

## **Innovative and Sustainable Information Services for Moldovan Higher Education: Evaluation of Moldavian Libraries System**

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**Abstract.** Within the project Innovative and Sustainable Information Services for Moldovan Higher Education, research was conducted on development and further education opportunities for librarians in the Moldovan universities. The goal of the research was to identify the level of education, training and information needs, the level of satisfaction of librarians on human resource management within these libraries, the level of knowledge and the intent to improve. The research method was a survey through a self-administrated questionnaire provided online by Survey Monkey. The level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the librarians within the Moldovan library system matches their expectations. Although the awareness of the librarian's importance becomes increases in the library system, recognizing the right to training and development, changing the mentality seem promising..

**Keywords:** information services, higher education, evaluation, Moldavia, Norway.

### **1. Introduction.**

International cooperation and information sharing is one of the key factors of success in the process of developing education systems. Innovation and research dissemination on the World Wide Web leads to rapid movement of scientific information. In this context, the role of the university library changes, to become more of a producer and distributor of knowledge. Without professionals with a creative spirit, able to implement and develop new information services, it will be impossible to build a library of the future.

The project “The development of new economic information services for higher education in Moldova” [4], funded by the Norwegian Cooperation Program with Eurasia in higher education [9], was carried out in the period from 2012 to 2015 in partnership between the libraries of Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) and the University of Bergen with professor Angela Repanovici from Transylvania University of Brasov as expert. The project focused on educational innovations in the use of information. The experiences and best practice of the University of Bergen Library formed the basis for implementation of an organization of digital deposits, and implementation of information literacy for all users of ASEM’s library. In addition, Professor Repanovici brought her experiences from a Tempus project in the Western Balkan to the project. Also, the project provided English language courses for ASEM librarians.

At present, the collaboration is extended by deploying a new project “Innovative and sustainable information services for higher education in the Republic of Moldova”, which is a bridge to another project application that will be written in September 2015. The objectives of the smaller transition project concerns the involvement of 20 university libraries of Moldova in training actions to promote new practices of information and integration into the international library community. The project investigates the changing role of Moldovan university libraries in the digital information age through surveys and training activities.

## **2. The basic content.**

Within the project of transition, the perceived needs for different kinds of skills for the academic librarians in the Republic of Moldova were researched through a survey. The scientific approach was based on studies of developments in the training of librarians. There are many articles in the professional library area, in journals or at conferences, highlighting existing problems in the field. Moldovan authors discuss the particularities of culture and communication, the quality of information specialist training - N. Țurcan, T. Coșeri [2; 3]; innovation management - L. Kulikovski, S. Ghinculov [6; 7; 8]; innovative marketing strategies and implementation of quality management system - N. Cheradi, E. Railean [1; 10].

The research was held in the first quarter of 2015. The aim was to uncover the self- evaluation of development opportunities of librarians in Moldovan university libraries. The hypothesis proposed in the study:

- Librarians experience a need for change and adjustment of the management system of academic library staff in Moldova.
- The acts and attitudes of library staff and their self-reported satisfaction in undergoing specific activities requires continuous learning. This will also contribute to improve the information services in libraries.

The survey was anonymous, through an online questionnaire survey in Survey Monkey [5]. 35 questions were given: open, closed and scale. The first results of this study were presented at a meeting of heads of university libraries, April 28,

2015 in Chisinau, and also at the QQML2015 conference in Paris, France in late May 2015.

There were 244 respondents: 27 senior managers/library directors; 117 functional managers and 86 librarians from 20 higher education institutions (there are totally 890 employees in academic libraries in Moldova). Based on statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (Statistical Form no. 6-c), margin of error is  $\pm 3,2\%$  with 95% estimated probability. The group of respondents is representative according to two variables: the library of higher education institutions, and the category of respondents.

<b>Your age:</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than 30 years	7,4%	18
31-50 years	51,2%	124
More than 50 years	41,3%	100
<i>answered question</i>		<b>242</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>2</b>
<b>What is your seniority in this position:</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
0-1 years	5,7%	14
2-5 years	12,7%	31
6-10 years	17,2%	42
11-15 years	16,8%	41
16-20 years	7,8%	19
more than 20 years	39,8%	97
<b>Professional experience in this area:</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than 5 years	8,6%	21
6-10 years	11,5%	28
11-15 years	14,8%	36
16-20 years	10,7%	26
more than 21 years	54,3%	132
<i>answered question</i>		<b>243</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>1</b>

More than half of respondents – 58% have specialized university degree, and 37% have university degree, which indicates a high level of professional training of library staff of Moldova.

The respondents of the research (84%) believe that their work corresponds to their education. In our opinion this reduces the cognitive dissonance and undue expectations among librarians. Most respondents (81%) say they have sufficient knowledge to perform activities related to position held, while 18% noted that they need more knowledge to fulfill service obligations.

96% of the respondents agreed that they wanted more training. This willingness of the respondents to increase their professional knowledge shows the readiness of the Moldovan academic library community in acquiring new knowledge. The survey asked about the respondents' intentions regarding the improvement of professional skills: 41% of the respondents would prefer to participate in national and international projects, where there are experts from abroad and they can obtain new knowledge and skills. 34% of respondents are willing to undertake retraining or improving through the national system of continuing education; 16% of respondents prefer to learn at work; and 5% want to educate themselves. Thus, the staff of university libraries in the country is willing to permanent update their professional knowledge, using various ways and means. However, 77% of the respondents said they were not currently involved any training processes.

Respondents received the following question: “*How important for you are the subjects / topics for the training of librarians?*” There is a high interest in new information technologies and innovations in libraries, on the scale between **important** and **very important**.

The level of general knowledge was self-evaluated by the respondents. Maximum weight was attributed to the following: general knowledge (score 1,58), communication skills (1,70) and professional knowledge (1,85); which is placed on the scale between **good** and **very good**.

Most respondents – 64% – said they liked their work, including: *the process of serving users, communication with researchers, supplementing collections, academic environment, intellectual work etc.*; 32% of respondents said they liked *the organization of work, work atmosphere, comfort and entourage, stable service etc.*; 29% of respondents liked the *library staff at work, staff competence, experience exchange between employees, team spirit etc.*

The answers to the question “*What do you do not like about your job?*” can be grouped into the following:

- 67% of respondents are not satisfied with the technical and material basis of libraries: small budgets for development, lack of modern technical equipment, insufficient space, outdated furniture, unfavourable conditions, outdated software, outdated collections, low wages, and insufficient material motivation.
- 15% are dissatisfied with library management: the authoritarian style, no motivation, the reduction of staff, conservatism, busy schedule,

insufficient promotion of the library, no functioning teamwork, tense atmosphere, collective relations are tense, the lack of specialists in IT etc.

- 12,5% are dissatisfied with the poor staff training, passivity, conservatism, fear for changes in library etc.

Librarians are not satisfied with the routine work; there is so much bureaucracy, the serving process is complicated and requires optimization and simplification. Some respondents do not like scientific work, writing articles for journals, and sedentary work.

Innovations that has appeared in the last 3-5 years in the library can be grouped as follows:

- *Technological innovations*: institutional repository, advanced software, WebOpac, access to online databases, digitization of publications, online exhibitions, electronic library etc. was mentioned by 75% of the respondents;
- *Innovations in management and marketing*: reorganization of the library, various information campaigns, implementing the course “Information Literacy” improving technological processes, diagnosis of the collection, strategic planning etc. 24% of the respondents mentioned this;
- *Innovative project activity*: international projects, partnership programs - 11%.

Most respondents (69%) believe that the problem of staff development is a lack of material and moral incentives, and economic guarantees, 45% of respondents consider technical and technological equipment inadequate, and 36% sees the passivity of staff as a problem for staff development.

In the opinion of respondents, staff attestation is important to stimulate initiative and creativity of staff in libraries, mentioned by 84% of the respondents, followed by continuous training – 65%, involvement in the planning process – 56%. Granting diplomas and certificates is an instrument of motivation frequently used, - 89% of respondents mention this while 27% suggest giving additional free days. 20% values prizes for successful activities. Thus, the leadership of the university libraries uses various management tools and techniques that motivate library staff to show initiative and creativity.

Respondents have indicated different elements in the development system of the library staff: training at the workplace – 86%; conferences – 81%; professional seminars – 80%. Traineeships in other libraries seem to be used rather little, it is mentioned by 22%, even though it is considered an effective form of professional development.

Respondents who mentioned a management program of library staff have indicated what it includes: job descriptions exist in almost all libraries – mentioned by 95%. Around half of the respondents also mentioned a written personnel policy and institutional programs of staff training. The respondents of the survey have also indicated the significance on nine aspects that could contribute to enhancing the prestige of the profession of librarianship.

How important to you are measures should be taken to enhance the prestige of the profession of librarianship?	Response Count	Answer Options					
		Very important	Important	I do not know	Less important	Not important	
Technology and the need for lifelong learning	232	162	69	0	1	0	
Promoting library values in society	236	165	67	0	2	2	
Promoting library and its opportunities in the media	233	130	98	2	3	0	
Opening the library for society (PR)	232	126	98	8	0	0	
Improving the quality of library services	238	189	49	0	0	0	

232	238	238	235	240	4
0	0	0	0		
0	0	0	0		
3	0	0	2		
68	49	25	46		
161	189	213	187		
Innovat ion public services	Improv ing the material and technical base	Increas ing wage for librarians	Focusi ng on the needs of users	<i>answered question</i>	<i>skipped question</i>

The average was calculated for all options presented in the question. The most important were “improving material and technical base” – 1,20; “improving the quality of library services” – 1,21; “focus on user needs” – 1,21.

Systematization of data obtained through the survey allowed us to identify the following issues and challenges facing the academic libraries in Moldova:

- The technical and material base is weakly developed with a slow reduction of users, insufficient promotion of the library and lack of advanced technologies. The library does not adapt and change quickly in line with the environment. There is inadequate management and lack of exploration of the library as a cultural space. Other challenges are the constantly increasing number of electronic publications, collections and archives full-text electronic information as an integral part of

library services, requiring a suitable storage management system. About half of the respondents mentioned something like this.

- About one fourth had comments about new competitors on the information market. It is difficult for libraries, using old-fashioned methods, to compete with these suppliers like Internet providers.
- About the same portion of respondents mentioned “Insufficient funding of the sector, outdated and imperfect legislative framework, the need to promote library values in society”.
- A smaller group (16%) gave lack of highly qualified personnel, lack of young specialists, having old staff that is not open to change, and lack of qualified specialists in the field of IT as especial challenges.

Changes in the economic situation in the Republic of Moldova and changes at the information market, reducing the number of users in libraries, along with the rapid development of information technology brings uncertainty in the activity of modern university library and its ability to adapt to the changing operating environment. Human resource management in such situation is particularly significant because the people are the source of success and /or failure of any organization providing services, including libraries.

The results of the survey allow us to set up a profile of the Moldovan academic librarian:

1. Respondents are highly qualified; mostly specialists with university degree. Their education corresponds to the nature of the work and the position. At the same time, library staff is open to new knowledge and willing to increase their knowledge.
2. 41% of the academic library staff is over 50 years old.
3. Library staff is geared toward continuous professional updating, using various ways and means. The survey revealed the respondents' intentions regarding the improvement of professional skills. The majority of respondents prefer to participate in national and international projects for the improvement of knowledge and skills, realizing the importance of these projects. Respondents also are directed to national continuing education system, which has a remarkable tradition and a good reputation in the country.
4. Respondents appreciate quite highly the professional knowledge and skills they possess both in terms of general culture and in the professional knowledge. They consider that working in an academic library requires special knowledge and skills. Respondents' own contribution to the development of libraries is expressed through the following activities: improvement of service users, the presentation of communications in the professional forum, participation in training courses, publishing articles and promoting new initiatives.



5. The range of fields in which academic librarians are interested in obtaining knowledge is rather wide: library, law, management and marketing, psycho-pedagogical methods of working with users, computerized technologies, use of databases, library innovations, effective communication strategies, and intellectual property.
6. According to the respondents, to have a career in an academic library will be influenced both by internal factors such as personal aspirations, ambitions, interests, skills, experience, government decisions, changing the structure of the library, library staff turnover; and external factors like economic, social, technological changes; wages, training courses, upgrading the organization's participation in projects etc.
7. Respondents said they were attracted to their work and to the opportunity to realize their creative potential. A relatively high level of satisfaction of respondents on the competence of personnel working in the library is noticed.

### **3. Conclusions.**

Innovative activities of libraries, according to the respondents, are based mainly on technological and managerial innovation. Innovative trends are related to activities within national and international projects, and to cooperation between libraries.

Staff development in academic libraries is prevented by insufficient material and moral incentives, mismanagement, lack of technical equipment and modern technologies. The leadership of libraries try to find instruments and management techniques that motivate library staff to be proactive and creative. Some examples that were mentioned: involvement in the planning process, attestation of the employees, giving prizes, career advancement, continuous training, delegation of responsibilities, etc.

Most of the academic libraries in Moldova have management programs for library staff. Development system of the staff includes activities such as workplace training and professional seminars. Staff rotation method is not used in more than half of the libraries of the country. This suggest that developing and implementing of human resource strategies on a national level would be profitable.

Implementation of information technologies requires library staff to evolve constantly and transform the job of the librarian into intellectual work. Attestation of library staff demands continuous training, participation in various courses and other educational activities. Professionals from all libraries recognize that to be a highly qualified specialist, it is necessary to improve the skills continuously. According to respondents, to stimulate desire for change, it is necessary to modernize the library, actively develop staff and to encourage the implementation of innovations.

To enhance the prestige of the librarian profession, it is necessary to optimize activities in the following areas: promoting an updated mission of libraries in the 21st century based on access to knowledge; information technology and the need for continuous learning; promoting library values in society; promoting

library and the opportunities they offer in the media; opening the library to society (PR); improving the quality of library services; service innovation for public; wage growth for librarians; focus on user needs.

The main challenges facing the Moldovan academic libraries today, according to the respondents are: Competition on the internet informational market, insufficient support from the state, reduced funding, inadequate legislation, the technical base is undeveloped, insufficient promotion of the libraries, an increasing flow of electronic information, reduced number of users, lack of young specialists interested in working in the libraries.

#### **4. What next?**

The results of this study will be the basis for new strategies in the development of university libraries and suggest new solutions for rational use of human resources. Academic libraries in Moldova will not function effectively without a good program of motivating employees. An effective model of motivation of library staff, adapted to the specific features of each library will have to be developed. An important direction in the development of personnel policy is to create a loyalty program for young professionals that will include new techniques for developing and maintaining young specialists in libraries. Among the innovative methods of training the library staff, including young professionals, the following methods and techniques may be proposed:

*Coaching (training, coaching, mentoring)* - one of modern methods of training and professional consultation, involving motivation and individual training to acquire new skills and qualities.

*Secondment* - temporary transfer of the employee to another department within the organization, and more recently - internship in a completely different organization.

*Buddying* - the method is based on mutual exchange of information and objective feedback on carrying out tasks (both personal and corporate) related to the development of new skills. Sometimes the buddying is called "informal mentoring" or "coaching based on equity."

*Shadowing* - often used for the training of people who plan to employ in the library, namely graduates. The organization offers the opportunity to spend 1-3 days with an employee doing his/her job duties. Thus, a young specialist informs himself about the chosen career and sees what knowledge and skills are lacking [10].

The results of the study will be the basis of creating a unified communications system in academic libraries in Moldova. This will create a common information field to eliminate communication gaps. Top managers of libraries will receive systematic feedback from employees and they will involve staff in the management process of the organization. The library staff will be more motivated to achieve specific objectives of the organization. Thus, the quality of decision-making procedures will increase. This requires the following:

- updating technical means of communication;
- implementing the use of modern communication technologies;

- identifying and minimizing the communication barriers;
- evaluating the effectiveness of feedback and level of information of the staff;
- selection and placement of personnel in accordance with the structure of informal communication;
- changing what impedes the efficient functioning of the organization;
- workshops, seminars and training courses involving employees of different managerial levels.

The new collaborative Moldovan-Romanian-Norwegian project will reinforce the position of higher education in Moldova at national and international level, maximizing the contribution of libraries and their ability to effectively mediate the relationship between users and information. The results of this collaboration will be a strategic framework for sustainable development of national policies on access to information throughout the higher education system of the Republic of Moldova.

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