

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273275017>

# How to Maximize the Job Satisfaction of Professional Librarians

Article in *Library Review* · January 1998

---

CITATIONS

2

---

READS

12

1 author:



**Chandrani Kuruppu**

University of Colombo

12 PUBLICATIONS 10 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



An Assessment of informational needs of Breast Cancer among patients and the general public [View project](#)



Knowledge Dissemination service for future generation [View project](#)

# HOW TO MAXIMISE THE JOB SATISFACTION OF PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS

*D. C. Kuruppu*

## Introduction

As the rapid changes in Library and Information Science (e.g. information technology) has gathered momentum in recent years, the character of a professional librarian has also changed and requires the revision of the organisational structures in which librarians perform their day-to-day operations. The main purpose of this change is to maximise the job satisfaction of professional librarians while enabling them to play an efficient role and reach their potential in the changing environment.

Today, most professional librarians carry out their duties within a bureaucratic structure. They seem to believe that the existing organisational structure has hindered the development of the genuine professional in librarianship. It has also been suggested in the literature that the loss of professional autonomy in the bureaucratic situation can cost librarians their occupational authority and control over library work. In recent years, many attempts have been made to suggest a 'more innovative' organisational structure in which the professional librarians perform their work more efficiently with higher job satisfaction. The basic direction can be summarised as moving from 'mechanistic' to 'organic' structure.

This article aims to investigate the causes of problems encountered by library professionals in the bureaucratic structure and analyse how their job satisfaction can change in alternative structures.

## Traditional Organisational structure

In the past, the typical organisational structure has been a hierarchical structure. According to Max Weber<sup>1</sup>, the common structure in most academic and public libraries tended to follow the bureaucratic model. This suited both employees and employers in the sense that all duties were clearly defined, procedures laid down so that everybody was able to understand their role. It is ensured, at least in principle, that everything was controlled and checked at a higher level (Line, 1991). It places decision making and responsibility with the head of the library and delegates diminishing amounts of authority in prescribed portions to different levels of the organisational pyramid (Sagar, 1970). This organisational structure can be termed 'mechanistic'<sup>2</sup>. The characteristics of this structure are: hierarchic structure of control authority, rigidly defined tasks, many rules and regulations, little

---

\* Assistant Librarian, Science Library, Faculty of Science, University of Colombo, Colombo 3.

1. See Weber (1924).

2. See Burns (1963)

teamwork, and centralised decision making (Burns, 1963). Authority, influence and information are granted to all organisational levels, with higher levels having progressively more of each (Johnson, 1990). This form is useful in a safe and stable environment and is likely to provide many people in the organisation with job security and stable work. Despite these seeming advantages, hierarchical structure contains a number of potential disadvantages. It can be affected by poor communication problems, very limited responsibilities of each individual and stifled initiatives<sup>3</sup>. The response time tends to be slow and the rigidity of behaviour sometimes leads to conflicts between clients and customers especially in the library setting.

Most librarians practice their duties within the bureaucratic structure, but it is often suggested that they are not able to enjoy their professional autonomy or privileges and are not given the responsibilities that accompany such autonomy. One survey<sup>4</sup> indicates that the newly qualified librarians face frustration for the following reasons:

1. Lack of opportunity to exercise one's professional expertise.
2. Lack of opportunity to exercise one's responsibility.
3. Monotonous routine work, rather than being empowered to apply the skills acquired during one's professional career.
4. Inefficient contact with users partly due to heavy technical service in relation to assisting readers to find materials; lack of achievement.

The individual characteristics and personalities of those working within the bureaucracy are largely suppressed. Librarian's professional responsibilities are disregarded in the face of the demands from the organisation. The goals, attitudes and values of the professional librarian may well be in conflict with those of the organisation of which the library is a part. In a highly centralised organisation, rules and procedures are required for the efficient performance of routine tasks, but any extension of rules and regulations to other tasks or functions (e.g. book selection, reference activity) is allowed only where efficiency will be significantly increased. Over specialization, specially of professional roles, tends to be avoided (Moran, 1980).

## The Role of Professionals

### The characteristics

Most librarians and library managers are sometimes unaware of the special characteristics of the profession and the conditions necessary for the successful role of a professional. Edwards (1975) described the profession as providing a service giving access to needed and appropriate recorded information. For the successful provision of this service, a substantial body of expertise, principles,

---

3. Savage (1977) suggested that much of the creative energy of librarians had to express itself in frustration or in extra-mural activities.

4. See Jones and Jordan (1975)

and theory are necessary. A Professional Association grants its members a monopoly in providing the professional service and the authority to control admission to its ranks and to evaluate and regulate its own performance. The work of professionals involves individualised decision-making and solutions to problems. These decisions and solutions must derive from a mastery of professional knowledge and a determination of each individual customer's needs. The professional's work requires a high degree of individual autonomy, and he/she is willing to accept full personal responsibility for his/her performance and professional growth.

## The Functions

Turning to the functions of a librarian in relation to the characteristics of the profession mentioned above, the first function is research directed toward expanding and developing the body of professional knowledge. The second activity or function that can be professional is the selection of materials which is an extremely demanding function that requires sound judgement based upon an extensive knowledge of the subject field, of bibliography, of clients needs, and of criteria for evaluation and judging information. The specialist can carry out the selecting function most efficiently by working autonomously. The third function is to establish control of information, that means providing access to various forms of bibliographic organisation. Some of these functions require a high level of professional knowledge and judgement. One of the aspects of bibliographic organisation is the design of systems for organising information such as indexing, subject cataloguing and classifying. The last function is client aid, which involves making various levels of demands upon professional knowledge, creativity and judgement. Reference activities and readers' advisory areas demand a knowledge of materials and their bibliographic control and require an analysis and assessment of the individual clients' needs and professional capabilities in using information. All the functions or types of activities that are defined here as professional functions are regularly performed at an inadequate and less than professional level in libraries. Moreover, librarians have also failed to appreciate their own potential value to society in terms of the benefits that society could derive from a substantial and effective professional library service (Edwards, 1975).

The causes of these problems lies to some extent in the difference between the characteristics of bureaucracy and the profession. Pavalko (1971), cited in Edwards (1975), selects key points to show basic differences between professionals and bureaucracy. First, professions place a greater emphasis on individual work methods and responsibility: professionals are self-motivated, use individual procedures and see tasks holistically. They believe in colleague loyalty, close colleague relations and service to the client. Professional authority is based on demonstration of superior competence. This contrasts strongly with bureaucracies, which depend on centralized leadership, power coming from position in a formalized hierarchy, use of standardized procedures, specialization leading to simplified tasks and service and loyalty to the organisation and its goals.

As seen above, there is great distinction between these two functions. It is inevitable that professions have a conflict within the bureaucratic organisational structure. For instance, conflict may occur when decisions are made on the basis of purely professional standards, standards that perhaps are not in concert with the administrative requirements of the organisation. One more example is that the service orientation of the professional may lead to work behaviour that is not in strict compliance with work procedures: this may cause conflicts in a bureaucratic environment (Johnson, 1990). This

structure of organisation brings a crucial problem hindering the development of a genuine profession of librarianship. Professional personnel need to be aware of their place in a bureaucracy and some of the constraints in bureaucratic conditions places on them. Just as various jobs are closely related among themselves, the individuals performing those jobs need to know, how and where they interrelate with others. The organisational setting in which they work has a very powerful influence on the way in which they view their jobs, and possibly other aspects of their lives. The physical environment, as well as the management style, will contribute to the level of job satisfaction. Improved physical working conditions can bring about considerable change in staff attitudes, increased sense of organisational 'belonging' and positive cohesiveness. This in turn leads not only to increase productivity, but also to less quantifiable benefits for the organisations (Boaz, 1979).

Before suggesting how to help increase a professional's potential in the organisational environment, the current tendency is described in the library organisation.

It is already suggested in the literature that according to the characteristics of the organisation, the professionals are able to have an influence in carrying out their role. An academic library exists as part of a university commonly recognised as one of the most complex structures in modern society. Modern universities are highly bureaucratic and hierarchical and are becoming increasingly outmoded and ill-equipped as they are required to cope with modern pressures and rapid change. University libraries tend to suffer from this same ponderous organisational structure and inflexibility. Libraries of all types are facing the increased costs, service networks and other co-operative arrangements, advanced technology (specially automation), changing patron expectations and the information explosion. Such pressures present different kinds of organisational requirements and suggest new relationships for both work units and professionals (Johnson, 1990).

The ever-increasing growth of information, its complexity and the use of sophisticated technology have brought about a dramatic change in the library and information science profession. The value of information professionals will increase as they move towards an information age. This is because society not only needs access to information, but also will become increasingly aware of the cost of doing so in terms of visible costs and those of time (Sylge, 1995).

## **New Directions**

How should organisational structures be changed to adapt to the environment and to help professional librarians fulfil their potential?

### Current Situation

As the organisational structure of libraries has become more complex, greater flexibility and creativity need to be injected (Pinfield, 1995). A great deal of attention has been focused on the re-organisation that has already occurred in some libraries. The Institute of Personnel and Development issued a paper "people make the difference"<sup>6</sup>, which points to current trends in organization and management, including:

---

6. The Institute of Personnel and Development issued a position paper, which set out the driving forces and survival in the competitive environment of current trends in organisation management.

- decentralisation and devolution of decision making
- slimmer and flatter management structure
- total quality and lean organisational initiatives
- fewer specialists directly employed
- development of a flexible workforce
- more project-based and cross-functional initiatives
- empowered rather than command structure
- partnership approach to supplier links

### Alternative Structure: Function or Product-oriented approach

Until recently there were two main alternatives available for organising structures. The first was by function or activity and the second by goal or product (Johnson, 1990). In the functional structure, activities are grouped into one department (e.g. collection management, acquisition, cataloguing, reference, circulation and processing, reader services), and people who perform similar work are located in one unit. The model is appropriate for achieving internal efficiency goals.

Benefits of specialization can be realised as individuals performing similar tasks are grouped together. Grouping individuals by skill allows specialists to advance within their skill areas, facilitates training, promotes co-operation, leads to efficient use of equipment and maximises the use of specialists required. There are easily recognised career paths for specialists who can enjoy the satisfaction of working with colleagues of similar interests. Such an arrangement also reinforces professionalism since interaction is with other specialists of the same type (Delberg and Eilly, 1974). Functional structure, however, with its emphasis on professionalism frequently leads specialists to focus on enhancing their own stature in the eyes of professional colleagues rather than on organizational goals. Insular and narrow view points are likely to develop.

In contrast to the functional structure, the product oriented structure is a more appropriate approach to grouping activities into departments or divisions by a common product, common customer, common geographic area, or common project. Subject or geographically dispersed branch libraries are example of goal-oriented library structures. Adopting a product structure involve a duplication of services, as each particular range has its own specialists available to service it. The benefits are rapidity of service, assurance of access and convenience. Such an approach increases attention to the goals of the division or department and may reduce attention on professional roles. In the sense that goal-oriented units are directed to user service rather than to professional expertise, they are superior to functional units in meeting the user needs.

Johnson (1990) points out that there are advantages and disadvantages in both function and goal-oriented structures. The functional structure maximises technical or professional skills but limit ability to fulfil user needs on time, whereas the goal-oriented structure can meet specialised needs but do not efficiently use professional, financial and technical resources.

## Matrix structure

Libraries have often opted for a combination of these two organisational approaches. This is intended to gain the advantages and avoid the problems of functional and product-oriented structure. One of the innovative structures specially designed to be responsive to rapid change and creating individualised practice is the organisational matrix. This offers a greater flexibility over task activity and encourages market responsive attitudes among managers and specialists in an organization, a higher level of professional independence. Specified individuals have both authority and responsibility for the project's completion with a more balanced decision making process and sharing of information and expertise. In addition, this type of organizational structure promotes a more balanced view of the importance of specialisation and co-operation.

In matrix management, interaction runs laterally. It allows flexible use of human resources. People and resources can be added or removed quickly to meet changing demands. The benefit of this is, enhanced employee satisfaction, in other words, effective utilisation of skilled personnel at appropriate points in time. Therefore, the responsibility to an environment is rapid and innovative. There are, however, also difficulties and conflicts. Conflicts associated with concentration of professionals appears when professional and non-professional technicians work together as a team, especially, because there are strong pressures for general agreement and team results. Moreover, in this organisation, everyone is encouraged to co-operate, but professionals often find conflicts in co-operating with non-professional colleagues. Furthermore a project team as a management team have pressure to accomplish the tasks given by upper level management; professional team members may have to resign their individual professional pursuits as they direct their attention and skills toward interactive work. The stressful and demanding project environment may inhibit the opportunity to do research, write, publish, and attend association meetings (Butler, 1973).

## Organic Structure

As seen above, every organisation structure has both advantages and disadvantages and thus it is difficult to say that one structure is better than another. Also, it is impossible to satisfy all individuals in an organisation, while at the same time maximise organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Whatever the structure of an organization, it must be flexible enough not merely to cope but to succeed. It is impossible to gain maximum effectiveness for the organization and maximum job satisfaction for the individual. Each employee is different: and people have their own likes and dislikes, their strengths weakness, needs, goals, standards etc. People make up an organisation and work together and they can influence the other members and also be affected by colleagues. Further, the organisational setting in which they work has a very powerful influence on the way in which they view their jobs and possibly other aspects of their lives. The working environment will contribute to the level of job satisfaction, can change staff attitudes, will lead to benefits for the organisation. In other words, the professionals cannot achieve their goals or potential fulfilment without support or encouragement from the organisation.

In terms of the characteristics of the professional, in particular, the structure of an organization should be an 'organic' system not a 'mechanistic' one. The character of organic structure is free-flowing with few rules and regulations, encouraging individual staff members to take responsibility

for solving problems, a decentralised decision making. In addition, authority and power are delegated and dispersed, communication is horizontal and vertical, collaboration and consultation are emphasised and consists more of advice, information and suggestion than that of direct orders. This kind of character is also suited toward an information age. A flexible approach to work and the development of highly specialized skill with the individual having greater control over their working life will mean that some staff will happily spend their own time learning more about the principle of their job in order to increase their job satisfaction, and enabling the professional to make decisions, carry out their responsibilities, and give more effective professional service to the public.

Corrall (1995) has given us one example of libraries and information centres moving in this direction. At Aston University, a new LIS structure is currently being implemented, which is a significant change from the past. This new structure is getting rid of the technical processing section and recognising to give all staff customer faithfulness. Furthermore, it is removing management layers and giving librarians responsibility for organising their own work with academic colleagues, and to focus more on strategy and policy issues. Further, it has fairly open information systems and flexitime operations at all levels, which encourage more frequent job rotation. Corrall mentioned that it takes time to know how the new structure will work and whether the changes will bring the anticipated benefits. However, the library is also prepared to be flexible and to make adjustments, as it progresses. It was strongly emphasised that hierarchical pyramid structure would no longer be used.

## Conclusion

This paper, discusses the conflicts between the professional role of librarians and the organisational structures to which they belong. It is suggested that the bureaucratic structure is not conducive to maximising the creative aspects of the professional. It shows the problems of traditional organisational structure and how they have interactive relationships with the role of professional librarians. The alternative structure can contribute to resolve the conflicts.

This traditional bureaucratic structure is likely to impose too much inflexibility upon the professional librarian. Hence, the role of librarians can be better performed in a less inflexible environment where they extended the rules in pace with the rapidly changing information technology. It is also pointed out that the professional should recognise their role and potential to reap maximum benefit from the organisation structure. The alternative system including the matrix structure, is likely to be more successful if a flexible approach is taken to design the system and maintain an organic rather than mechanistic view in running the system.



## Bibliography

1. Boaz, M. (1979). Current concepts in library management, Libraries Unlimited.
2. Burns, T. (1963) "Mechanistic and organic structure" In: Pugh, D.S. (editor). (1990), Organisation theory: selected readings, 3rd edition, London: Penguin.
3. Butler, A.G. (1973) " Project management: a study in organisational conflict". *Academy of Management Journal*, 16, pp90.
4. Corral, S (1995) "Flat structures- how low can you go?" *Library Manager*. March, pp 9- 10.
5. Delberg, A. and Eilley, A. (1974). "Program and project management in a matrix organisation: a case study". Graduate School of Business, University of Wisconsin, pp5-6.
6. Edwards, R.M. (1975). "The management of libraries and the professional functions of librarians". *Library Quarterly* 45, pp 150-160.
7. Johnson, P. (1990). "Matrix management: an organizational alternative for libraries". *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16(4), pp222-229.
8. Jones, N. and Jordan, P. (1975). "One year later: a survey of students from Leeds School of Librarianship". *Research in Librarianship* 28(5), p113-123.
9. Line, M.B.(1991). "Library management style and structures: a need to rethink?" *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 23(2), pp97-104.
10. Moran, R.F. (1980). "Improving the organisational design of academic libraries". *Journal Academic Librarianship* 6(3), pp140-145.
11. Pavalko, R.M. (1971). Sociology of occupations and professions. Itasca: F. E. Peacock, 189.
12. Pinfield, S. (1995). "Team building and team-working in libraries". *Managing Information*. October, 95-2:10.
13. Sagar, Don. (1970) "The comfortable Pullmann: Administrative creativity on the siding". *American Libraries* 587-592.
14. Savage, A.W. (1977). "Management pamphlets: 1. Personnel, management. Library Association.
15. Sylge, C. (1995). "Your investment is you: personal professional career development in the 90s". *Managing information* October 95-2:10, pp30-32.
16. Weber, M. (1924). "Legitimate authority and bureaucracy" In: Pugh, D.S. (editor). (1990), Organisation theory: Selected readings. 3rd edition, London: Penguin.