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Academic Libraries: Reflecting on Crisis, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Way Forward, edited by Anette Janse van Vuren

Aneta Kwak ⓘD

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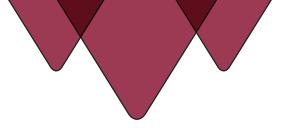
Book Review: *Academic Libraries: Reflecting on Crisis, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Way Forward*

Anette Janse van Vuren, *Academic Libraries: Reflecting on Crisis, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Way Forward*. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg Press 2022, 230 pp, $21.92 CAD.

Aneta Kwak

University of Toronto

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Academic libraries have a long-standing history of resilience and adaptability, despite skepticism of their relevance as technology advances. This has also been the case with the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), marked by the development of digital technology like 3-D printing, robotics, the internet of things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI). Adding to the significant changes to our digital world, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic forced academic libraires to embrace technology as the world shifted online, a task that libraries are continuing to navigate in the aftermath of the pandemic. *Academic Libraries: Reflecting on Crisis, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Way Forward* is a collection of papers that showcase academic libraries as they embrace the 4IR, navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, and work towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Editor Anette Janse van Vuren (University of Johannesburg) has 44 years of experience as a library and information science professional. Throughout their tenure until retirement in 2015, they focused on incorporating library services into the academic institution through several initiatives, including establishing open access repositories, offering virtual learning environments, and digitization projects.

In this title, van Vuren brought together a collection of papers that were originally delivered at the international conferences hosted by the University of Johannesburg Library between 2019-2021. Following the Preface, the book begins with Tshilidzi Marwala providing an outline of the history of technological advancements in South African academic libraries leading up to the 4IR and the impact of 4IR on academic

libraries. Kirti Menon, Angina Parekh, and Saurabh Sinha outline how the library leveraged their experience with the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests of 2015 to prepare the University of Johannesburg library to lead through the COVID-19 pandemic. Kiriti Menon and Gloria Casterillon then provide a review of the Emergency Remote Teaching plan between March and July of 2020, and its impact on teaching and learning at the University of Johannesburg. Dhanjay Jhurry and Rubina D. Rampersad capture the history of online learning over the last 30 years at the University of Mauritius and the need to continue keeping up with current trends in digital technologies to remain relevant. The literature review presented by Mathew Moyo describes the shift in the way academic libraries in South Africa support researchers from providing training and services to more active participation throughout the entire research process, specifically in areas of data management, bibliometrics, and data sharing. Cheryl Peltier-Davis, Jolie Rajah and Marsha Winter present a case study describing how two academic libraries at the University of the West Indies embraced the 4IR by implementing AI driven digital assistant for first-line reference questions and discusses the potential for implementing other 4IR technologies, like robotics in collaboration with the engineering department. Lorette Jacobs continues the discussion on 4IR technology by conceptualizing a transition to smart academic libraries that embrace IoT technologies by examining their relation to smart technologies, smart people (staff and users), smart services, and smart governance.

The book also brings in two chapters on the UN SDGs. The chapter by Inolofatseng Lekaba, Trynos Gumbo and Kammila Naidoo explores community-based projects aimed at helping to end poverty, with a focus on the imbalance in power dynamics in partnerships between impacted communities and the academic library partners in South Africa. They suggest incorporating the coproduction of knowledge system will improve relations between community partners and academic libraries as they work towards implementing the SDGs. Olawumni O. Sadare, Kapil Moothi and Michael O. Daramola then provide an overview of the value of South African libraries in supporting the 17 UN SDGs.

The book then returns to topics of 4IR and COVID-19 with a study by Ruth Nalumaga, Helen Byamugisha, Caroline Kobusingye and Patrick Sekikome that outlines the use of digital market to promote the library and moving to a new remote access system to allow for more seamless connectivity at Makerere University. In the final chapter, Frahm et al. describe management strategies to support library staff experiencing grief and loss, as many library staff at the University of Johannesburg lost loved ones due to the COVID-19 virus. This chapter highlights how a caring approach to leadership can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of staff.

A common thread throughout the volume is the issue of access to technology,

limited technological infrastructure, and the digital divide. Some authors described challenges incorporating advancements in technology due to limited resources and local infrastructure, an issue which was felt even more with the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, South African institutions stressed the continued impact of Apartheid and the Bantu Education Act, which implemented a policy of racial segregation into the education system that limited access to higher education for racial groups. The legacy of the Bantu Education Act and Apartheid created inequity within the country that is still felt today, and the authors of these chapters stress the importance of libraries in working towards improving the equitable access to information and higher education.

The editor was able to successfully bring together chapters with a global author base, interconnecting the overarching themes of the book. However, the organization of the chapters appeared disjointed. For example, the two chapters related to management of staff relations appear at opposite ends of the book, with one towards the start and one as the last chapter. The book would have benefited with an overview of the organization of the chapters in the preface, as they may have been organized based on their delivery at the original conferences.

This book will be of interest to academic librarians and library staff, specifically those in managerial or leadership roles; user-facing roles supporting students and researchers; and those responsible for information technology and infrastructure. The book will also be relevant to libraries working with limited budgets, resources or technological infrastructures, as some chapters highlight innovative approaches to services while facing these challenges.