

# CHANGING DUTIES - RELATIONS BETWEEN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION WORK

By Adriaan G.A. Staats

**Abstract:** The author gives insight into organisation and management of the Central Information, Documentation and Library Department of the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. On the basis of his experience the authors discusses changes in the transfer of information, its effects on the daily work, and he presents some proposals for modifications in the curriculum of training institutes in librarianship and documentation.

Every day, we are all subject to changes in our surroundings. We ourselves are a part of it and sometimes contribute to those changes. This gives rise to an attempt to obtain some insight into the status of the work with which we are occupied: information services based on literature and other documents. In this regard it would seem natural to view matters from the perspective of the developments which can be expected and, if possible, to indicate what, if any, are the repercussions for the respective professional training programs.

I intend to say something about: 1) the organisation in which I work, 2) the management which is concerned with providing information and its organisation, 3) changes and developments. I hope that the reader will regard my remarks as being from the point of view of the shopfloor, which is highly influenced by the local situation. I would like to invite to think with me and to consider which factors are specifically local and which are universal and not tied to local circumstances.

The organisation which I am going to tell you about, is the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs (WHCA). It is one of the thirteen ministries in the Netherlands. It was set up in 1982 and is the result of an amalgamation of tasks which were previously the responsibility of other departments. The ministry is led by Mrs. H. d'Ancona who as Minister has special responsibilities for the

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Mr. Staat's paper was delivered at 58th IFLA General Conference, New Delhi, India, 30 August - 5 September 1992.

portfolios of Welfare and Cultural Affairs. She is assisted by the State Secretary, Mr. H.J. Simons, who also holds political office, and who has been appointed specially to look after the Health portfolio. Both members of the government are assisted by the Permanent Secretary, the top civil servant, and by four Deputy Secretaries, each of whom responsible for a broad policy field.

It would be taking matters too far to go into more details now, but it can be imagine, that the policy field is rather varied and extends from the restoration of paintings to caring for a good diet, from taking care of people asking for asylum to the policy on orchestras. Today there are about 7000 civil servants working throughout the Netherlands within the framework of the ministry. Today, because procedures have been started are aimed at reducing the number of civil servants. In The Hague and Rijswijk some 2500 civil servants are employed at a central level.

Together they form the nucleus of the ministry. In addition to the Deputy Secretaries there are a number of staff departments, which fulfil a supporting function. By way of example Legislation, Judicial Affairs, Administration and Personnel can be mentioned. One of these central units is formed by the sections, Central Management of Information, Documentation and Library (CMIDL). This department operates under the direct remit of the Permanent Secretary. It is divided up and organised according to the type of work. There are about 60 people, who, on a daily basis, are involved to some degree or other with information services.

1. Press and Information Service Department
2. Editorial Department
3. Department for Information Resources
4. Department of Public Relations and General Affairs
5. Department for Cabinet Ministers' Engagements
6. Main Department for Documentation and Library
  - Documentation section
  - Library
  - Literature Study section

The management is in the hands of a director and a deputy director, who are assisted by a secretariat and a financial assistant.

In brief the respective departments are characterized as follows:

1. The Press and Information Department consists of a number policy information officers. They have specialised/acquired information in certain policy fields and

support the policy-objectives from the standpoint of information. Furthermore there are project information officers, who are responsible for the campaigns, e.g. alcohol limiting campaigns, healthy eating, information on Aids and so on. There are also 3 media spokesmen, who in the first instance communicate with the press, radio and television, as well passively as actively. The newspaper clipping service is part of this department. In this service, items are selected from the newspapers, documented and distributed by means of collating 2 newspaper cuttings collections each day.

2. The Editorial department is responsible for a number of periodicals which are published by the ministry. The fortnightly magazine "Trefpunt" covers reports from the department. The magazine is sent to the media and the so-called field. The contents consist of news from the ministry concerning new policies and background information on existing policies. The editorial staff is also responsible for internal information and to this end a fortnightly staff newspaper is also produced. In addition they try to ensure that written statements from the department are in understandable language.
3. The Department for Information Resources is responsible for the appearance and production of publications which are published by the department. It advises on designing and sees to it that the style of the ministry is used.
4. The Department for Public Relations takes care of the distribution of ministerial publications to the appropriate target groups. Each year there are about 400 publications. Enquiries from those individual citizens who ask the department for information are answered at the information desk or by telephone.
5. The Department for "Cabinet Ministers' Engagements" looks after the so-called invitation policy. Nearly every public engagement undertaken by the Minister or by the State Secretary has a publicity effect. The department's duties are to ensure that the public appearances have a certain structure and to advise the members of the government in this respect.
6. The Main Department for Documentation and Library collects publications and makes them accessible through an automated system. In addition they provide literature reports.

The library looks after a collection of about 100,000 items and 1500 current journals. They take care of the purchasing and cataloguing of those purchases in the database of the Ministry. The Documentation section provides abstracts of books and journals which have been purchased. These abstracts are entered into the database, from which the documentation magazine is put together once

a fortnight. Internal signalling is done by means of the so-called S(elective) D(issemination) of I(nformation)-SDI-service.

The Literature Study section produces literature reports in response to internal requests. Based on what has been requested, these reports contain information on literature research. The report draws conclusions and makes recommendations (with regard to policy) on the basis of these conclusions.

This summary shows a variety of duties and tasks. Very different to each other, but with one common characteristic: they are all concerned with the transfer of information. I would like to provide the reader with an analyse of job descriptions for comparison. It is concerned with the job of policy information officer and the job of documentalist. Within the organisation these positions are separated from each other. They are performed in very different cultural surroundings.

For instance the informations officer operates in the world of journalism, whilst the documentalist is concerned with books and libraries. The official evaluation is not very different and the question is which demands are made on these civil servants? This can be summarised as follows:

- Acquisition, collection of sources
- Selection
- Adaptation
- Distribution

In my opinion this parallelism can be seen in the editorial staff/journalists. But also between the public relations spokesmen and the librarians. There are, however, differences. The question which lies at the heart of the matter is, are the similarities stronger, more dominant than the differences? And if the answer is yes, what are the criteria on which to make this judgement? Given my own personal experience and my expectations for the future I am not entirely certain that my observations can be called objective.

One noticeable conclusion was drawn from research carried out by the Dutch office for Library Staff and Information Officers (Nederlands Bureau voor Bibliotheekwezen en Informatieverzorging) into the connection of the occupational practice in question.

The conclusion was, that if there was a vacancy in the information sector, 70% of the respondents, felt that graduates from outside the field of work should be appointed. In other words, the idea exists that new functions such as information management, should replace the traditionally trained people. This opinion, conclusion - these are not facts - is sufficient in itself to observe that there should be

some adjustment made in the training, even if it was only to give such an expectation less credence.

### **Conclusion**

Yet, I have to conclude that - from the point of view of the user - the differences between the various information functions are diminishing. For he or she is primarily interested in the result of the work of the intermediaries. Where the information comes from, or from whom, is only of secondary importance. To put it differently, the user wants to ask the question to one person only; to get an answer. Moreover, the user has to be convinced that the information-intermediary does not limit his search for an answer to the discipline he feels at home in. In future the user will call in the help of an intermediary - and I am convinced of this - when he can rely on the fact that the intermediary knows his way to all kinds of sources that can lead to an adequate answer. Such sources may be books, newspapers or magazines, but also lobbyists, statistics and databases. As one of the changes one can observe, I mention the shift from information - gathering to information - mediation. More than ever before, the rapid development of information technology brings a growing need for a guide with it. In the near future, that aspect will get the strongest emphasis.

From the comparison between the various job descriptions it is clear that in the future it will no longer be the differences which count, but the similarities. Interchangeability and flexibility of officials will become a prime requirement. The information intermediary should dispose of good social skills. The conclusion is that the information intermediary should have the following personal characteristics:

- ready to provide service
- friendly
- open
- imaginative
- flexible
- neat and tidy

For knowledge of affairs:

- well acquainted with the content
- technical
- about the environment

I believe that this should be reflected in the curriculum of those institutes providing training in librarianship and documentation.

I would suggest that training institutes should consequently:

1. Focus on communication, both orally and written.
2. Provide insight into information sources, both within society and in organisations.
3. Train people to be all-rounders, no longer limited to specific locations or organisations.
4. Focus on a professional code and ethic. A qualified person can be relied on to make, as far as possible, an objective presentation of information.

## **Annex**

### **THE POLICY INFORMATION OFFICER**

- analyses policy and information requirements,
- prepares (printed) information material,
- ensures contact is made between the media and the Minister or the State Secretary,
- advises on information activities and methods

### **THE DOCUMENTALIST**

- analyses and selects literature in the field of policy,
- makes indicative or informative summaries of the content,
- provides information on policy to internal and external users.
- gives advice on literature purchases.

### **THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER**

- studies official documents and maintains contacts with the policy sections,
- issues brochures and deals with the correspondence in which information is requested,
- manages the information material: ensures that the information sources and the stores are up to standard.

## THE LIBRARIAN

- acquires literature in specific fields of study,
- introduces lending and distribution procedures,
- provides information on and about the material available.

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