## Conclusion

The future will probably see increases in the applications of hypertext. It has the potential to allow each user to become their own information retrieval specialist, with less need for intermediaries such as librarians.

Work on projects such as Ted Nelson's Xanadu may result in hypertext system for the repository of all world knowledge, accessible from anywhere.

Hypermedia is likely to be the common means of information retrieval in many of the multimedia home entertainment and reference systems of the future, the beginning of which we can see with such developments as CD-I.

There are a great many implications for librarians in hypertext, both in terms of using it to improve services but also in issues that need a great deal of research eg. usability, interface design, standards, presentation rhetoric, and so on. As information professionals, we have our part to play.

## Acknowledgments

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## The information needs of prisoners: a study of three penal establishments

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This research was conducted as part of the coursework requirements to complete the MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield, and was carried out during the early part of 1992. The objective of the study was to determine the nature of inmates' information needs and examine how effectively they were met.

## Methodology

This study relied mainly, but not wholly, on semi-structured interviews with prison staff and inmates and took place in three prison establishments. The three prisons comprised firstly, a B category training prison with a large lifer population (hereafter referred to as Prison A). This was a typical 'bang-up nick', housing about 200 inmates within a fairly relaxed regime. Secondly, Prison B was a low security C category establishment, formerly an army camp, housing a range of inmates from long sentenced prisoners who have worked their way through the system, to others serving very short sentences. Prison C was a Vulnerable Prisoner Unit, principally housing sexual offenders and operating a very liberal regime. Nevertheless, inmates were strictly aware that if they did not cooperate fully, they were likely to be returned into the mainstream prison system, with all its attendant difficulties.

Altogether, 36 inmates were interviewed and 24 members of staff. Obtaining these interviews within the context of a prison environment presented some difficulties - the precedence of security over all other issues, the time constraints imposed by the régime and the pressures upon staff caused by underresourcing.

## Main findings

First, the prison population has very different characteristics from the general population, and these factors, to a large extent, help determine prisoners' information needs. For example, in comparison with the general population, inmates are predominantly young, more likely to be educationally disadvantaged, have had a higher rate of truancy, more likely to have been unemployed, more likely to be from an ethnic minority and more likely to have had family members convicted. The majority of offences committed are drugs or vehicle related (Walmsley et al., 1993). Second, the length of sentence and the time left to serve exercise important controls over inmates' information needs.

Third, the nature of the régime at each establishment is a significant determinant in the satisfaction of inmates' information needs.

Fourth, formal channels of information provision may be perceived to be ineffective by inmates, irrespective of their objective validity.

Fifth, informal networks among inmates themselves may be the most preferred source of information.

## Sources of information

The differing perceptions between inmates and staff as to the sources of information available illustrates many of the findings listed above. For example, all interviewees were asked to name all the sources of information available within the establishment.

Number of sources named:

|          | INMATES | STAFF |
|----------|---------|-------|
| PRISON A | 8       | 18    |
| PRISON B | 12      | 18    |
| PRISON C | 15      | 11    |

As can be seen, inmates tended to name fewer sources of information than staff, except at Prison C.

These figures reflect the nature of the régime at each establishment - a higher emphasis on security and control will tend to restrict inmates' opportunities to access information sources.

Number of interviewees who named inmates as a source of information:

|          | INMATES | STAFF |
|----------|---------|-------|
| PRISON A | 7       | 1     |
| PRISON B | 4       | 2     |
| PRISON C | 4       | 0     |

At higher security establishments, 'us' and 'them' attitudes are more pronounced. Staff-inmate contacts tend to be minimized and thus inmates tend to develop information networks among themselves.

Percentage of interviewees who named civilians working in prisons as a source of information:

|          | INMATES | STAFF |
|----------|---------|-------|
| PRISON A | 50      | 30    |
| PRISON B | 57      | 30    |
| PRISON C | 30      | 30    |

These figures indicate that while staff perceptions of civilians are very consistent, at establishments with less relaxed regimes inmates tend to have a distrust of uniformed staff, and consequently rely to a greater extent on civilian providers.

Sources of information provided by the prison itself such as published Standing Orders and Prison Rules, induction courses, pre-release courses and noticeboards were all mentioned by staff but not by inmates. Again, this may reflect a distrust of official sources of information by inmates.

The Prisoners' Information Pack, distributed to all prisoners, was not mentioned by staff or inmates. Upon further prompting, those prisoners at establishment C considered it to be less useful than prisoners at other establishments. Several reasons for this may be advanced - prisoners here have already worked their way through the system and have picked up information from other sources. Furthermore, many inmates in this prison are only serving short sentences, and may only be concerned with doing their time and getting out, rather than gathering information.

**Constraints on information provision**

There are many constraints on obtaining information within a penal establishment, and these largely determine the strategies adopted by inmates.

First, inmates themselves may be incapable or unwilling to articulate their needs, because of a lack of trust of the authorities, the rapid institutionalization process, low motivation and low expectations. A probation officer at Prison C commented, "We are still only scratching the surface, because we are relying on them to identify their own problems".

Some inmates may simply not want any information because serving a prison sentence is a familiar and routine part of their normal life. And for some prisoners, any information which is likely to address the causes of their offending behaviour is likely to be very unpopular.

There may be a lack of advice on how to use information. For example, one inmate said, "In a prison, one of the few things we rely on is getting the truth, the right information. Like I have been helped by writing letters and to be able to have the references to refer to, like housing points, they've got books where you can look at tenancy agreements, stuff like that. But sometimes it's hard to understand when you haven't got a person telling you what the particular things are".

Inmates may only have very limited access to the information resources they require. For example, the libraries at Prisons B and C tended to be open when inmates were mostly at work.

At all prisons there was some degree of hostility between prisoners and officers, and hence sometimes a reluctance on the part of inmates to use staff as an information resource. And particularly at Prison C, there was evidence that some inmates would suppress their information needs rather than be perceived as disruptive influence and increasing the possibility of a return to the normal prison system. For example, one inmate said "Information does lead to empowerment, but it is a double edged sword - if you become aware of what you're entitled to, you become someone who's not conforming, a troublemaker".

Inconsistencies and arbitrariness were almost endemic at each prison. Such a situation can actually increase a client's information needs rather than help solve problems.

There are a variety of organizational constraints, for example, a lack of resources. A landing officer at Prison A commented "I'm hampered by not enough information. My job suffers from a lack of finance and resources at my disposal". A high workload at all three prisons often resulted in inmates developing negative perceptions of service effectiveness.

Staffing arrangements tended to exert a negative influence on effective information provision. For example, commonly there were no trained relief staff for particular posts, while opposing shifts of personal officers at Prisons B and C never met. In addition, there were typically very low levels of integration and communication between management and staff and between officers and civilian workers. For example, a Probation Officer at Prison A commented, "We have an information network that prison officers don't know about".

Inadequate training of staff was a problem at all three establishments. For example Personal Officers at Prison A received no initial training, while at Prison B officers had received just an afternoon visit to a probation office.

There was evidence that poor communications among staff hindered information provision. There were few interdepartmental meetings, over reliance on negative means of communication and information delivery, low levels of liaison with other prisons, no effective system of information management, little or no promotion of services resulting in low awareness and a reluctance to either act proactively or encourage independence or self-help initiatives.

Finally, there tended to be poor timing of information delivery. Induction courses tended to be either minimal or to contain too much information resulting in confusion. Pre-release courses tended to come too late in the sentence, immediately prior to release, when many inmates find it difficult to concentrate.

## Conclusions

Because of these constraints upon the formal network of information providers, three principal

processes were observed. First, in some cases information needs were not addressed at all. Second, inmates developed ways to circumvent the system. Although inmates may not have been dissatisfied with the end result, they were dissatisfied with the process. Third, many inmates preferred to access information independently or use their own information networks, which may become the most preferred source even when highly organized forms do exist. This is not surprising - there is easier access to fellow prisoners, other inmates may possess exclusive information, they may offer affective support and they are perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than staff.

However, an inmate's sources of information may be inaccurate or unreliable, particularly as information requirements are becoming more complex. The real solution is that all staff should be able to intervene proactively and effectively, be willing to adopt an advisory or referral role and above all to encourage inmates to develop the necessary skills to access information themselves. Prison libraries in particular have a large responsibility in this context, in order to ensure that inmates have access to sufficient information, not only to cope with prison life, but also to enable them to begin to address their own offending behaviour and prepare for their eventual return to society.

The following short piece is an abstract of research which was highly commended in the TC Farries/ LIRG Postgraduate Prize competition.

## Data protection and the media

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The idea for this research grew out of an interest in the attempts to balance the conflicting concerns of individual privacy and freedom of expression and the rights of the individual vis a vis those of economic and political needs. British law recognizes no statutory right to privacy and the Data Protection Act 1984 was the first Act to address this right, albeit in the limited area of the automatic processing of personal data.

A chance conversation with a foreign correspondent on a national newspaper who expressed horror at some of the recommendations of the EC Draft Directive on data protection set me thinking about the balance between privacy and the need for public disclosure in the media. This is a topical concern with the British media presently enjoying little public sympathy, with the public professing a view much journalistic activity as an unwarranted intrusion into people's lives. It seemed a fruitful area in which to explore the problems of balancing individual private interests with those of a collective public interest at a time of growth in information technologies, the greatly increased use of computerized personal data and the expotential growth of information as a tradeable commodity.

The research sought to appraise the impact of the Data Protection Act 1984 and to assess attitudes to the EC recommendations on journalists and media librarians. The Data Protection Act's principles seem to have met with general approval but it does not appear to have allayed fears about intrusions into personal privacy and it is these fears that the Draft Directive addresses.