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Electronic Resources Librarian Job Description

Abstract: This article discusses the rules and methodology of introducing new job description of the electronic resources librarian in a modern academic library. Says, that the precise description and the succeeding practical implementation of job positions, linked to the strategic goals of a firm, make the firm structure clear and, consequently, efficient.

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The article appearing in the December 2000 issue of EBIB (Electronic Information Bulletin for Librarians) discusses the rules and methodology of introducing new job descriptions in a modern library. It attempts to prove that Polish libraries are in a great need of a new approach to work organisation issues. Let us recall just one paragraph from that work:

“A precise description and the succeeding practical implementation of job positions, linked to the strategic goals of a firm, make the firm structure clear and, consequently, efficient. Maintaining a job description record by a firm indicates its high organisational culture. The goals of preparing job descriptions are:

- to ensure that a particular position is valuable to an institution;
- to organise work better and to create focus teams to cope with specific tasks;
- to optimise the organisational structure;
- to specify the duties of an employee and to evaluate his/her performance
- to assess human work and provide appropriate gratification (effects = reward);
- to develop a salary range for every position;
- to recruit employees;
- to rationalise the politics of employment (to optimise employment);
- to improve the quality of work“¹

Job description development

This essay presents a different job description and a somewhat distinct philosophy of its creation. While the description of the subject librarian was prepared on the basis of vast professional literature on the topic, both Polish and foreign, as well as using experiences of the subject librarians in the Nicholas Copernicus University Library, the characterisation of the electronic resources librarian is based on actual solutions implemented in foreign libraries. These patterns were not copied directly but rather adapted to the specific needs of the NCU Library. The electronic resources librarian is an entirely new position in Poland and, hence, there is no prior experience in this area. Moreover, there is no tradition in implementing modern managerial methods in Polish libraries, not to mention the lack of adequately qualified professionals. It seems that, usually, a librarian of a certain department (for example, reference) performs tasks associated with managing electronic resources in addition to his/her regular duties.

A request for sample job descriptions was posted to a forum of international librarians at E-COLLECTIONS, a discussion list moderated by the Joint Information Systems Committee in the U.K. The community responded with a number of descriptions connected with acquisitions,

cataloguing and storage of electronic media in libraries. The wealth and variety of the positions exemplified in the received material, showed how advanced foreign librarianship is in comparison to the rigidity of the Polish one. Management flexibility and fast implementation of organisational shifts in the face of the changing or emerging demands are yet to find their way to libraries in Poland.

Recently, there have been more discussions among the Polish community of librarians regarding the problems of acquisitions, storage and access of electronic documents. The recurring questions concerned the issues of who, within the library structure, is to be assigned the new duties and what are the necessary skills for their effective fulfilment. It is certain, though, that there is no way of escaping this new trend. Furthermore, it is necessary to clearly define the post of the electronic resources librarian and to localise it within the library organisational structure, the latter of which proves particularly important. Current library needs have to be specified and analysed in order to locate the new post in an optimal way – precisely there where it is most needed. Thus, the following questions should be addressed:

- Is the new position to be located in the division of acquisitions, reference, serials, or special collections or, perhaps, each of these requires a librarian to manage electronic resources?
- Is there a need for a librarian who will only acquire electronic documents (monographs and serials), is there a need for one who will only inform the users about them or, is there a need for a librarian to do both? The answer to this question will determine the localisation of the post.
- How to name the position?

Additionally, in developing a job description, the following rules should be applied:

- It should be written in simple and understandable language (avoiding professional jargon).
- It should be of informative character, as opposed to opinionative or judgmental.
- It should be brief (not more than 3 pages long).

The method of creating a job description will depend on who within the organisation will be given its task. A human resources manager dealing with personnel policy will apply a different method than a direct supervisor familiar with the specifics of the job, an external expert hired to conduct an objective job analysis will choose yet another method.

Naming the position in Polish

The absence of job titles that reflect new tasks brought on by the emergence of electronic resources requires Polish libraries to create new titles while they implement new positions. Library regulations and ministry rules have dictated the following to be used as job titles: *junior librarian* (*młodszy bibliotekarz*), *senior librarian* (*starszy bibliotekarz*), *custodian* (*kustosz*) and *senior certificated custodian* (*starszy kustosz dyplomowany*). The usage of terms *junior* and *senior* strongly suggests that the above are not actual job titles but simply, library ranks, a view also supported by the definitions in the “Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Polish Librarianship.”²² Furthermore, in the past, the title *librarian* was sufficient to describe the performed function. Today, the increasing complexity of tasks associated with electronic resources requires more precise job titles, as they are created in Western libraries where job titles refer to specific posts and reflect the prescribed activities (i.e. one is a *cataloguer*, because one catalogues books). In developing job titles, libraries should make the following distinctions and ensure that job titles explain functions clearly, as below:

- Profession – librarian
- Position – director, cataloguer, subject librarian, reference librarian, preservation specialist, stacks manager, etc.
- Library rank – junior librarian, custodian, senior certificated custodian, etc.

Once decisions are made on the localisation of the position in the organisational structure and on the area of responsibility, then the position can be named. While the English language offers many choices of naming the position (e.g.: Electronic Resources Adviser, E-Resources Adviser, Electronic Services Adviser, Electronic Resources Librarian, Electronic Information Services Adviser, Electronic Services Officer, Electronic Information Manager, Electronic Resources Coordinator, Network Information Coordinator, Reference Librarian, Information Broker), Polish [language and culture] poses some problems. When translated into Polish, terms *adviser*, *officer*, *specialist* or *coordinator* do not always fit well with Polish cultural and linguistic traditions. One possible solution to this problem is replacing the above terms with the word *librarian* (bibliotekarz) and attaching adjectives like *electronic* (e.g. electronic librarian). However, semantically, in Polish, the adjective produces a peculiar impression of an *electric* or *magical* librarian.

Electronic Resources Librarian

The arrival of electronic resources at the NCU Library created a demand for a qualified professional to manage their acquisitions. The following is a job description of the electronic resources librarian proposed at the library. The below example may be modified further to suit the needs of a particular library.

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE Electronic Resources Librarian

PLACEMENT IN THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE LIBRARY

University Library

Acquisitions Department

GENERAL CHARACTERISATION – The librarian acquires, manages (i.e. promotes, selects and determines conditions for storage) and develops the library’s electronic collection (CDs, DVDs, online and other).

DUTIES

| Regular duties – 90% | Time devoted in % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Conducting research in the vendor/publisher market | 10% |
| Developing purchase lists | 10% |
| Negotiating with vendors/publishers | 10% |
| Maintaining a vendor/publisher database | 2% |
| Preparing contracts for review by supervisor or director | 2% |
| Archiving licenses and contracts | 2% |
| Maintaining inventory of documents | 1% |
| Managing current subscriptions and online access | Etc. |
| Consulting with special collections librarians in regards to purchases | |
| Making decisions with other staff about distribution of funds towards electronic resources | |
| Selecting and de-selecting electronic documents | |
| Defining storage conditions | |
| Creating back-up copies | |
| Monitoring the collection continuously | |
| Promoting electronic documents in the local environment | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Staying informed about current copyright laws, Polish and foreign | |
| Making recommendations to other librarians and coordinating trials | |

| Irregular duties – 10% | Frequency |
|--|-----------------------|
| Participating in managerial projects regarding the development of electronic collections | Depending on the need |
| Participating in tasks associated with the digitalisation of collections | Depending on the need |
| Organising training for staff about database access | At least twice a year |

AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

The electronic resources librarian is responsible for the selection of valuable electronic documents, their de-selection, fast and efficient acquisitions and responsible dissemination of library funds towards building the collection. The specialist defines storage terms of electronic documents and decides on their archiving, all in accordance with licenses and copyright laws. Additionally, he/she is responsible for informing and promoting electronic documents in the local environment. In business relations, he/she must maintain the highest level of professionalism.

DECISION-MAKING

The electronic resources librarian develops the profile of the collection with the help of special collections librarians. With proper guidance from supervisor or director, he/she decides about contract details, licenses and purchases of electronic documents. The person in this position also decides about the division of funds set aside for electronic documents, formulates the rules and conditions of storing electronic documents in the library and chooses promotional and staff training strategies.

PROFESSIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE

The electronic resources librarian reports to the head of the acquisitions department and performs no supervisory duties.

INTERACTION

| The librarian interacts with: | Regarding |
|--|---|
| Vendors/publishers | Electronic documents purchases |
| Immediate supervisor – department head or director | Signing contracts and allocation of funds |
| Special collections librarians | Collection scope |
| Systems librarian | Electronic documents access |
| Stacks manager | Storing electronic documents |
| Reference department head | Electronic documents promotion |

SUBSTITUTIONS

The electronic resources librarian may perform tasks of the acquisitions librarian and may be substituted by the head of the acquisitions department.

PARTICIPATION IN COMMITTEES

| Subject of the committee | Membership |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Computerisation of the library | Member |
| Acquisitions | Member |
| Staff training | Member |

WORKING CONDITIONS

In order to perform his/her tasks effectively, the librarian must be provided the following: office space, desk, high standard personal computer (fast memory, adequate hard-disk space, DVD and CD-ROM drives, CD and DVD burner to enable collections back-up, etc.), printer, best programming available that will allow completing regular tasks, Internet connection, archive of CDs, DVDs and floppy diskettes, safety case to store licenses, documents and disks.

OFFICE APPLIANCES

The electronic resources librarian must have a telephone and a personal computer at his/her disposal. Among the highly desired appliances are a copy and a fax machine.

Personal profile

The second element essential in developing a job description is creation of a personal profile of the candidate that contains a listing of desired qualities. The profile stresses general qualifications, skills and personal attributes of the potential employee. By analysing the duties and areas of responsibility, it is possible to specify the characteristics and skills that are necessary to make this position function well. To describe the degree of their importance, a value number can be assigned to the listed characteristics. This process is vital to successful recruitment.

PERSONAL PROFILE

| Desired quality | Value of the quality (scale 1-8) | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| QUALIFICATIONS | | | | | | | | |
| University degree | | | | | | | | * |
| Professional experience | | | | | * | | | |
| IT training | | | | | | * | | |
| English training | | | | | | * | | |
| Copyright law training | | | | | | | * | |
| Knowledge of the vendor/publisher market | | | | | | | | * |
| | | | | | | | | |
| SKILLS | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Computer skills | | | | | | | | * |
| Ability to use network applications | | | | | | | | * |
| Good work organisation | | | | | | * | | |
| Good financial management | | | | | | * | | |
| Creativity | | | | | * | | | |
| Ability to communicate well with a client | | | | | | | | * |
| Cooperation with colleagues | | | | | | * | | |
| Negotiation skills | | | | | | | | * |
| Ability to work in a team | | | | | | * | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Communicativeness | | | | | | | | * |
| Independent thinking | | | | | | | * | |
| Precision | | | | | | | * | |
| Cautiousness | | | | * | | | | |
| Attention to personal appearance | | | | | * | | | |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Willingness to grow | * |
| Courtesy | * |

Final note

The job description of the electronic resources librarian presented at the NCU Library is based on sample descriptions sent by colleagues from the following libraries:

Director of Electronic Resources - The Main Library of University of Houston, US;
 Electronic Publication Librarian - Edinburgh University Library, UK;
 Electronic Resources Librarian - University of Saskatchewan Libraries, Canada;
 Electronic Resources Manager - Leeds Metropolitan University Library, UK;
 Electronic Services Development Manager - Leeds Metropolitan University Library, UK;
 Information Adviser - Learning Resources Centre, University of Surrey Roehampton, UK;
 Digital Resources Librarian - Frick Art Reference Library, New York, US;
 Research Literacy Librarian - Frick Art Reference Library, New York, US;
 Librarian Electronic Resources - Frick Art Reference Library, New York, US;

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Bożena Bednarek-Michalska, Toruń, January 2001.
 Translated by Marta Sobieszek

¹ Bożena Bednarek-Michalska, (2000) *Job description of the subject librarian in the Nicholas Copernicus University Library*, [electronic document] a paper for the international seminar “Subject librarian in academic libraries,” Toruń, October 26-27, 2000; EBIB [Elektroniczny Biuletyn Informacyjny Bibliotekarzy] Vol 18 No. 10, Wrocław Ossolineum, ISSN 1507-7187, access available at <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/arc/e018-08.html>.

² Original title: “Encyklopedia Współczesnego Bibliotekarstwa Polskiego”.