSLAM event run by the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS Sydney. We need to get out of our library-centred bubble.

Which brings us to Lifecycles of emergence. Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze in 2006 wrote an article called "Using emergence to take social innovations to scale" in which they state:

> "In spite of current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible. This is good news for those of us intent on changing the world and creating a positive future. Rather than worry about critical mass, our work is to foster critical connections."

They state that networks are not the whole story. Networks grow and transform into active communities of practice by combining separate, local networks connecting with other networks and strengthening into communities of practice, which results in a new system emerging at a greater level of scale. This system of influence then possess qualities, capabilities, and capacities that were unknown as individuals. It isn't that

these qualities and capacities were somehow hidden; they didn't exist until the system emerges. The system that emerges always possesses greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change.

Emergence has a life cycle. It begins with networks, shifts to intentional communities of practice and evolves into powerful systems capable of global influence.

A couple of points here. Networks are the only form of organisation used by living systems on this planet. Networks create the conditions for emergence, which is how life changes. Emergence violates so many of our Western assumptions of how change happens. In nature, change never happens as a result of a top-down, pre-conceived strategic plan or from the mandate of a single boss. Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different areas. When these local actions become connected, a powerful system with influence at a more comprehensive level can appear. Examples to think about here is how quickly the Berlin wall came down, how the Soviet Union ended or how quickly corporate power came to dominate globally.

Emergence only happens through connections. Networks are essential in connecting like-minded individuals, the first stage in emergence. Networks make it possible for people to find others engaged in similar work, which then leads to the second stage of emergence with the creation of Communities of Practice. Communities of practice are self-organised. People share a common work, are in a relationship, and use this community to share what they know, to support each other and to intentionally create new knowledge for their field of practice. They are communities in which people participate not just for their own needs, but also to serve the needs of others. The focus is to extend beyond the group, to advance the field of practice and share those discoveries with a wider audience. Communities of Practice allow for good ideas to move rapidly between members; for new knowledge and practices to be quickly implements. The speed at which knowledge development and exchange happens is crucial, because local regions need this knowledge and wisdom now.

The third stage of emergence can never be predicted. It is the sudden appearance of a system that has real power and influence. Pioneering efforts that were once out on the edge, at the periphery are suddenly the norm. The practices developed by courageous communities of practice emerge as the accepted standard and people no longer hesitate about adopting these approaches and methods.

No matter what other change strategies we may have learned or favoured, emergence is the only way change really happens on this planet.

Enough theory, here is a real world example, though not from the library world. Peter Dearman is an engineer who was thinking about the shift from oil dependency and has invented an engine that runs on liquid nitrogen. At the heart of Dearman's technology portfolio is the Dearman engine – a novel piston engine driven by the expansion of liquid nitrogen or liquid air, to produce clean cold and power.

Liquid nitrogen expands 710 times between liquid and gas phases and this expansion is used to drive the pistons of an engine. Dearman engines operate like high-pressure steam engines, but the low boiling temperature of liquid nitrogen means that low-grade or ambient heat can be used as a heat source, eliminating the need for a traditional fuel. A unique feature of Dearman engines is the use of heat exchange fluid (warm water). When it mixes with the extremely cold nitrogen, this fluid enables a quasi-isothermal (near constant) expansion and significantly increases the engine's efficiency. Crucially, the only emission from a Dearman engine is air or nitrogen, with no emissions of NOx, CO2 or particulates.

To get this brilliant idea developed required Dearman walking out of the usual solutions and walking on to new ones and finding others to journey with him and, of course, facing huge challenges on the way, but it is now happening.

Like Peter Dearman, we need to do things differently. What do we need to change? There is your challenge to walk out on old ideas and walk on to new solutions.

And so, to thick networks. George Monbiot, who is from the UK and writes in The Guardian, writes "without community, politics is dead. But communities have been scattered like dust in the wind. At work, at home, both practically and imaginatively, we are atomised." Now he is writing that from a UK perspective so take that comment with that in mind.

Is it reasonable to hope for a better world? Study the cruelty and indifference of governments, the disarray of opposition parties, the apparently inexorable slide towards climate breakdown, the renewed threat of nuclear war, and the answer appears to be no. Our problems look intractable, our leaders dangerous, while voters are cowed and baffled. Despair looks like the only rational response.

He then goes on to say that over the last little while (and one could argue here that is has been over the last decade at least) that he has been struck by four observations. What they reveal is that political failure is, in essence, a failure of the imagination.

The first observation is the least original. It is the realisation that it is not strong leaders or parties that dominate politics, as much as powerful political narratives. This should not surprise us. Stories are the means by which we navigate the world. They allow us to interpret its complex and contradictory signals. We all possess a narrative instinct: an innate disposition to listen for an account of who we are and where we stand. A string of facts, however well attested, will not correct or dislodge a powerful story. The only response it is likely to provoke is indignation: people often angrily deny facts that clash with the narrative "truth" established in their minds. The only thing that can displace a story is a story. Those who tell the stories run the world. Libraries are, and have always been, the storehouses of stories.

The second observation is this. Although the stories told by social democracy and neoliberalism are starkly opposed to each other, they have the same narrative structure. We could call it the Restoration Story. It goes like this:

> *Disorder afflicts the land, caused by powerful and nefarious forces working against the interests of humanity. The hero – who might be one person or a group of people – revolts against this disorder, fights the nefarious forces, overcomes them despite great odds and restores order.*

Stories that follow this pattern can be so powerful that they sweep all before them: even our fundamental values. For example, two of the world's best-loved and most abiding narratives – *Lord of the Rings* and the *Narnia* series – invoke values that were familiar in the Middle Ages but are generally considered repulsive today. Disorder in these stories is characterised by the usurpation of rightful kings or their rightful heirs; justice and order rely on their restoration. We find ourselves cheering the resumption of autocracy, the destruction of industry and even, in the case of *Narnia*, the triumph of divine right over secular power.

If these stories reflected the values most people profess – democracy, independence, industrial "progress" – the rebels would be the heroes and the hereditary rulers the villains. We overlook the conflict with our own priorities because the stories resonate so powerfully with the narrative structure for which our minds are prepared. Facts, evidence, values, and beliefs: stories conquer all.

We move now into the third observation: the narrative structure of the Restoration Story is a common element in most successful political transformations, including many religious revolutions. This leads inexorably to the fourth insight: the reason why, despite its multiple and manifest failures, we appear to be stuck (at the moment) with neoliberalism in politics is that we have failed to produce a new narrative with which to replace it.

You cannot take away someone's story without giving them a new one. It is not enough to challenge an old narrative, however outdated and discredited it may be. Change happens only when you replace it with another. When we develop the right story, and learn how to tell it, it will infect the minds of people across the political spectrum.

What we have ended up with is a programme that seeks to sustain employment through constant economic growth, driven by consumer demand that seems destined to exacerbate our greatest predicament of climate change and environmental damage.

Without a new, guiding story of their own, allowing them to look towards a better future rather than a better past, it was inevitable that parties, which once sought to resist the power of the wealthy elite, would lose their sense of direction. Political renewal depends on a new political story. Without a new story, that is positive and propositional, rather than reactive and oppositional, nothing changes. With such a story, everything changes.

The narrative we build has to be simple and intelligible. If it is to transform our politics, it should appeal to as many people as possible, crossing traditional political lines. It should resonate with deep needs and desires. It should explain the mess we are in and means by which we might escape it. And, because there is nothing to be gained from spreading falsehoods, it must be firmly grounded in reality.

We are also, among mammals, the supreme co-operators. We survived the rigours of the African savannahs, despite being weaker and slower than our predators and most of our prey, through developing a remarkable capacity for mutual aid. This urge to cooperate has been hard-wired into our brains through natural selection. Our tendencies towards altruism and cooperation are the central, crucial facts about humankind.

But by coming together to revive community life we, the heroes of this story, can break the vicious circle. Through invoking our capacity for togetherness and belonging, we can rediscover the central facts of our humanity: our altruism and mutual aid. By reviving community, built around the places in which we live, and by anchoring ourselves, our politics and parts of our economy in the life of this community, we can restore the best aspects of our nature.

Those who want a kinder politics know we have, in theory at least, the numbers on our side. Most people are socially-minded, empathetic and altruistic. Most people would prefer to live in a world in which everyone is treated with respect and decency, and in which we do not squander either our own lives or the natural gifts on which we and the rest of the living world depend.

As library professionals working in libraries we already know how much libraries change communities. That we are transforming agents for positive change. We know communities need libraries, and libraries need us, the trained library professionals working in them. We quite clearly need professionals who are able to connect human beings with information.

Facts, not opinions. To teach people how to research properly. How to filter out the Fake News, the political media bias. To look up 'austerity' and double-check that the dictionary does not read: "Oh, just starve already, pauper". With schools underfunded and overcrowded, a library can provide much-needed sanctuary.

We know libraries are the home of stories and ideas, big ideas that can change the world. And we can connect the like-minded thinkers to the do-ers and movers and shakers.

Turning such initiatives into a wider social revival means creating what practitioners call "thick networks": projects that proliferate, spawning further ventures and ideas that weren't envisaged when they started. They then begin to develop a dense, participatory culture that becomes attractive and relevant to everyone rather than mostly to socially active people with time on their hands.

There are hundreds of examples of how this might begin, such as community shops, development trusts, food assemblies (communities buying fresh food directly from local producers), community choirs and so called 'free universities' (in which people exchange knowledge and skills in social spaces). Other examples are time banking (where neighbours give their time to give practical help and support to others), potluck lunch clubs (in which everyone brings a homemade dish to share),the Men's Shed movement (in which older men swap skills and escape from loneliness), lantern festivals, and Dr Matt Finch's Fun Palaces project and makerspaces in libraries.

A study commissioned by the London borough of Lambeth sought to identify how these thick networks are most likely to develop. The process typically begins with projects that are "lean and live": they start with very little money and evolve rapidly through trial and error. They are developed not by community heroes working alone, but by collaborations between local people. These projects create opportunities for "micro-participation": people can dip in and out of them without much commitment.

When enough of such projects have been launched, they catalyse a deeper involvement, generating community businesses, co-operatives and hybrid ventures, which start employing people and generating income. A tipping point is reached when between 10% and 15% of local residents are engaging regularly. Community then begins to gel, triggering an explosion of social enterprise and new activities, that starts to draw in the rest of the population. The mutual aid these communities develop functions as a second social safety net. The process, the study reckons, takes about three years. The result is communities that are vibrant and attractive to live in, which generate employment, are environmentally sustainable and socially cohesive, and in which large numbers of people are involved in decision-making. Which sounds to me like where we need to be.

The Lambeth Council report is titled "Designed to Scale: Mass participation to build resilient neighbourhoods" and I have provide a link to this report in the bibliography. The basis of the study was to try and answer the question; Is local participation at scale possible and does it hold the potential to improve people's lives and make lasting positive change?

One other area that libraries can learn from is the philosophy of Asset-Based Community Development or ABCD. This focusses on what resources does the community already have, rather than look for what we need. I currently use this model in teaching the Develop and maintain community and stakeholder relationships unit in the Diploma Library and Information Services course. I get the students to look at a 1 to 2 kilometre radius of their local library to see what other assets might be available for the library to utilise in outreach projects as well as looking at what community groups the library could co-opt to present programs. It is another way of building these thick networks in communities.

And so to the Sods and Mods. Modality and sodality. Now. In all my research and to the best of my understanding, modality and sodality have only ever been used in relation to church and mission but I think the idea has merit for us in the library world. In church circles, modal is the local gathered church community and sodal the spread out community focused around a mission task. A brief review of Church history will show that it is often the movements on the edge of 'solid' Church that have enabled the wider Church to re-discover its calling to true mission. Now I don't want to draw too long a bow here and suggest that we, as library professionals, need to somehow rediscover the library mission in the world, however, as I have said in the past we are very good at preaching to the converted in our libraries but pretty poor an evangelizing to those people who don't use libraries. And with 50% of Australians not being members of their library, we still have a lot of work to do to convince those who don't use libraries, that they should join. But I digress.

Modality comes from the root word *mode*. This in turn refers to the customary way things are done. One might say it is the default position, or prevailing fashion or custom. Mathematically modal is the greatest frequency of occurrences in a given set, and there is a corresponding sense socially that it is the most common way things are.

Sodality comes from the Latin root, *sodalis*. This can be translated comrade, or using other words, all of which suggest closeness and active partnership: companion, associate, mate, crony, accomplice, conspirator, are all listed. *Sodalitas* was used for social and politics associations; religious fraternities; electioneering gangs (an interesting take on mission); and guilds. Once again a significant sense of belonging is conveyed and some purpose to that belonging. There is a sense of high commitment and particular purpose. I would argue that at least the last 3 iterations of the steering committees for NLS7, NLS8 and the current NLS9 have embodied this idea of sodality as each portrayed a strong sense of belonging and have a clear purpose and mission.

It is probably better however, not to see Modal or Sodal as diametrically opposed or to see them in binary/dualistic terms pitted against each other but rather on a spectrum or continuum. Essentially Sodality pioneers and Modalist sustains. We are here at this conference because we see ourselves as pioneers and explorers as we are seeking to discover that which is next. However, we are also committed to the idea of libraries continuing to sustain and support communities. At least I hope so!

Mods and sods may be fine in the world of church and theological circles but I think we can easily transfer the concept across to the library world. In our context modal would be our physical library structures and the way we currently do things, and sodal would be for when we gather outside of those structures to tackle different aspects of the library and information world, both practical and theoretical. Examples

abound but any conference, symposium, unconference, local network meeting, dinner or learning opportunity would be examples of a sodal event.

A sodal network gets and supports what you are about, and these networks can be applied both within your locality, networking with others locally and more widely to make connections in networks beyond the local and even international that allows ideas and creativity to flow. In church circles, they talk about a mixed economy in its modal and sodal expressions, so I think that's a reasonable expression to use in library circles as well. In order to be effective change agents in our communities we need to also be a mixed economy of modal and sodal thinking and practice. Largely, I think we already do this.

Networks and networking are crucial to what we as library professionals have done; are doing and will do in the future. Mobilising across such a vast country as Australia, and across the even more vast Asia Pacific region requires us to get out and make these connections and have the conversations that will change what we do and how we do it. Our communities that we serve are ready to be transformed and improved. We have the skills to tell a different more inclusive story. We work in and represent libraries that are beacons of hope for this world and for our communities. One of the current challenges we face is the need to get through to our governments just what libraries are capable of achieving.

 It used to be said that content is king. Cory Doctorow says, "Conversation is king. Content is just something to talk about." Cory Doctorow is a science fiction author, activist and journalist — the co-editor of Boing Boing, and the author of many books. Libraries facilitate that conversation and allow collaboration to happen. I think one of the revolutions that is about to happen (or is happening already) in libraries is around providing space (and spaces) that allow for different levels of co-operation, collaboration and conversations to happen and for barriers to community to come down and true community to flourish. But that will take organisation, enthusiasm, courage and commitment by library professionals and the organisations that control our budgets. Networking will allow us to share the load of the journey and share what we learn together as we seek to transform our community, wherever our library is situated.

The challenge of the new environment is not just about the new social media tools and making the most of them (though that is of course a good thing to explore). The wider change is actually about how the new environment is remaking us. I think there is a wider cultural shift towards sharing and co-operation and interaction towards participation. As we are aware, libraries are the enablers of that cultural participation.

To respond to the challenges ahead the best way to prepare for that is to walk out of the old ideas and walk on to the new narratives we are telling and network, network, network!

Thank you.

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