The Future of Libraries
The Critical Issues

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January, 2015
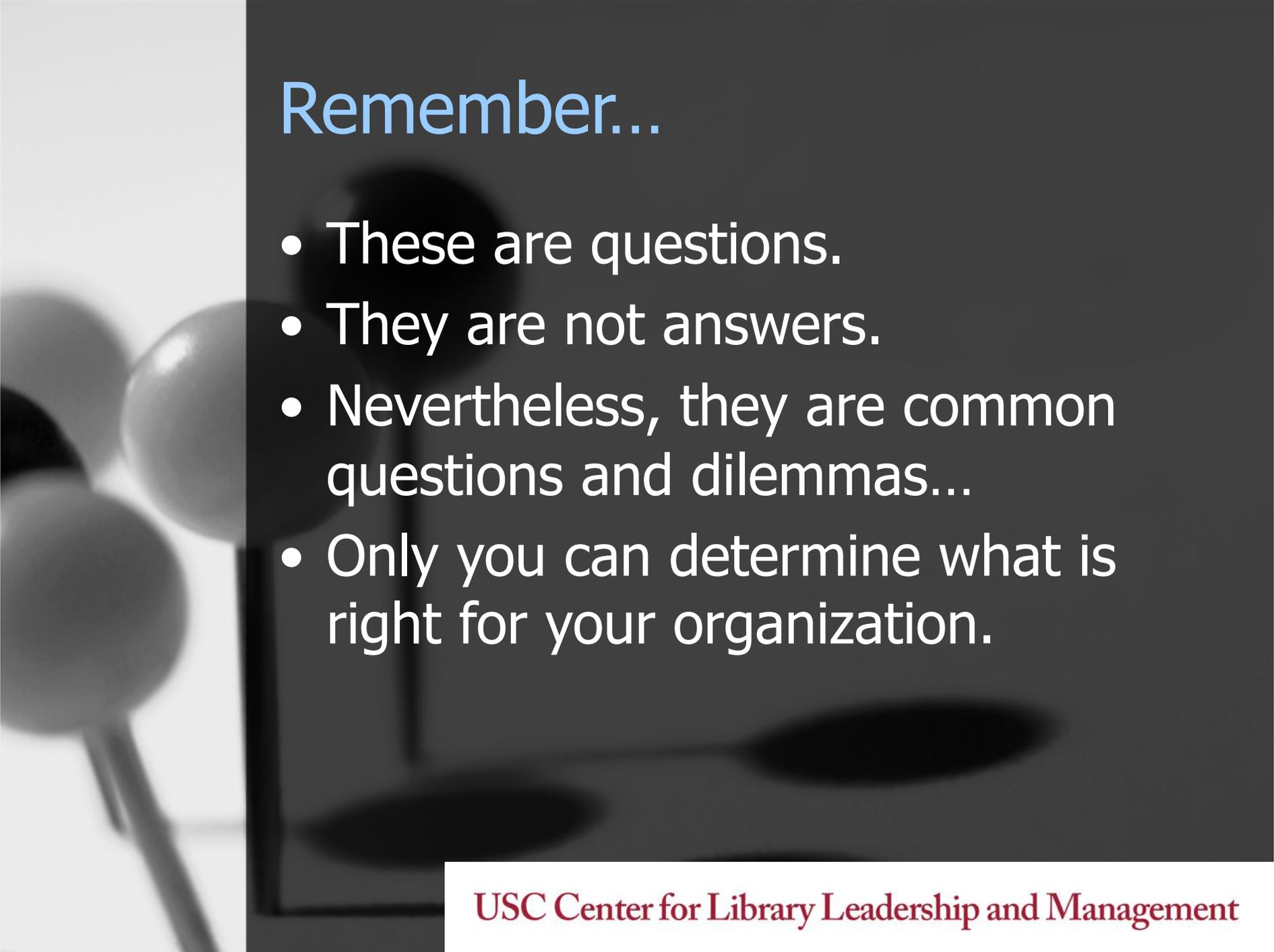
Remember…

- These are questions.
- They are not answers.
- Nevertheless, they are common questions and dilemmas…
- Only you can determine what is right for your organization.
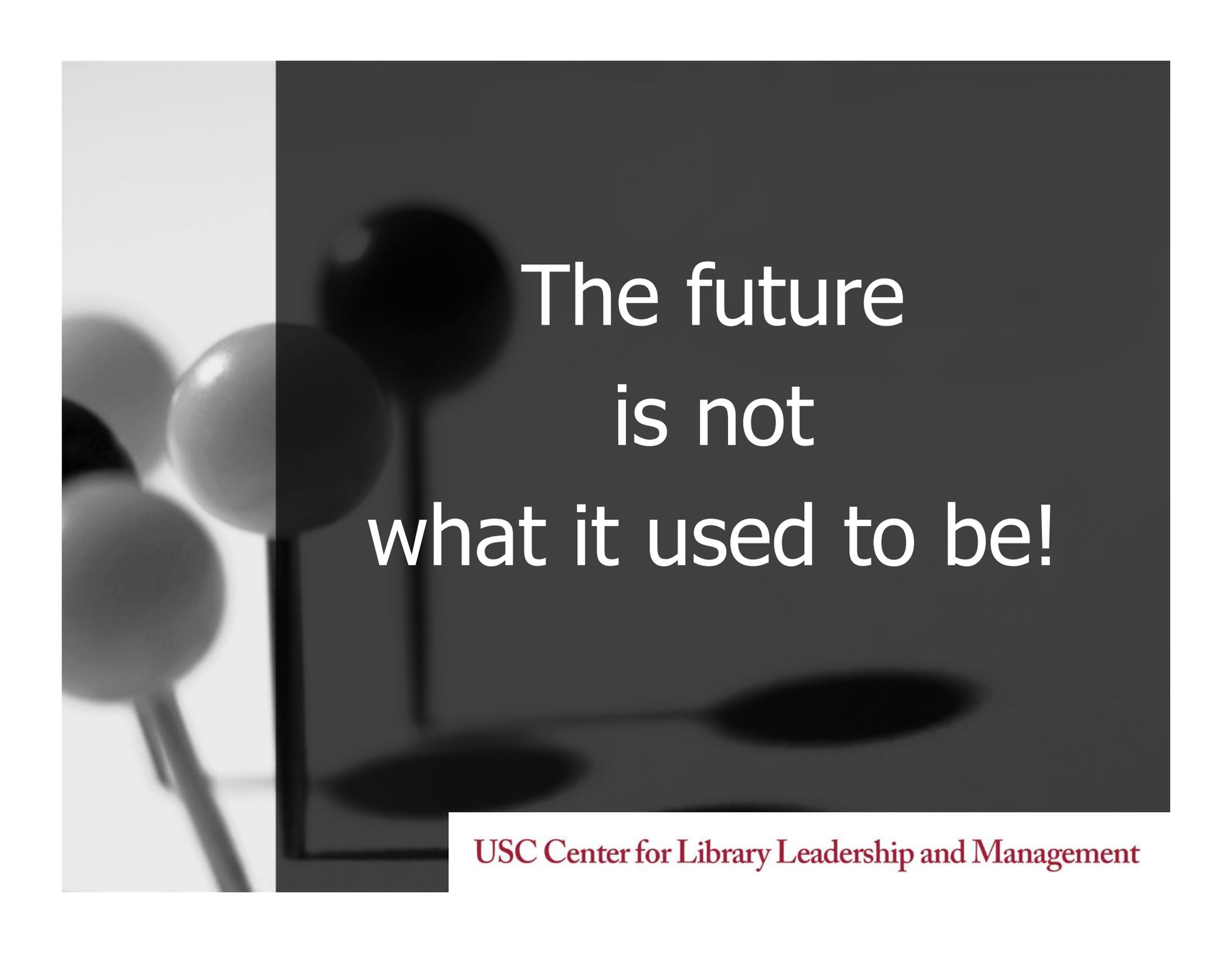
The future
is not
what it used to be!

USC Center for Library Leadership and Management

The future can be bright!

USC Center for Library Leadership and Management

Our Mission? Our Business?

"... to organize
the world's information
and make it
universally accessible
and useful."

What is success?

- Why can we not agree on common key success factors for our industry?

A unique value proposition?

- What is our unique value proposition?

- What is our staff's unique expertise (a teacher can do that, a social worker does that, a faculty member could do that...)?

Promising new initiatives?

As we move into new areas (learning centers, after school programs, research support, maker spaces) others already occupy much of that space.

Conversely, other public agencies are moving into "our" space.

And we are expensive...

City managers and provosts are seeing less expensive options within their jurisdictions, whether preschool programs in community centers or space in cafeterias. Shared services is shining a spotlight on perceived duplication, and we are expensive.
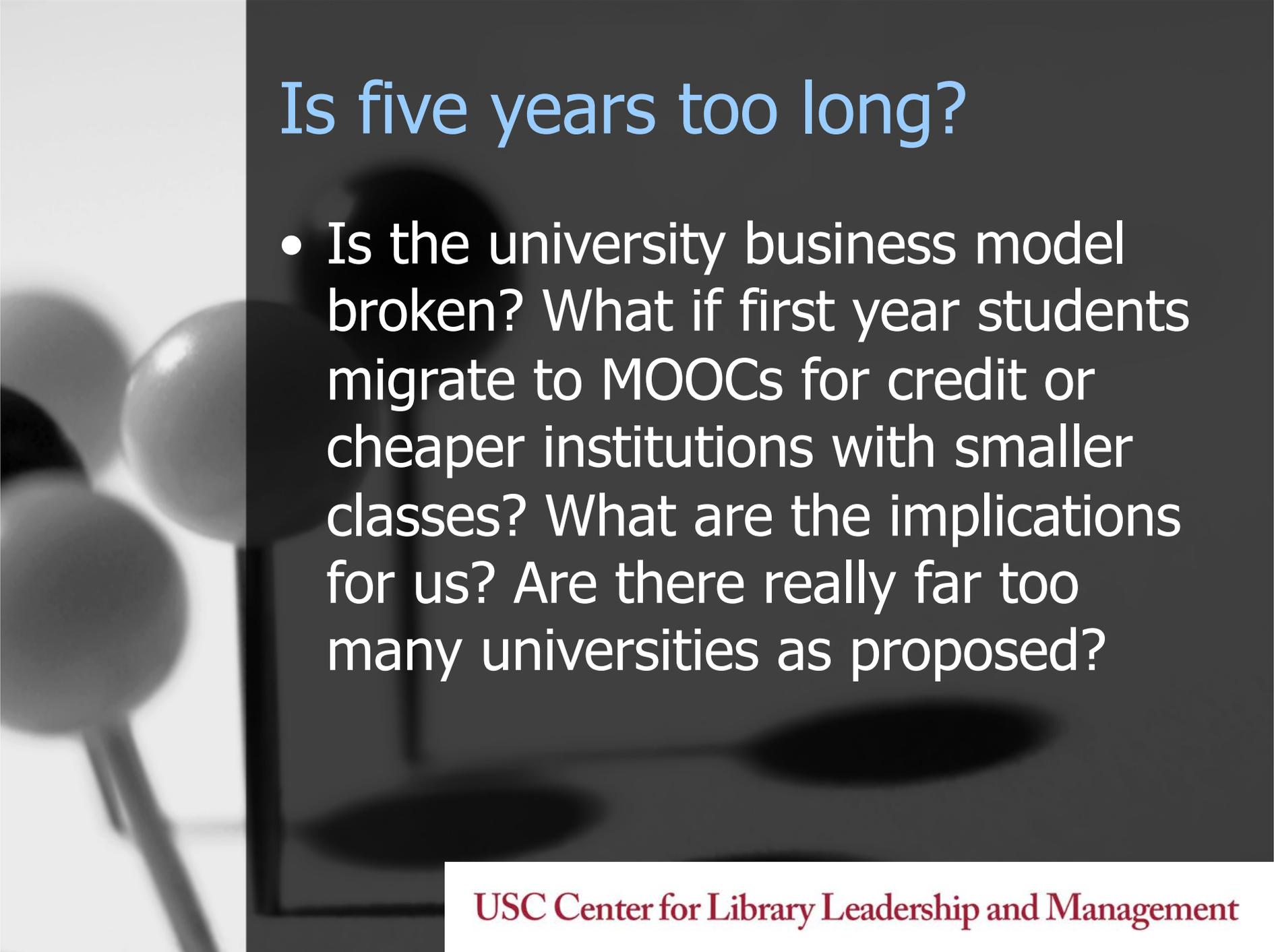
Is five years too long?

- Is the university business model broken? What if first year students migrate to MOOCs for credit or cheaper institutions with smaller classes? What are the implications for us? Are there really far too many universities as proposed?
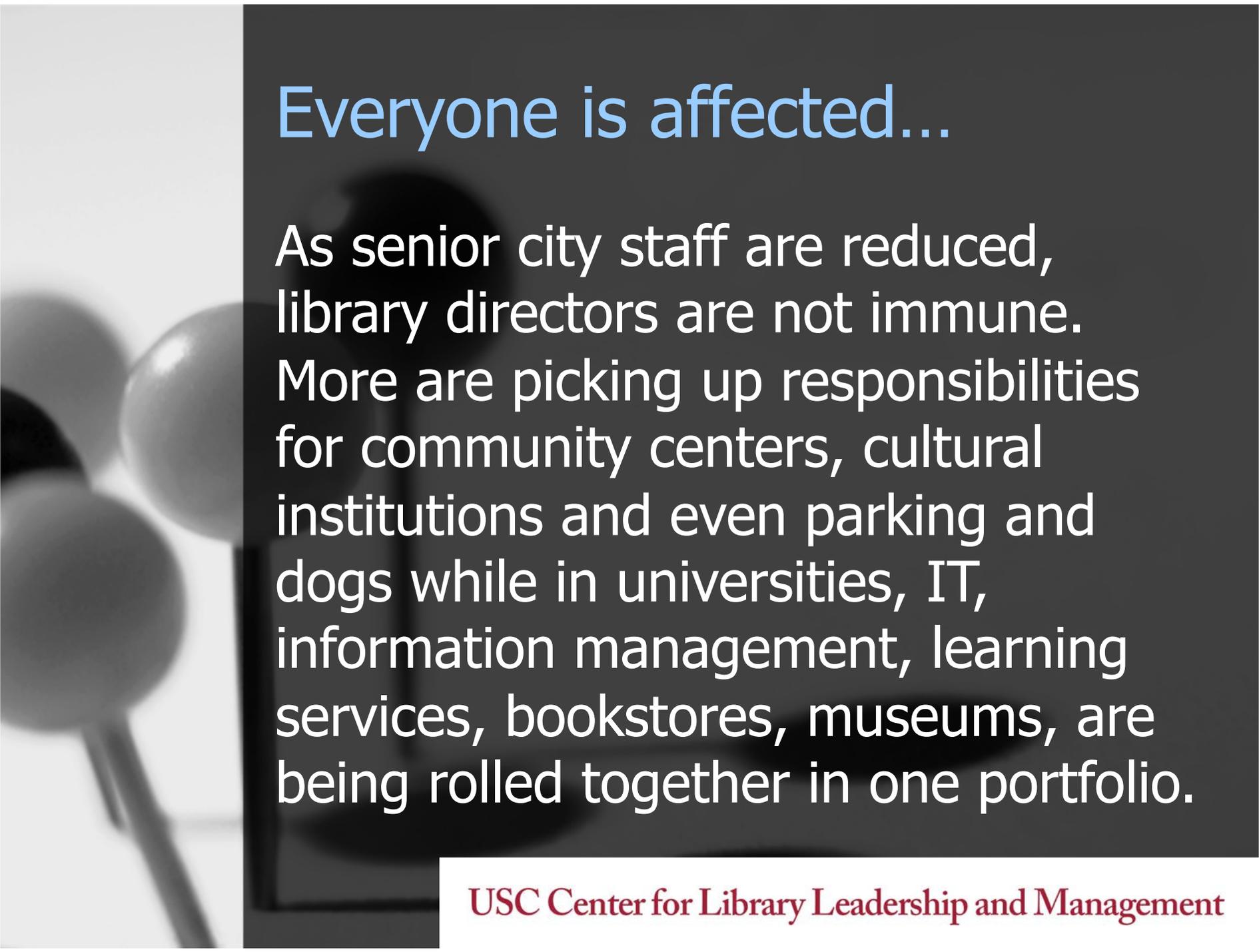
Everyone is affected...

As senior city staff are reduced, library directors are not immune. More are picking up responsibilities for community centers, cultural institutions and even parking and dogs while in universities, IT, information management, learning services, bookstores, museums, are being rolled together in one portfolio.

What about the competition?

- Competition abounds, whether Google Help or scribd, or McDonald's and national newspapers, or public agencies offering programs. The issue is competition for time as well as expertise.

- When do we get serious about positioning and marketing? Even our users don't know the services we provide.

Partnerships 'r' Us

- Collaboration and partnerships are critical.
- But with whom and for what purpose and by what measurement?

What is the brand?

- 11 cents of dollar on materials.
- The % is down, from 25% to 12%.
- But: Titles up from 11k to 328k.
- And people are buying them, from 955m in 1975 to 3.1b in 2009 –from 4 per capita per year to 10.
- Library share of book market has declined from 4% to 1%.

- How do we reclaim our brand?
- Our vendor partners are starting to communicate directly with our customers.
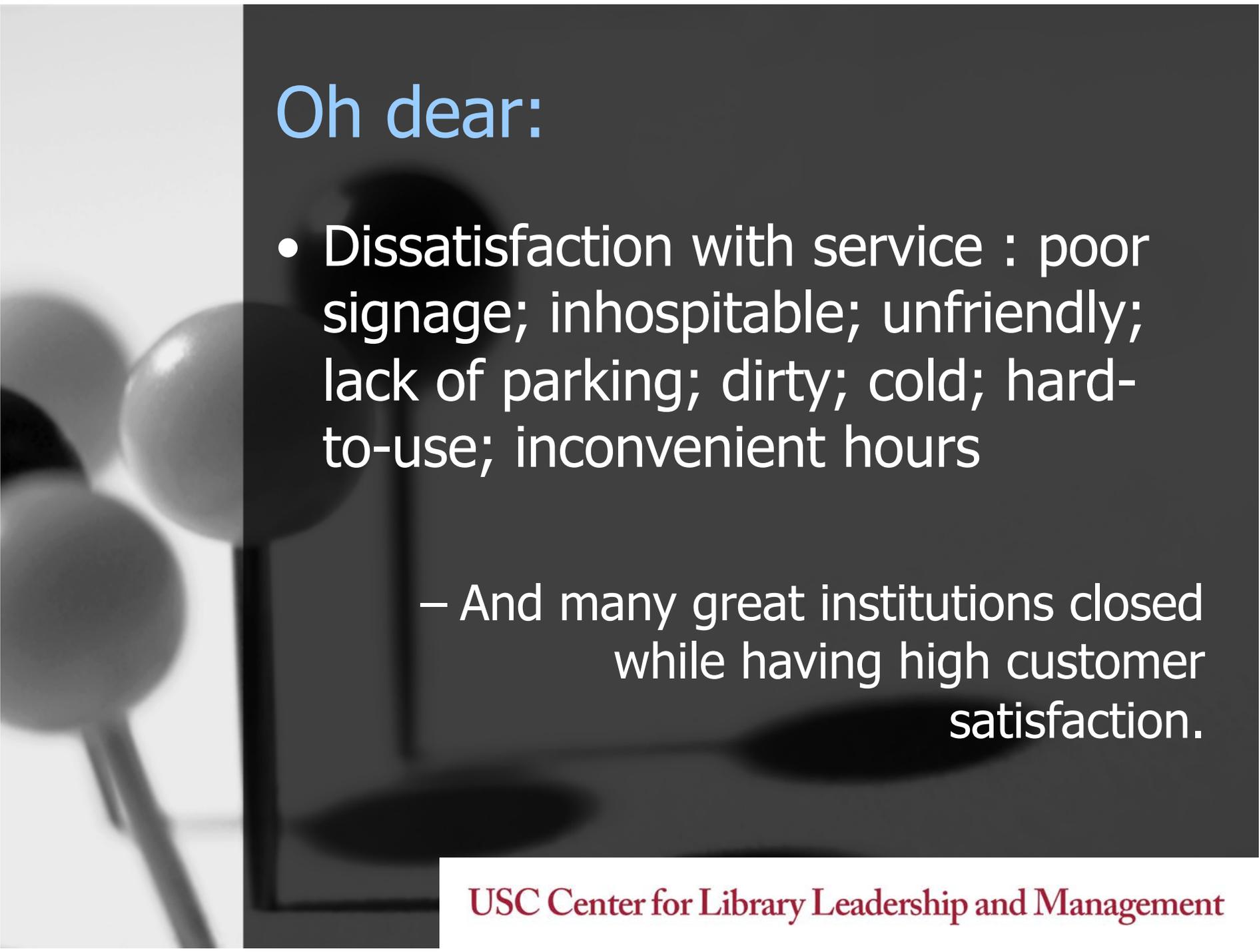
Oh dear:

- Dissatisfaction with service : poor signage; inhospitable; unfriendly; lack of parking; dirty; cold; hard-to-use; inconvenient hours

  – And many great institutions closed while having high customer satisfaction.
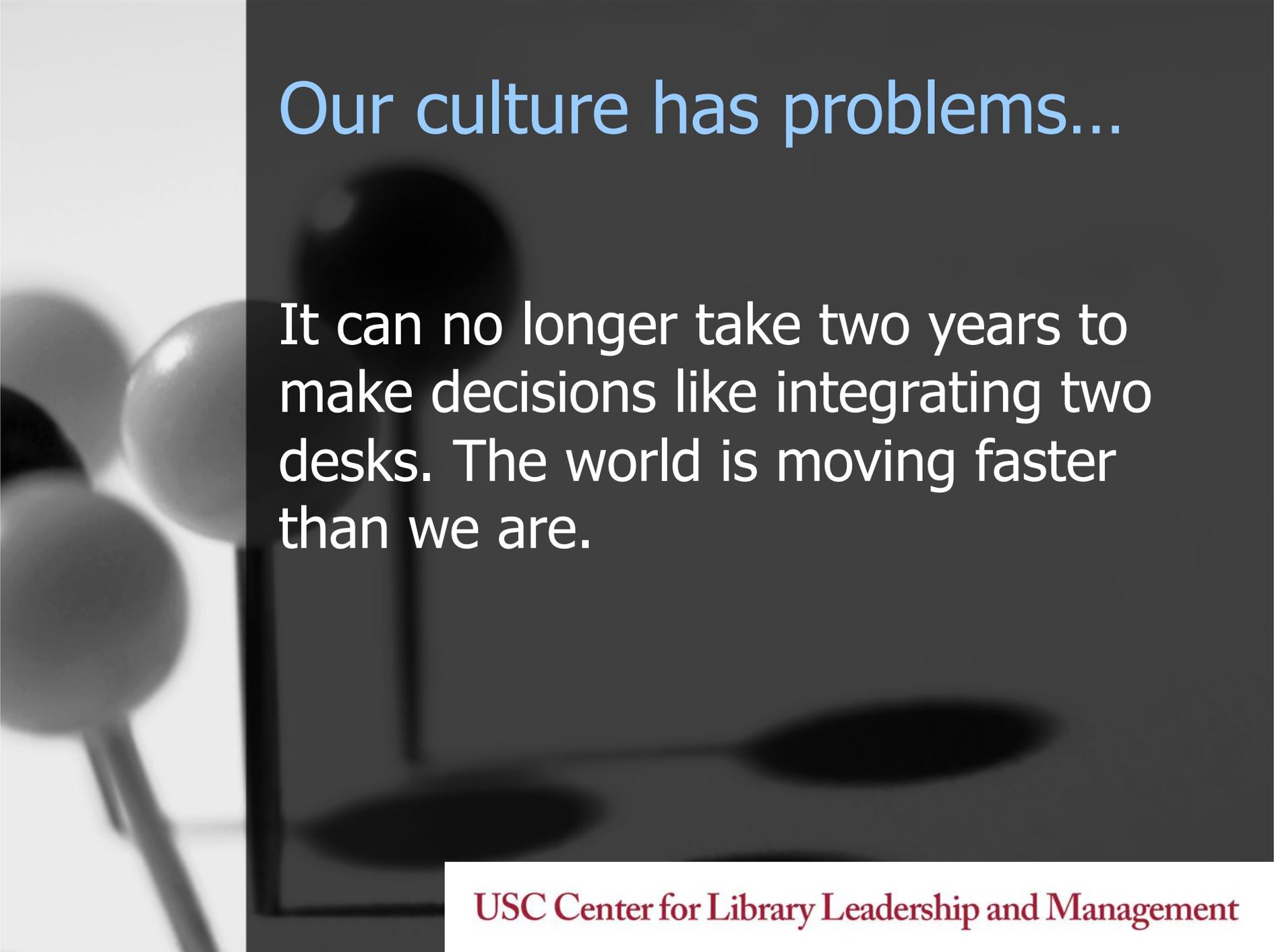
Our culture has problems...

It can no longer take two years to make decisions like integrating two desks. The world is moving faster than we are.
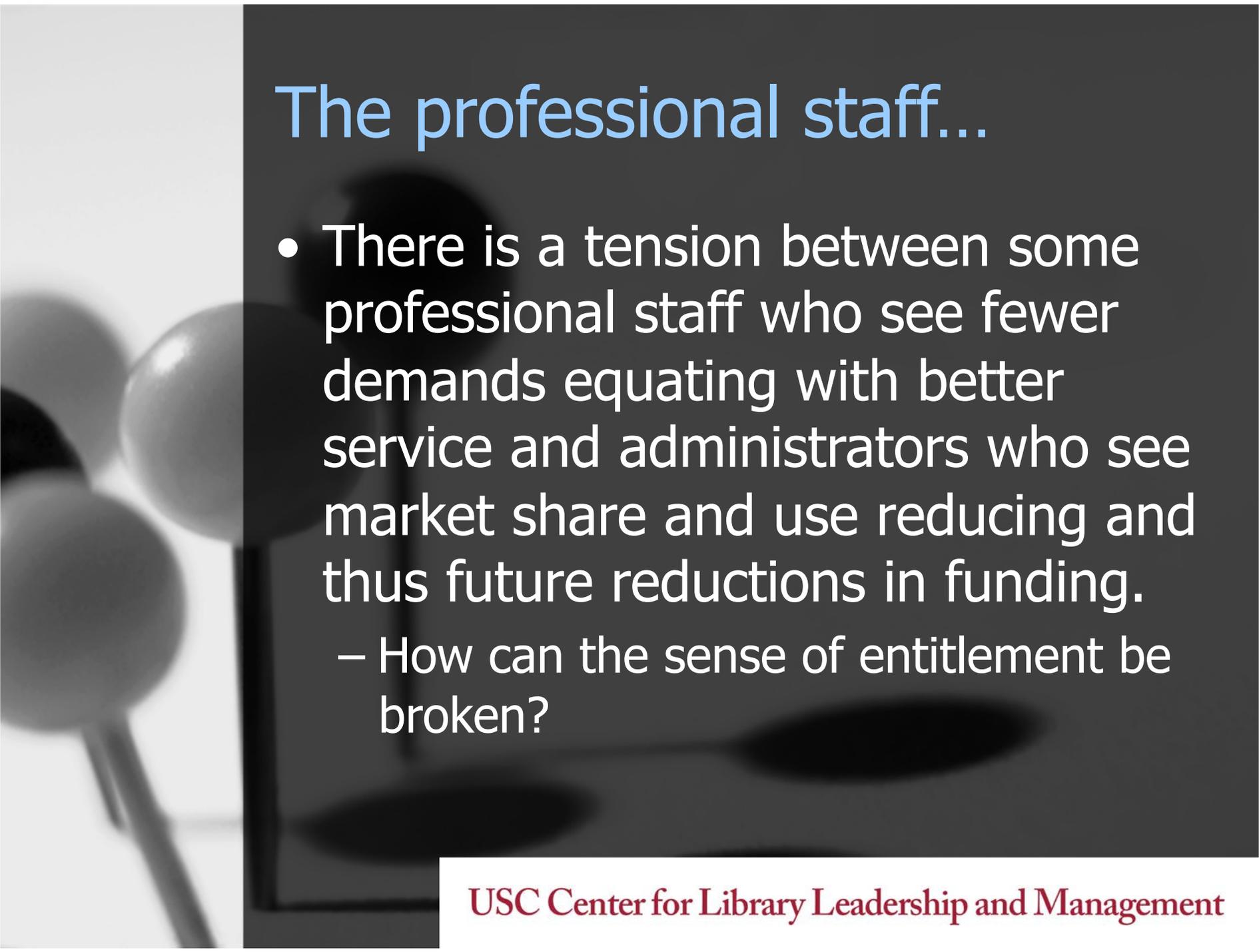
The professional staff…

- There is a tension between some professional staff who see fewer demands equating with better service and administrators who see market share and use reducing and thus future reductions in funding.
  - How can the sense of entitlement be broken?

And the profession?

- What are the implications for education and the profession when employers are hiring fewer professional librarians for libraries?

How do we build capacity?

- How do we celebrate what we drop, or how do we drop services, even though there are six faithful users and a passionate staff person?

Are there alternatives?

- Public libraries have been outsourced to private firms. Now academic libraries are being outsourced to private firms. How do we focus more on efficiencies and operations research to compete for the cost of service delivery?

But we have values…

- How do we balance values with action, charging fines for children while espousing literacy, expressing concern about privacy while allowing amazon to collect data on downloads to kindles?

- Why do partner groups seem to value fee-based services better than "free"?
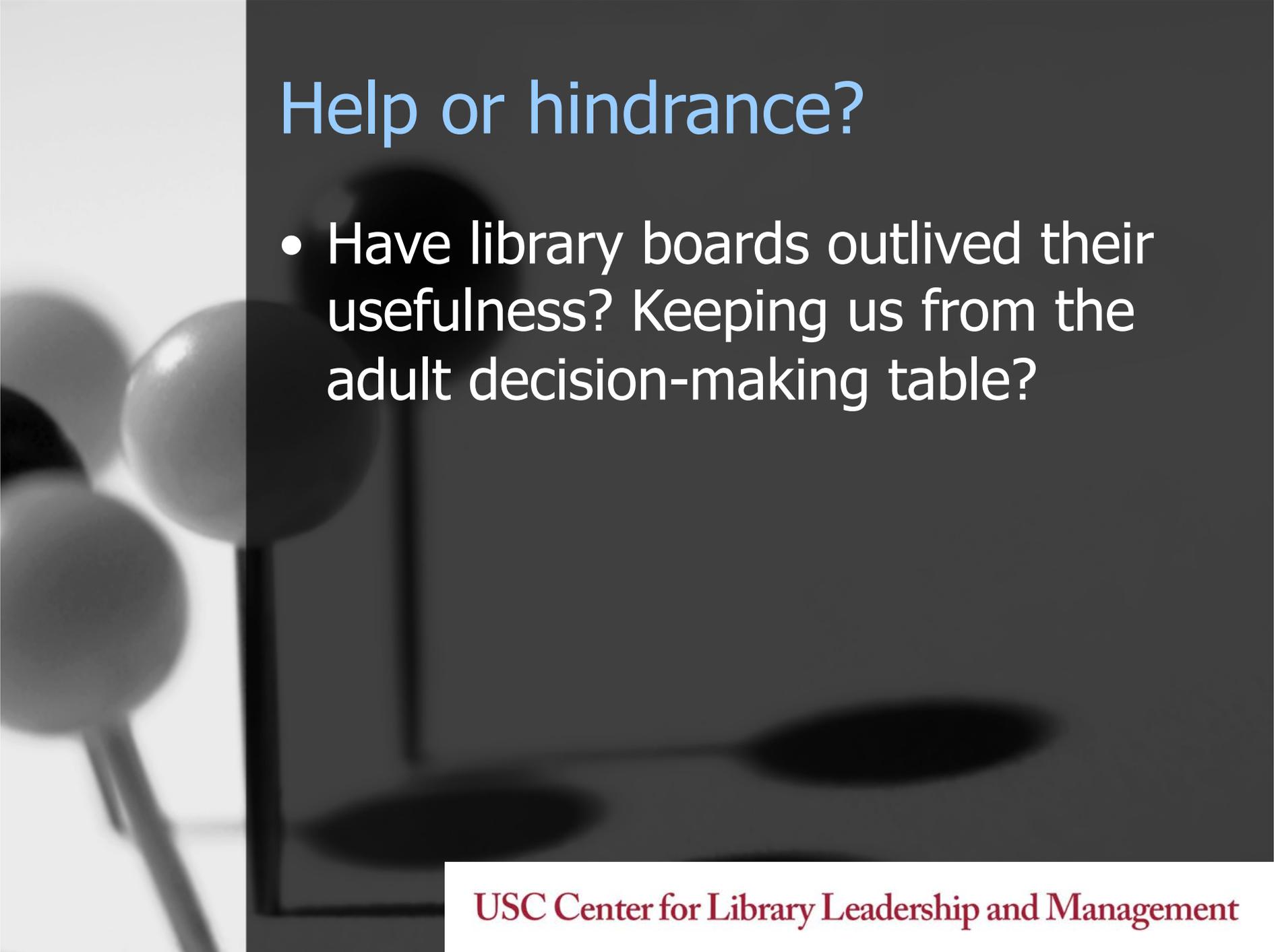
Help or hindrance?

- Have library boards outlived their usefulness? Keeping us from the adult decision-making table?
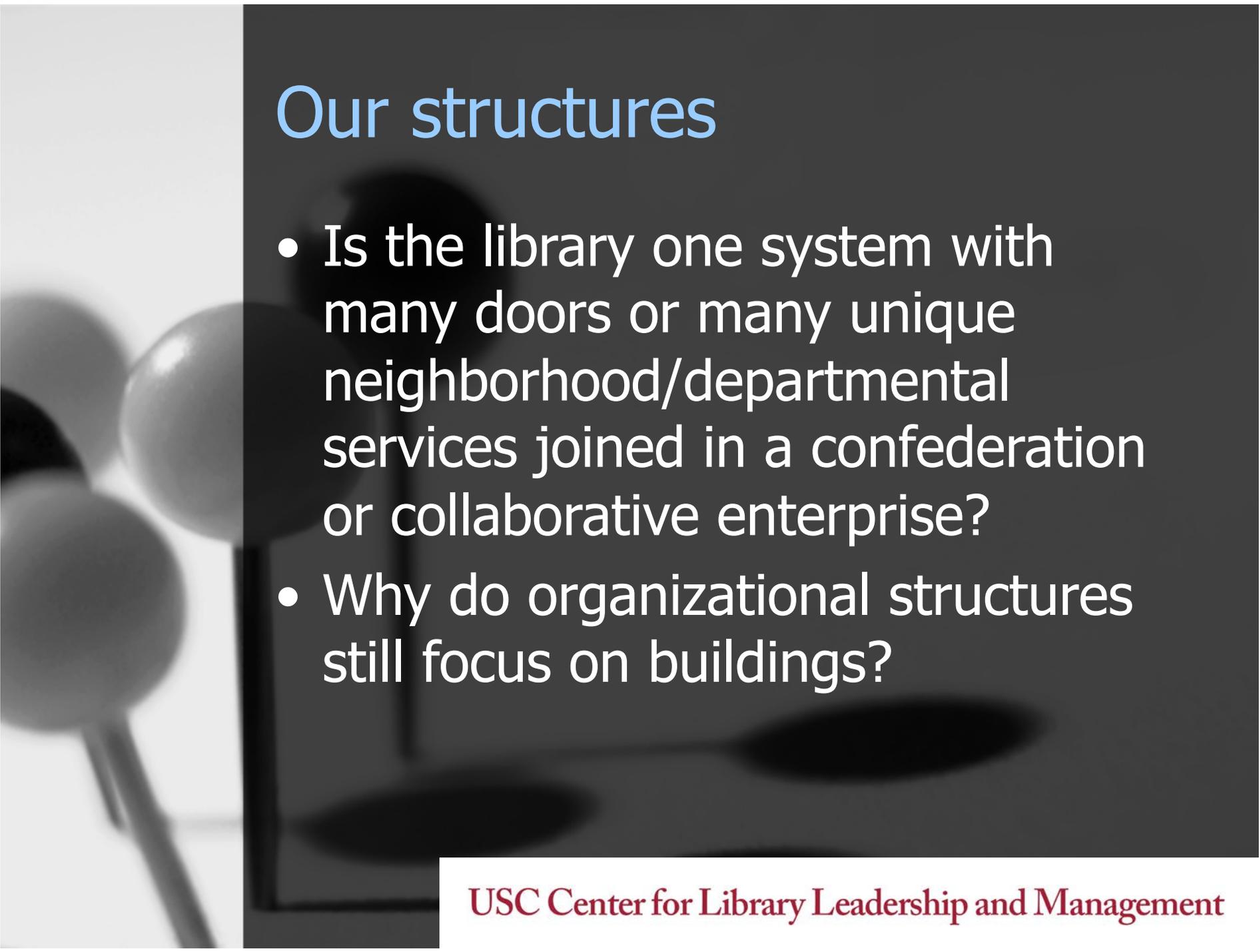
Our structures

- Is the library one system with many doors or many unique neighborhood/departmental services joined in a confederation or collaborative enterprise?

- Why do organizational structures still focus on buildings?
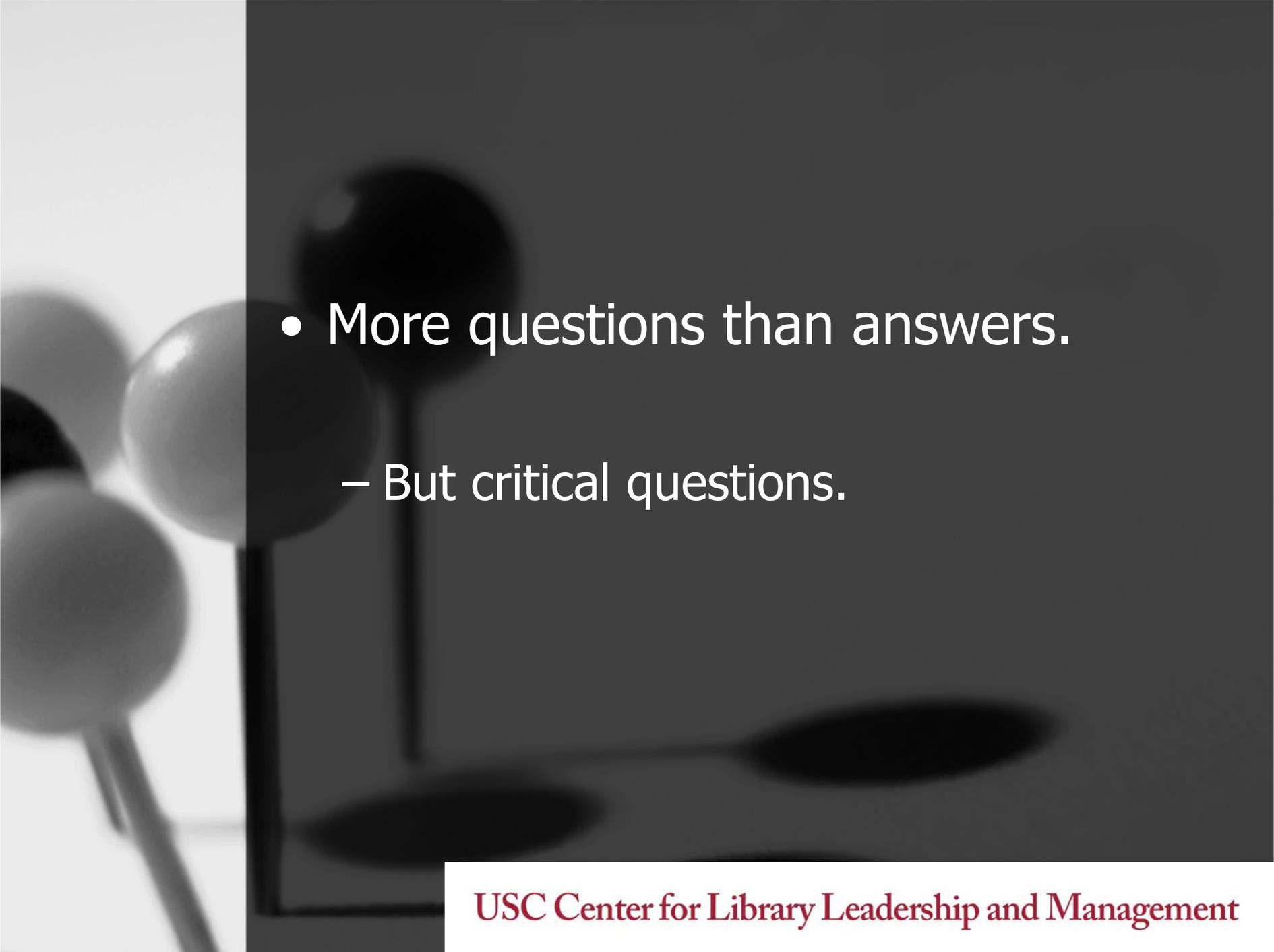
- More questions than answers.

  – But critical questions.