



Staff Planning at the National Library of the Netherlands

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This is a revised version of the author's presentation at LIBER's Annual General Conference in Toulouse, 2 July 2009.

Abstract

The Koninklijke Bibliotheek in the Netherlands has developed a Strategic Staff Planning Programme to deal with the challenges of an ageing workforce, succession issues for management and specialised positions, and short-term budget cuts in combination with expected long-term staff shortages. This article describes the reasons for the Programme, steps taken to develop it, and preliminary results. The programme includes a Trainee Programme, a Management Trainee Programme, Individual Career Counselling and a Career Service Centre.

Key Words: staff planning; libraries; national library; trainee programme

The Challenges

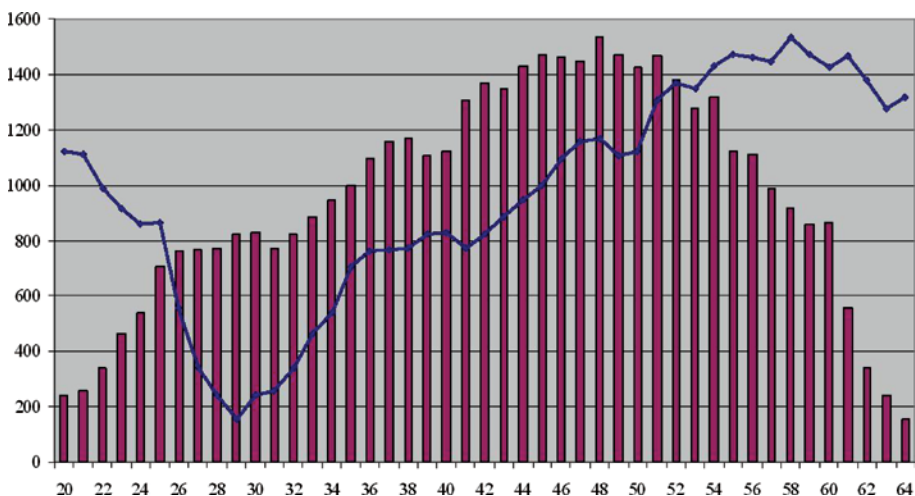
We are all familiar with the old-fashioned stereotype of the average librarian: he or she is an older lady or gentleman who placidly answers a number of questions from a library patron while acting as if he or she is doing this person a favour. Of course the average staff member of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) does not exactly mirror this biased caricature, but traces of the stereotype still remain. The average age of a KB staff member is relatively

old: in 2007 it was 45.03 years as opposed to a national average of 39.8, an average of 43.4 in the education sector, and 42.1 in the government sector (Bruggink, 2008). Moreover, KB staff tend to hold on to their jobs: on average they stay at the same position level for 14.8 years (figures early 2009).

The KB also increasingly faced recruitment problems. Traditional library positions were easily filled, but when it came to management, financial and IT positions, it turned out that the KB was an unknown and/or unpopular employer. As no systematic incentive to train for managerial positions was provided by the KB, staff were mostly content to continue to focus on the academic aspects of library work as opposed to managerial aspects. IT and managerial vacancies had to be filled from outside the library, preferably from other research libraries. But such outside recruitment often took a lot of time.

A third challenge is posed by credit-crunch budget cuts, which may force the KB to reduce its work force (either voluntarily or by dismissals), whereas it is expected that staff shortages will become apparent from 2019 on when the present ageing workforce retires, as is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Workforce composition by age in 2009 (bars) and projections for 2019 (line) in the Netherlands.



(Source: Algemene Nederlandse Werkgevers Vereniging AWWN)

The Strategic Staff Planning Programme

Mid-2007 the KB started to discuss the issues identified above and in 2008 the KB set up a *Strategic Staff Planning Programme*, initiated by the Human Resources Department in close consultation with the Corporate Strategy Department and the Board of Directors. The somewhat weighty title of the Programme was a conscious choice, intended to arouse interest.

Four steps were to lead to a project plan:

1. Take an inventory of present KB staff
2. Project staff requirements in 2 years' time and in 5 years' time
3. Identify discrepancies
4. Draw up an action plan and carry it out.

Steps 1 to 3 involved taking an inventory of each department's staff and discussing this overview in detail with the managers involved. The following questions were asked:

- Which staff members cannot be missed?
- Which staff members do you consider especially talented, and why?
- Which staff members are not productive?
- Do you have enough staff for the amount of work?
- Does your staff have the required qualifications?
- What changes do you anticipate in the nature of the work in two years' time and in five years' time?

The inventory led to the identification of a number of bottlenecks:

- Relatively old staff
- Too little influx of young staff members
- Lack of managerial talent
- Many staff members hold their manager responsible for their careers rather than themselves
- Shortage of expertise needed to run the digital library in 2015.

It was concluded that there was a shortage of young academics willing to train for managerial and/or specialised positions. Too many staff members persisted in traditional library positions and stayed in those positions for a

great length of time. In addition it was noted that dysfunctional staff members often simply remained where they were or were transferred to positions where they contributed little to the operating results, instead of trying to find them more appropriate work where they can make a contribution — within or outside the KB. Lastly, comparatively few staff members took control of their own careers; many held their managers responsible.

The plan that was eventually developed comprised three lines of action:

- A trainee programme and a management trainee group;
- Individual career counselling;
- A career service centre within the KB.

The KB could have decided to start at the problematic end of staff management and focus on ageing and/or dysfunctioning staff members. However, this would have sent a negative message to the organisation. So, instead, the KB decided to focus on a group of young staff members who radiate rejuvenation and innovation. Once a programme was under way to coach them towards managerial and specialist positions, the other issues of employability and mobility could be addressed.

The extent to which the KB was failing to foster its talent was clearly demonstrated when at the end of 2007 it turned out that four of the nine young staff members who had been qualified as potential talents by their managers and had been selected for the Trainee Programme, were on temporary appointments. As the KB is restricted in the number of permanent positions it can offer (many of which are taken up by staff of a certain seniority), these young talents were hired on a project basis, and if we had not acted, they would have left the KB as many others had done before them when their project was over. In this case we managed to secure two-year temporary appointments for those involved in the Trainee Programme, giving us time to find more permanent solutions.

The Trainee Programme and Management Trainees

The Trainee Programme's goal is to enable the KB to hold on to young, talented staff members. It offers them a unique opportunity to develop themselves (further), both professionally and personally for a period of two years.

The participants of the first Trainee Programme were selected in consultation with department managers on the basis of a number of criteria:

- Academic qualifications
- This is their first real position
- In the KB's service for less than three years
- Good communications and social skills
- Affinity with research libraries and/or cultural heritage
- Familiarity with the digital world and proven initiative with regard to the digital library
- Potential talent for managerial or specialist positions.

The programme is structured around two main programme lines: knowledge and skills. First, the 2008/2009 trainees were acquainted with the KB and its strategy and policies, then the horizon was broadened to general issues in information provision, focussing on strategic issues. Five or six half-day knowledge sessions were organised around specific themes, such as knowledge management, project management, acquisitions policy, and the LIBER environment. These knowledge sessions were sometimes run by experienced colleagues from the KB, and sometimes by outside experts. As a group the trainees participated in the 2009 Bielefeld Conference and they visited the offices of the Dutch National Press Agency (ANP).

In the area of personal skills particular attention was given to project leadership, personal leadership and communication skills. For these sessions professional trainers were contracted.

All trainees were assigned a senior KB coach who was not their manager. These coaches provided guidance on all possible matters arising, and were greatly appreciated by the trainees.

Whilst the Trainee Programme was being put in place, another group of staff members was identified which merited special attention: young KB staff members who had worked for the KB for five years or more and who showed managerial potential. It was decided to develop a special programme for them, concentrating on project leadership and personal leadership, always combined with training in communication skills. As these staff members had more experience, group knowledge sessions were not

organised. If the need arose, individual training was offered to supplement particular knowledge.

Participants in this management trainee programme rated their experience with an 8.5 on a 10 point scale and three of them have meanwhile accepted management positions.

Individual Career Counselling

The Human Resources Department also started offering individual career counselling for staff members who had reached a dead end in their career at the KB, or who were judged to be dysfunctional by their managers. The aim was to find a new position for them — either outside or within the KB — where they could once again become productive. The approach consisted of three steps:

- Identify the problem
- Explore possibilities
- Concrete action: training, internship, secondment, self-employment, dismissal

Career Service Centre

In May 2009 a Career Service Centre was set up to ensure that groups of staff members of whom we know that they will be confronted with major changes in their work in the medium term remain employable — either inside the KB or elsewhere. Such major changes are often the consequence of the advent of the digital library, such as cataloguers who must now start working with automatically generated metadata.

By offering these staff members opportunities to retrain in time, the KB helps them remain productive — either within or outside the KB.

Preliminary Results

As the Programme did not get fully started until 2008, all results are as yet preliminary. On the down side, there was an increase in training costs, from K€150 to K€270 annually, plus an additional K€100 for career counsel-

ling. These costs cover a workforce of 340 fte's, 274 of which are permanent appointments.

On the positive side, the average age of KB staff has already declined, from 45.15 in 2006, to 45.03 in 2007 and 44.09 in 2008 — while the general trend in the Netherlands is an increase of 0.3 years.

Of the nine participants in the Trainee Programme, all nine are still in the KB's employment after 1.5 years. At the start of the Programme three held managerial positions, as against five at the time of writing (July 2009).

Twelve individuals left the KB with relatively low exist costs (one annual salary as opposed to five annual salaries on average in the previous period).

A change in the culture of the KB is slowly but surely becoming noticeable as well — staff are taking control of their own careers at last.

New Advertising Strategies for Recruitment

Even though the preliminary results of the Trainee Programme are promising, the KB still needs to recruit staff in the marketplace quite frequently, especially for managerial and IT positions. To improve the KB's image in the market, a new advertising strategy was developed, featuring the trainees themselves and introducing dynamic positions in the KB's *core business* of information provision (Figure 2).

Conclusions

The new digital library requires a different type of librarian: one who's focus is on the outside world, who is an active internet user, with an analytical, international perspective. It is important to start developing such librarians immediately. A first step is to take an inventory of your present staff and make an estimate of what your needs will be in two, five and ten years time, taking account of larger demographic developments which suggest staff shortages in the future.

Fig. 2: Recruitment advertising format.



Word jij trainee bij de KB?

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De KB zoekt trainees! Ben jij een net afgestudeerde academicus, die in een projectorganisatie wil werken? De KB biedt je een aantrekkelijke combinatie van leren en werken. Je werkt als trainee mee in projecten om de Digitale Bibliotheek verder te ontwikkelen. In het tweejarige traineeprogramma doe je uitgebreide kennis op van de informatiesector. En daarnaast werk je aan je persoonlijke effectiviteit. Ben je al bekend met digitalisering, metadata, digitale duurzaamheid, programmeren of ontwikkelingen op het web? Dan is het KB-traineeprogramma een interessant leertraject voor je.

Wij vragen daarnaast van je dat je affiniteit hebt met bibliotheken of cultureel erfgoedinstellingen en een IT-blik. Dat je zelfstandig kunt werken, maar ook goed in een team functioneert. Goed prioriteiten kunt stellen, kunt organiseren en beschikt over goede communicatieve en sociale vaardigheden. Is dit allemaal op je van toepassing? Kijk dan voor uitvoerige informatie op www.kb.nl/werken

KB Koninklijke Bibliotheek
Nationale bibliotheek van Nederland

Developing a trainee programme can be an excellent way of retaining young, talented staff members for the next decade. If your organisation does not have the scale to develop such a programme independently, it is advisable to seek collaboration with other libraries on a national or even international level.

Reference

Bruggink, J.W. (2008): *Sociaaleconomische trends*, 3rd quarter, CBS (Statistics Netherlands).