

# Summarizing Fiesole 6: Collection Development Retreat

Tony Ferguson  
University Librarian and Director  
of IT in Learning

---

University of Hong Kong

# Have we been looking at the RIGHT questions?

RIGHT = Harvard Business Review  
Breakthrough Ideas for 2004. February  
2004.

“From the fields of biology, neuroscience, economics, positive psychology, network science, marketing, management theory, and more . . .”

## 20 Ideas in 3 Major Groupings

- Human Resources 10 Ideas
- Technology 5 Ideas
- Miscellaneous 5 Ideas
  
- Note: They are my own paraphrasings and I have been selective

## Human Resources: Not enough to have a better mouse trap

- Allow front line staff to have more say in product development
- If you want out of the box thinking, hire outside the box
- Amplify the positives like loyalty, compassion, trustworthiness – instead of fighting to suppress the negatives

## Human Resources: Not enough to have a better mouse trap

- When you send employees out for training, convey expectations before, and discuss implementation afterwards
- Promote ethical behavior, not just the mastery of a set of principles
- Recognize that people get things via informal networks, more than through official organizational structures

# Technology: Recognize that

- Companies make the most profit when their products are readily recognized as truly different from those of the competition. When they are the same, you have to be cheaper to win.
- While the dot coms went bust, overall, during the past seven years, information technology has still been steadily growing.
- Nano technology (manipulating matter at the molecular level) and genome technology are the two next super technologies. Those who figure out how to use them in practical ways will succeed in a very big ways.

# Miscellaneous Hot Ideas

- Avoid the STUPID money syndrome.
- Pay attention to risk management. Cheaper to avoid critical problems than fix them.
- Pay attention to threats to your survival.
- Put more money into market research about what works, and then try to apply the lessons learned.
- It is cheaper/better to buy from the poor than to give them loans or handouts.

## Which of these hot ideas related to the talks given at Fiesoli 6?

- Human resources development: 0  
(did talk about student ethics/plagiarism)
- Technology: 12 of 18 given up through Friday afternoon. These days, we are technology driven much of the time.
- Miscellaneous: Several speakers demonstrated that their libraries/groups understand the need to differentiate what they are doing from the rest of the Library world. Unless we have something different to offer, we are doomed to doing it cheaper than our competitors.

## Great/interesting ideas I heard or was caused to think about

- Hyper links – Single most important technology development. Sadly they are two way streets.
- Electronic information consortia. Still loved and reviled by many.
- Collaboration in Europe must contend with multi lingual, national, cultural factors.
- Still lots of resistance to natively digital ejournals. But they are too good to miss.

## More great/interesting ideas:

- What should libraries be doing once the past is digitized and users have access to newly published digital materials?
- Digital Library Federation working on DODL and NDIPP projects to enable us to search everything digital from a single starting point – we will need to cooperate as never before.
- Scholars continue to read more and more – enabled by libraries but just not in libraries.
- Japan is no. 2 as the source of STM research and China growing dramatically.

## More great/interesting ideas:

- Academics disagree over importance of refereed journals and preprint archives.
- Dramatic increase in amount of cross national collaboration/new tools to make it possible -- know more about WIKI.
- 25% of the British Library budget comes from revenues.
- British Library is focusing on desired outcomes – not just collecting.
- We need to remember to do things with our academics, not for them.

## More great/interesting ideas:

- HIRARI and Agora are two examples of publishers using library revenues to help scholars in some nations to do research. We should all feel good.
- The question is, how to build sustainability into such efforts? How to use the “buy from them” principle?
- Open access for some is a solution in search of a problem, for others, it is an article of faith.
- For a moment I wished I had been born in Germany. I spent 12 years in RLG CMDIC but we never got as far as the Germans. Yet even the promised land is not easily sustainable.

## More great/interesting ideas:

- Do runs of dead serials, and the left overs from terminated licenses, have anything in common? Seems yes, but am told this is more complicated.
- The Hong Kong Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee needs a clear/new vision, good communication, incentives for cooperation, demonstrable benefits/savings, and be able to implement its vision – if we want to be more successful.

## More great/interesting ideas:

- Trust among users, libraries, and publishers is key to short term success and long term sustainability.
- Networked, user initiated, low use print repositories, with contents delivered digitally, is a new idea well worth pursuing.
- Students cite web resources 1000 times more than aggregated? resources.
- The Internet seems to have introduced a sort of situational ethics – theft via the web is not theft. We are feeding this. (ethics)

## More great/interesting ideas:

- Foundations have programs designed to change the world in some way; you are hired to make the change happen; your need must fit within their need, you must work for the money. Good proposals require champions, teamwork, and administrative support.
- Approval plans (physical volume and slip) have become a global phenomena, but are evolving because of the Internet.

## So what if we did not hit many of the HBR list of 20 BREAKTHROUGH ideas?

- We can review these ideas on our own to think about library, vendor, and publisher applications.
- We can remember that technology is only a tool, that vision, and the people to carry out our visions, are critical to success, and that we need to give vision and our staff more attention.

Fiesole 6 Collection Development Retreat:  
A Summary

Tony Ferguson  
University Librarian and Interim Director of IT in Learning  
University of Hong Kong

How do you summarize the 23 different interesting presentations given at this year's Collection Development Retreat. I decided that I would employ a straw man of sorts, with which to compare our retreat, to see how well we did. The straw man, or ideal set of concepts that we might hope would be covered in this year's event, comes from an article in the February issue of the Harvard Business Review: *The HBR List: Breakthrough Ideas of 2004* (pp 13-37). Upon reading this article, which describes itself as "from the fields of biology, neuroscience, economics, positive psychology, network science, marketing, management theory, and more – here are the emergent ideas that are changing the way business is done," I thought it might serve my function admirably. Now, some of us, particularly publishers and vendors, in attendance know we are in business, while we librarians might like to suppose our part of the educational endeavor is nothing as crass as being in business. But I would like to suggest that we are all in the information business of bringing people, and the information they need/desire, together as quickly and efficiently as possible.

When I analyzed the 20 ideas mentioned in this article, I found that I could categorize them into three major groupings: Human resources (10 ideas), technology (5 ideas) and then a miscellaneous grouping of another five ideas. I must note that the following paraphrasing of many of these breakthrough concepts are my own and I have been selective in the ones I have chosen to dwell upon. I advise all who come in contact with this presentation to read the HBR article on their own as well.

The ideas in my first category, human resources, suggests that it is not enough for businesses to build a better mouse trap, but they must also have talented and motivated staff who can sell and service their particular group of consumers:

- Allow front line staff to have more say in product development.
- If you want out of the box thinking, hire outside the box.
- Amplify the positives like loyalty, compassion, trustworthiness – instead of fighting to suppress the negatives.
- When you send employees out for training, convey expectations before, and discuss implementation afterwards.
- Promote ethical behavior, not just the mastery of a set of principles/skills/knowledge base.
- Recognize that people get things via informal networks, more than through official organizational structures.

I think all of these concepts resonate with the goals pursued by our organizations. Speaking for libraries (a dangerous attempt), I think library administrators would do well

to pay attention to each of these ideas.

The second category, technology, again has a number of fruitful ideas for libraries, publishers and vendors:

- Organizations make the most profit when their products are readily recognized as truly different (technologically innovative) from those of the competition. When they are the same, an organization has to price what they have to sell cheaper than their competitors.
- While the dot coms went bust, overall, during the past seven years, the information technology industry has continued to grow steadily. Organizations cannot discount the importance of IT to their future success.
- Nano technology (manipulating matter at the molecular level to create miniature devices, etc.) and genome technology (finding physical reasons for traits/behaviors) are the two next super technologies. Those who figure out how to use them in practical ways will succeed in a very big ways.

The final miscellaneous category of hot ideas includes a grab bag of interesting concepts:

- Avoid the STUPID money syndrome. That is the temptation for organizations with more than minimal capital to find some rat hole in which to sink it with the goal of perhaps making it seem that they are “with it.” For libraries this has been at times buying huge collections of microfilm which they never catalogue to show that they are supporting research. Some, not me, might suggest that participants in e-journal big deals might see this as an example of the stupid use of money.
- Pay attention to risk management. It is cheaper to avoid critical problems than fix them later.
- Pay attention to threats to your survival – quite similar to the risk management idea.
- Put more money into market research about what works, and then try to apply the lessons learned instead of focusing on what isn’t working to avoid similar mistakes.
- It is cheaper/better to buy from the poor than to give them loans or handouts. I am not sure how this relates to our common enterprise.

So, which of these “hot ideas” were discussed here at Fiesoli? Frankly, while there were some oblique references to a few of the ideas in the human resources category (we did talk about student ethics/plagiarism), in general, it was interesting that we were able to talk about so many interesting programs without talking about recruiting, training, or retaining the people who are critical to making them happen. To be fair this was a collection development meeting, but I think my observation still stands.

Except for the presentation on publisher programs to help libraries in some of the developing nations, I don’t think we again touched much of these grab bag ideas. I would suggest that perhaps in addition to giving scholars in these countries super cheap access to databases, publishers should actively seek out articles to publish since this would insure that these scholars would be invested in, not just the beneficiaries of publisher largesse (using library funds might I caustically observe), of the publishing world in which

we all operate.

We did much better in the technology category. While the same ideas were not discussed, 13 of the 23 talks focused on technology/IT related issues. I am not so sure I should say we “did much better.” Perhaps we are too focused on technology these days. Yet, I think it was significant that several of our speakers demonstrated that their libraries/groups understand the need to differentiate themselves in terms of technical innovations to win in this very competitive world in which we work.

Having said that we have not hit directly upon the 20 HBR breakthrough ideas, I believe we have been treated to a number of very interesting/important concepts:

- Academics in different subjects disagree over the importance of refereed journals and preprint archives. I knew about the latter but was surprised to learn that some very solid disciplines don't see the need for refereed journals.
- Approval plans (physical volume and slip programs) have become global phenomena, but are evolving because of the Internet.
- Digital Library Federation working on DODL and NDIPP projects to enable us to search everything digital from a single starting point. This is both an amazing development but we also learned that we will need to cooperate as never before.
- Do runs of dead serials, and the left overs from terminated licenses, have anything in common? Seems yes and therefore I would suggest that both can be ignored given someone is bound to have what you want when you want it. But I am told this is more complicated and we all need to worry about capturing and retaining this digital content.
- Dramatic increase in amount of cross national collaboration/new tools to make it possible -- We all need to know more about WIKI's (see <http://tavi.sourceforge.net/WhatIsAWiki> for a quick education)
- It is interesting to recognize from the several presentations focusing on library consortia that they are still loved and reviled by many.
- For a moment I wished I had been born in Germany. I spent 12 years in RLG's CMDC committee trying to get libraries to work collaboratively but we never got as far as the Germans. Yet this inspiring presentation showed that even in the cooperative Promised Land, collaboration is not easily sustainable.
- Foundations have programs designed to change the world in some way; libraries are hired to make the change happen. Consequently, libraries to successfully obtain grants much fit what they want within the foundation's goals – not vice versa.
- Good proposals to foundations require champions, teamwork, and administrative support.
- Groups like my own Hong Kong Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee needs a clear/new vision, good communication, incentives for cooperation, demonstrable benefits/savings, and be able to implement its vision – if we want to be more successful.
- Hyper links – this is perhaps the single most important technology advancement in publishing since the invention of movable type. Unfortunately, while these links do enable scholars to quickly and efficiently move from one useful full text article to the next, we also heard that the links can also be used by spammers to inundate us with

information we did not want.

- Japan is no. 2 as the source of STM research and China's productivity is growing dramatically.
- Library consortia and collaborative programs in Europe must contend with multi lingual, national, cultural factors. As some have said, cooperation is an unnatural act and to do it speaking many languages at the same time is truly amazing and our European colleagues are to be congratulated.
- Networked, user-initiated, low-use print repositories, with contents delivered digitally, is a new idea well worth pursuing.
- Open access movement for some is a solution in search of a problem, for others, it is an article of faith.
- Scholars continue to read more and more – enabled by libraries, but just not in libraries.
- Strategically, the British Library is focusing on desired outcomes – not just collecting. This is a lesson for us all.
- Students cite web resources 1000 times more than commercially published resources in papers that they are submitting to their teachers using the Internet.
- The Internet seems to have introduced a sort of situational ethics – theft via the web is not theft.
- There is still a lot of resistance to natively digital e-journals. But irrespective of their costs or challenges, they are too good to miss.
- Trust among users, libraries, and publishers, is key to short-term cooperative success and long-term sustainability.
- Twenty-five percent of the British Library's budget comes from revenue generating activities.
- We need to remember to do things with our academics, not for them.
- We were given the challenge of figuring out what should libraries be doing once the materials of the past are digitized and users have ready access to newly published digital materials. Fortunately, or unfortunately, we probably have many years to work on this challenge.

So, what if we did not directly talk about many of the HBR list of break through ideas? I am not worried about it, but I do have two suggestions. First, we can consider why this is the case and try to think whether our being divorced from what is going on in business is healthy. Second, however, we can all read the HBR article and seek to glean from it what is useful.