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A Day in the Life

*Career Options in Library
and Information Science*

Edited by PRISCILLA K. SHONTZ
and
RICHARD A. MURRAY

 **LIBRARIES**
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For David. –P.K.S.

For my mom and dad. –R.A.M.

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CHAPTER 30

Technology Librarian in a Developing Country

CHINWE ANUNOBI

The ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Unit at Nigeria's Federal University of Technology Owerri was the result of the adoption of ICT in library operations. As the head of the unit, I report to the university librarian and am responsible for the management of staff and resources in the unit.

Staff management involves a number of responsibilities. I must ensure that the right caliber of staff is employed or deployed in the unit. These staff members must not only be knowledgeable in academic library operations but also must be computer literate or have the capacity to learn the rudiments of computer operation. I also schedule jobs for the staff based on the operational needs of the unit and am responsible for evaluating and disciplining them according to the university's standard for the appraisal of academic and nonacademic staff.

Management of ICT resources includes acquiring, processing, storing, and ensuring effective utilization of ICT facilities. The facilities presently available in the ICT Unit include computers and their accessories, databases, CD-ROMs, networked computers for the eGranary digital library, public address systems, overhead projectors, and televisions and related accessories.

As head of the unit, I am a member of the university library management, and I advise the management on automation of the university library. I also represent the university librarian in the ICT Directorate of the university and the School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology's Board of Studies.

A TYPICAL WORKDAY

In the morning of every workday, I usually start with general university library housekeeping, such as shelving and shelving supervision. On a particularly eventful day, I was scheduled to supervise shelving of print materials. I drove to the university library premises at 7:30 a.m., entered my office for meditation, and then moved to the stack areas to ensure proper shelving by the scheduled staff. Individual unit operation in the library starts at 8:30 after these housekeeping activities are completed.

When I got to my office, I confirmed with the ICT staff that all the computer systems were booted. Settling down, I instructed the ICT officer for CD lending, writing, and searching of

databases to start attending to users even though it was not yet our scheduled opening time. The staff in charge of CD processing was busy with the newly acquired CDs, and the clerical staff responsible for processing the unit's correspondence was typing a memo to the university librarian (UL) requesting a new scanner. Then the attendant in the UL's office came to inform me that the UL needed to see me.

When I arrived at his office, the UL requested information on the status of Internet access donation by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). He also wanted my opinion on the Alice for Windows library software, which the university library plans to acquire, and he also asked how users are responding to a newly acquired database and the eGranary digital library. Finally, he also sought my opinion on the need for the university library to design and host its own Web site. I responded that OSIWA, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO), may not disappoint the university, but in the event it was unable to donate the Internet access we need, the university should make every effort to provide Internet facilities in the library by soliciting help from other NGOs or donor agencies. Internet access in the library will help us derive benefits including free online databases, virtual library access, and others (Benson 2001). My advice on library software acquisition was based on the knowledge I have acquired from seminars, workshops, and conferences, and readings like those of Rowley (1993) and Burton and Petrie (1991). I also informed him that the university library is overdue for a Web site. Though we need to contract that work out to an expert, I can advise and coordinate the articulation of the Web site's content using the knowledge I have gained by reading appropriate materials.

Back in my office, the officer in charge of public services told me about a staff member in the engineering school who needed to perform an Internet search on triangular distribution. I had to assign one of the library staff the responsibility of conducting the search in one of the cybercafés outside the university because the Internet is not accessible within.

Suddenly a staff member reported that one of the systems was hanging while the printer could not respond to a command. I instructed him to cancel all commands, exit all programs, reboot, and possibly check the printer toner.

The technical services librarian came in to ask for advice on some of the basic requirements of his staff for effective participation in the automation project that will begin soon. I replied that they should have basic computer application literacy and should also endeavor to read computer books written by Parker (2003) and O'Leary and O'Leary (1994). We are going to make training part of the software and hardware package during acquisition. We are also planning to organize training for library users on the use of the workstations.

It was 11 a.m., and I had to attend a School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology Board of Studies meeting. In the meeting I introduced two new resources to which the university library had recently subscribed: the online portal AGORA (Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture), set up by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and major publishers, and eGranary, a WiderNet project that provides digital educational resources to libraries without Internet access. I took time to explain the content of each product so the board members would have a full understanding of their importance to teaching and research. I also asked them to communicate the information to their students.

Back to my office; it was 3:30. What a hectic day, but I needed to gather literature for the proposed article on the university local content. I also needed to read more on the software selection to better advise library management and read more literature on Internet browsing because the university community has come to rely heavily on us for that service. "Oh, I will do those readings at night," I said to myself. "I need to get home and rest."

JOYS AND CHALLENGES

The position of ICT librarian is highly dignified yet filled with challenges. The enviable and dignified nature of my position stems from a number of sources. It gives me a lot of joy to identify and interact with computer engineers and scientists. I have this opportunity when I represent the university librarian in the ICT Directorate of our technological university. I am also exposed to issues and concepts outside the traditional library and information science domain. By so doing I not only learn but am challenged to read and make recommendations on areas that may be alien to me.

The image of the university library is always boosted when I help faculty members find information outside of traditional print sources or give them advice on software and hardware. Thus faculty has come to appreciate libraries and librarians as an integral part of the ever-developing global information society and the university's teaching and research efforts.

Serving as a clearinghouse for all the operations and services in the university library enhances my knowledge of what constitutes university library management. I can only advise on the application of ICT or effectively apply it in the library's operations when I am well grounded in those operations. I expose myself to effective reading and also participate actively in traditional library operations as the need arises.

Despite the institutional and personal gains of this job, the position of the ICT librarian is not easy. Just as the university library is the pivot point around which a university's academic activities revolve, the library's provision of state-of-the-art information using technology revolves around the ICT librarian and the services provided by the unit. I am held responsible for any failure in that aspect. Such high expectations are often not met due to some encumbrances faced by the library. Inadequacy and inefficiency in the areas of software, hardware, and infrastructure tend to impede or, in many cases, bring to a halt all the operations in the unit or the entire library. Poor understanding of the operations in the unit by the university management engenders inadequate support in the areas of finance and training. Underdevelopment of society hampers the availability of infrastructure the unit needs to function effectively, such as electricity and telephone facilities.

Low computer literacy of library users imposes extra tasks for those working with database services. Staff have to make an extra effort to help users who cannot perform effective searches by themselves. In most cases, reference interactions do not elicit the needed information from the users due to poor computer literacy. Furthermore, my limited knowledge and skill in systems maintenance, troubleshooting, and networking often slows down activities in the unit when I am not able to rectify a technical breakdown.

JOB REQUIREMENTS

Though I was previously a cataloger in the technical services unit of the university library, I was called on (as a result of my interest in computers and their accessories) to expand the learning resource center in the library by integrating the new information infrastructure: computers and related equipment and telecommunication facilities.

Before this initiative began, I had acquired training on computer literacy outside the university's sponsorship and was able to write a proposal on the need to have a unit that could provide information resources to the university community using emerging information technology. I started reading books and journal articles on library automation, information technology in libraries, computer science, applications software, and so on. Fully armed with such knowledge, I was able to convince the university library's management of the need to

acquire computers. The learning resource center (audiovisual unit) of the library was then converted to the IT unit, now called the ICT unit. I was then asked to staff and develop it.

Though this process is how the ICT unit in my library evolved, I believe such units' development in other developing countries may vary. However, some basic skills are required of an ICT/automation/systems librarian in a developing country like Nigeria. Based on my membership in the IT Section of the Nigerian Library Association, I have identified a number of skills such a librarian needs.

An ICT/systems librarian must be able to advise the library on software, hardware, and staffing needed for the automation of the library, and in most cases will be the one to plan and execute such an automation project. He or she must be able to integrate the Internet and all its paraphernalia into the operations of the library, including the design and maintenance of the library's Web site. The ICT librarian must be in a position to troubleshoot in the event of a breakdown or ensure the availability of a technician who can achieve such troubleshooting. He or she must be knowledgeable in digitization of information resources. Above all, the individual should be well grounded in traditional library operations.

Hence being an ICT, automation, or systems librarian in this part of the world requires basic knowledge of computer hardware, software, and networking and how to apply them to library operations; creating and searching databases; programming; digitization procedures; and management of library resources in print or electronic form. Such a person should also be in a position to keep abreast of developments in academic library management through reading and attending workshops on ICT application to library and information science.

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