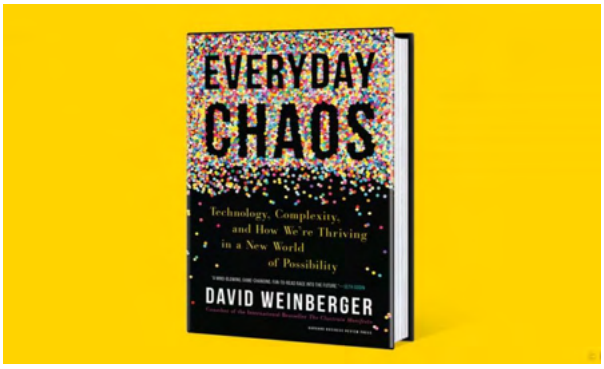
UNCATEGORIZED

Context Book Report – Embracing Everyday Chaos

EDIT

by Anja Williams | Published February 21, 2022

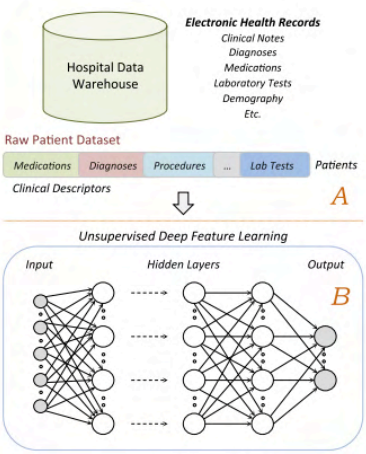


Book Cover – Retrieved from: https://cyber.harvard.edu/events/everyday-chaos)

It is apparent from the very beginning of David Weinberger's novel *Everyday Chaos: Technology, Complexity, and How We're Thriving in a New World of Possibility* (2019) what the book is about: how new technological possibilities are changing the shape of progress. As technology opens up new possibilities, our world becomes more and more complex, interrelated, and chaotic. Weinberger's book explores how the chaos of the internet has not only revolutionized how fast change is happening, but the actual scientific process that produces change.

"Feeling Overwhelmed, confused, surprised, and uncertain is our new baseline stance toward the world because that expresses the human truth about the world"(ch. 7, the future, para. 7).

In *Redesigning Library Services:A Manifesto,* Michael Buckland states that old information technology mostly allowed the library to be a space for reading, writing, and thinking, but "new information technology is transforming the use of library materials, with computer-based techniques for identifying, locating, accessing, transferring, analyzing, manipulating, comparing, and revising texts, images, and data" (Buckland, 1999, Intro., Library Users, para. 3). Because new technologies don't always improve old functions, but sometimes create entirely new functions, we need to re-think how libraries should work and what services we can provide. Changing how we think about and plan for the future is imperative for libraries to remain relevant in a world where the people "control the information age, not the libraries, not the librarians, but the people" (Stephens, 2022).



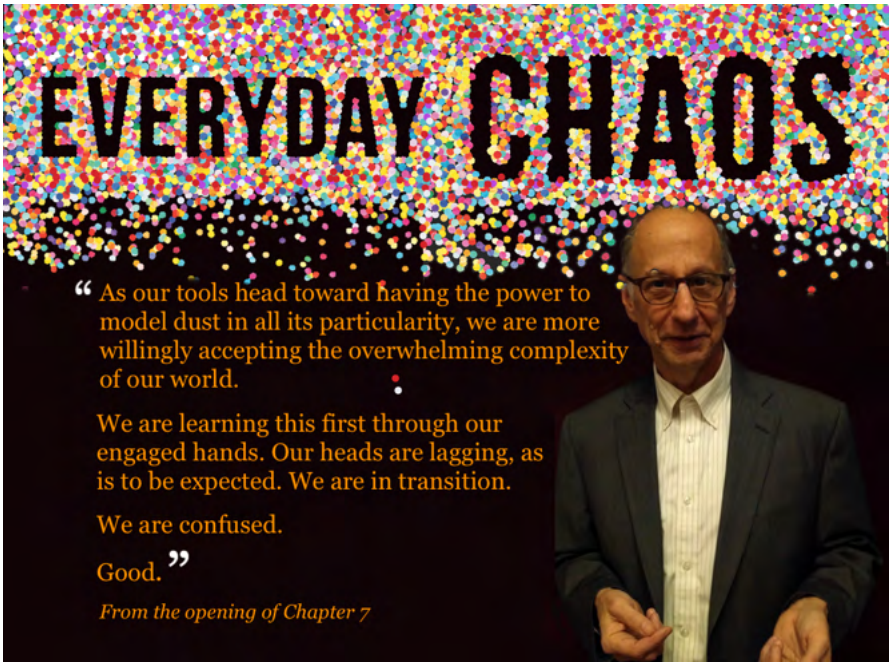
Deep Patient Model – Retrieved from: http://web.cs.ucla.edu/~shayan/video/deep-patient

Weinberger believes that machine learning has brought about "a change in how we think things happen, which means it is a change in how we think the future arises from the present, the next from the now" (Intro., How this Book Works, para. 9). When machines can correlate seemingly unrelated data to produce connections beyond human comprehension, we are forced to reevaluate how we think. In his novel, Weinberger exemplifies how machine learning is surpassing us through many examples, one such example is Deep Patient. Deep Patient was designed by researcher's at Mount Sinai who input seven hundred thousand patient records into the machine, then let it find relationships across the data, without knowing what any of the data represented. Deep Patient was able to predict that patients would develop certain diseases, including those that "have utterly defied predictability" (Weinberger, Intro., para. 1). Weinberger believes that "deep learning's algorithms work because they capture better than any human can the complexity, fluidity, and even beauty of a universe in which everything affects everything else, all at once" (Intro., para. 6). Competing with the efficiency and the innovation of these new technologies, forces us to change how we strategize. Rather than trying to create simple, logical strategic plans and models based on experience, "we are starting to build strategies that take our world's complexity into account" (Intro. para. 12). As librarians, this means letting go of the idea that we understand the way the profession works and how to best do our jobs, and simply experimenting until we notice new connections being formed. Weinberger believes that the human brain cannot fully keep up with the complexity of the world and trying to understand why something works the way it does may be detrimental to progress. In order to keep up with a changing world and maximize progress, we must let go of our attachment to *why* things happen and instead just focus on the fact that they do happen, creating a model of thinking based on correlation without causation. Weinberger exemplifies this concept through A/B Testing. A/B Testing is a type of user-based testing where a website tries out different versions of their content on different users, gathers data, then settles on the version that generated the most user engagement. With A/B testing, we don't need to know why users preferred a black-and-white image over a colored one, we simply need to know that they do. This style of testing and thinking about exploring the world has implications for the world of library science because it shows that user testing can be valuable, even without understanding, and that the "principles, laws, and generalizations aren't as important as we thought" (Weinberger, Intro., The A/B Mystery, para. 13). A/B Testing involves a re-framing of the scientific method that doesn't begin with a hypothesis. Weinberger makes it clear that we don't even need a hypothesis or a baseline understanding of a phenomenon, to begin exploring and developing – we simply need to begin crowd-sourcing information.

As librarians, "We are increasingly being sought out to provide the insights and infrastructure that can empower people to create, share, curate, and reflect on their learning. As a result, libraries are shifting from a transactional model to partnership models" (Mathews et al., 2018, para. 2). We are interacting more with our users because we need to learn the strategies to best serve them. We do not need to know *why* our patrons think the way they do or agree with them, but we must interact with them so that we can learn how they think and get ideas for better meeting their needs.

Patron interaction - Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/08/opinion/sunday/civil-society-library.html

Weinberger doesn't believe in anticipating or preparing for the future because the future is so chaotic and unpredictable, however he does believe in a strategy he calls "unanticipation." In chapter three, he uses the creation of IMVU, an instant message and virtual world site, as an example of how developers can implement his "unanticipation strategy." IMVU was released as a "minimum viable product," with relatively simple, yet unique features. Through getting feedback from its users, the developers were able to improve the site's functions. Anticipating that your user will find value in a feature of a product, releasing it, then developing it post-release, is a strategy libraries could implement when it comes to programming development. Moving away from a conceptual model, toward a working model of development not only saves time and resources, but it may create products that are more in line with patron needs. Simple testing doesn't provide all the information, as "products are complex, and how they best fit into our workflows and lives can only be discovered by actually using them" (Weinberger, ch. 3, Modes of Unanticipation, para. 8). Some level of anticipation is required because if an idea or product isn't slightly useful or enjoyable, no one will use it. However, by "unanticipating," rather than fully planning out every aspect of a change we want to implement, we create space for innovation.



Quote - Retrieved from: https://everydaychaosbook.com

Because the internet and modern technology have changed the rate of progress and added to the world's chaos, librarians must develop new strategies for progress and new ways to meet modern patron's information needs. As librarians we know that in order to keep up with an ever-expanding world of knowledge and possibilities "we must build mechanisms into our structures through which both users and nonusers can participate in the service creation process" (Casey & Savastinuk, 2007, p. 62). We cannot only rely on our individual knowledge and conception of how the world works. We need to provide user testing that is free from our individual biases, experiment, stop micromanaging, and let "users directly drive design decisions in collaboration with the professionals" (Chant, 2016, para. 1). In order to adapt we need to connect with our patrons, connect with other organizations, and experiment to create interoperable, generative models of operation that we can continue to develop and perfect. In essence, we need to embrace the everyday chaos of our world, rather than fearing it.

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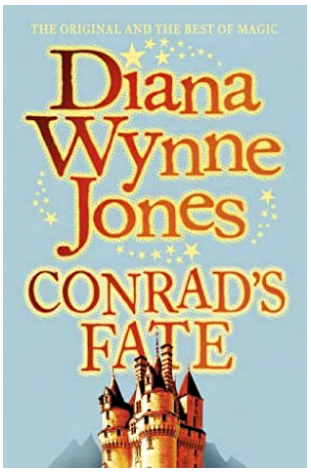

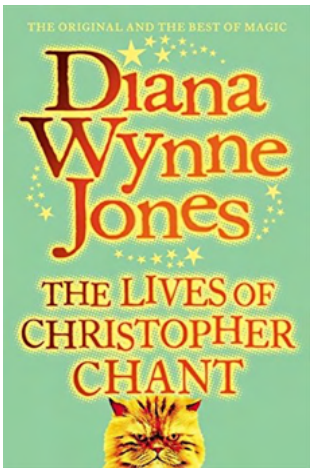

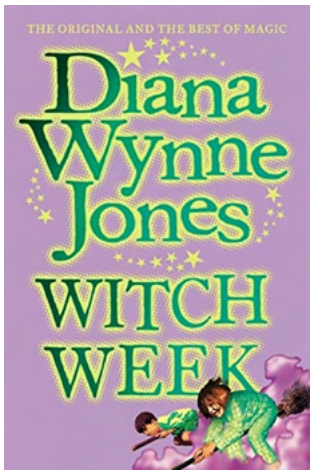

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