



Inclusion of New Professionals in the Strategy of the Library Association of Latvia

Silvija Tretjakova

Children's and School Libraries Section
Library Association of Latvia
and
Children's Literature Centre
National Library of Latvia
Riga, Latvia
E-mail: [silvija.tretjakova\[at\]lnb.lv](mailto:silvija.tretjakova@lnb.lv)

Dace Ūdre

New Professionals Section
Library Association of Latvia
Riga, Latvia
E-mail: [dace.udre\[at\]lu.lv](mailto:dace.udre@lu.lv)

Sanita Malēja

Department of Library and Information Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Latvia
Riga, Latvia
E-mail: [sanita.maleja\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:sanita.maleja@gmail.com)

Silva Suhanenkova

Library of the University of Latvia
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Latvia
Riga, Latvia
E-mail: [silva.suhanenkova\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:silva.suhanenkova@gmail.com)

Meeting:

95 — Strategies for library associations: include new professionals now! — Management of Library Associations with the New Professionals Special Interest Group

Abstract:

The Library Association of Latvia was established in 1923 as a non-government professional organization and is a member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions since 1929. In April 2009, thanks to the open-mindedness of the newly elected association president Silvija Tretjakova, the newest section of the association – the New Professionals Section – was founded by six students. The president's trust has helped to form a well organized section with its own vision for development and action. The section has been acknowledged as the most visible and active part of the association in the past two years, but

communicating mostly externally, inner communication has suffered. The lack of a single strategy for the association is holding back the recruitment and integration of new professionals into the association. An ongoing discussion has brought up a list of questions that should be addressed.

The study of the section presented in this paper reveals extensive research and also gives an overview on the section's activities. It is considered as a pilot project to create a long-term strategy for the association.

The first part of the study reveals the identity and strengths of the members and the section. The study is enhanced by the results of focus group discussion, where all members of the section shared their motivation, benefits gained and vision for the section.

In contrast, the second part of the research provides an outside view, having been conducted amongst potential members of the section. It provides non-members' vision on the section as well as shows the directions that should be addressed.

The main findings include different options and activities members would seek in a professional organization. By treating the section as the future of the association, the study serves as a starting point in creation of a strategy for the association.

Keywords: library associations; new professionals; organization identity; organization strategy

Introduction

The Library Association of Latvia (Latvijas Bibliotekāru biedrība – LBB) was established in 1923 as a non-government professional organisation. In 1929, it became a member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and also now acts as the representative of Latvian librarians in this international organisation. In 2013, it will celebrate its 90th anniversary. Silvija Tretjakova, president of the association, has always been open to new ideas and she admires the enthusiasm and spirit of new professionals. That was one of the reasons why she invited a group of new professionals to form a section within the association. In April 2009, the New Professionals Section (Jauno speciālistu sekcija – JSS) was established by six students. It can be said that the international symposium BOBCATSSS unified them. Now, after a period of three years, LBB JSS has 15 registered members and about 20 new professionals involved in an informal new professionals' network. They have their own blog (<http://lbbjss.wordpress.com/>), which is highly rated by other professionals, library and information science (LIS) students and academic staff.

Background

LBB is the largest and professionally most varied organization in Latvia. Apart from the LBB, the comparatively small country Latvia has several other library organizations. There are different associations that strive to provide an opportunity for librarians to choose where and how they can voluntarily invest their undeniably precious spare time. The idea that one organisation can represent all interests and requirements of library staff is no longer valid. In order to carry out its objectives, the association must look for new opportunities in these changing circumstances. LBB has more than 500 individual and 9 institutional members, and there are 4 regional divisions and 7 sections within the LBB. The sections bring together many members. However, it is obvious that each section has a small number of active

members that take an initiative and implement the ideas themselves. LBB JSS is the most active section within the association. It has been concluded for a long time that other sections are comparatively formal. Changes are possible by changing their leaders to initiate new ideas for projects and activities. It is reasonable to note that one section cannot serve as representative of a whole organization; therefore it is time for a unified system to be implemented.

Purpose of the study

In order to ensure successful operation of the JSS within the association and to keep on track with projected objectives, it is necessary firstly to identify the interests and needs of new professionals. Gradually and intuitively this has been done continuously; therefore, now the results have been summarized in this study.

The aim of the research was to find out both current and future visions of the organization from the perspective of members. The potential members of the section were surveyed to indicate the impression of the section from the outside, as well as to see whether it is attractive and recognizable by them.

Findings

Identity of LBB JSS

In spring 2011, Aija Putniņa, a former LBB JSS member, conducted research on the identity of LBB JSS as an organization. According to Hofstede and Hofstede's dimensions of organizational culture (2005, p. 292), LBB JSS can be described as a results and work oriented organization. It is a loosely controlled open system that is very pragmatic and practically organized. However, it cannot be said for sure whether the association is a professional or a parochial organization. The section's members emphasize that LBB JSS is a unique like-minded group of new professionals. It is active, new and still developing. In order to strengthen the unity of its members, a way to engage less active members needs to be found. The most common characteristic of members or new professionals that can join the section is "active". They should also be open, persistent, flexible, creative, full of ideas and willing to make a change. The section is open to all new professionals (students, new graduates or working professionals) who feel that they could benefit from being in the association.

Potential members

The main aims of the survey for potential members were to characterize the new professionals, their ties with the library world and their perception of the section. There were 26 respondents, of whom one was male. The average age of the respondents was 30.5. Almost 70% of respondents held a degree in LIS (12 were bachelor and 6 – master level). Other common areas of education are humanities, management, pedagogy and tourism. Of the respondents, 22 were employed in a library. The length of service of nearly 60% of respondents was up to 6 years. The survey was intentionally distributed among recent LIS graduates and young library employees. Respondents were asked if they identified themselves as new professionals. Half of the respondents considered themselves to be new professionals, while the same proportion did not. At the same time only 61% of respondents did feel that they belonged to the library community. It is worrying that the majority of those who indicated themselves as being new professionals were amongst the 37% of respondents who did not affiliate themselves with the library field.

Image of the section

The strength of the LBB JSS is the growing trust in individual and team power. Projects that have been carried out and recognition increases the motivation and gives much needed strength to continue. For potential members, the main reason for not joining the section was lack of time and a disbelief in changes. At the same time, this was one of the main strengths of new professionals – the vigour of youth, creativity, determination, and belief in the possibility to make changes.

When asked of the paths that led respondents towards the LBB JSS, 18% indicated that the survey was their first encounter with the section. Therefore, the most common paths were via study peers or friends as well as social media activities of the section. Only 20% of respondents were informed of the section via work colleagues, which led us to think that the association might not play an important role in their workplaces. A surprisingly small number of respondents had heard about the association from their educational establishments. Therefore, we explain this by the fact that most of them (over 75%) gained their degree over two years ago. The last two years have been the most active for the section. Currently we can see an active cooperation between the Department of Information and Library Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia (the only institution that provides an academic degree in LIS in Latvia).

Discussion

Both potential and existing members were asked to evaluate the aims that the LBB JSS had proposed in 2010. All of the statements below were marked with “yes”, or “likely yes”.

- Representing the interests of libraries and new professionals;
- Organization of workshops, conferences and experience exchange trips;
- International cooperation;
- Informing LIS professionals of current events.

Several times the additional tasks of building a positive image of librarians were mentioned. However, one of the respondents noted something that appeared several times during focus group discussions:

“All these tasks cannot be accomplished by LBB JSS alone. It is needed to ensure succession by including new professionals developing cooperation with established professionals, lecturers and culture officials. LBB JSS is like a torch-bearer that should enlighten the industries road to innovative solutions and ideas as they are more easily adapted. They are much faster on novelties; therefore when choosing their direction, they should be included in succession principle and paired up with corresponding professionals.”

The weakest link of the LBB is ensuring succession of members within the organization. The survey supplements the statement, revealing that 50% of respondents were not motivated to join the association, while 80% of respondents had no idea how to do so. But what bothered the members of the section most was where to go when they had outgrown the section? While there is a slow, though continuous, flow of new members toward LBB JSS, the long standing members of the section were more likely to leave the association. This is due to reduction of their level of identification with the association. Judging the identity of LBB JSS, it is obvious that alongside active operation, development and increasing identification of the section in the past three years, the actual motivation and affiliation of the members has changed. Currently the section attracts highly motivated members willing to contribute for

advancement. Members unable to distinguish themselves with these criteria have left the section.

According to our study in 2010, Latvian new professionals were identified in two aspects:

- Someone who has finished LIS studies or courses in the last three years (also LIS students are qualified as someone close to new professionals – if they are really interested and active in the field of LIS);
- Someone who has worked in a library or other information organization within three years (after the first three years, a professional goes into routine and is not as active as new professional).

The criteria mentioned above were not proved during the application process for the new professionals' conference 4CanGurus, the first conference in Latvia organized by the LBB JSS specifically for new professionals, when library professionals, aged 21 to 49, identified themselves with a new professional. The experience and education indicators were well above the previously stated three years.

For the reasons mentioned above, the action plan for inclusion of new professionals within the association looks as follows:

1. New professionals are still the target audience of the LBB JSS. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the true beneficiaries of LBB JSS activities are the whole LIS community of Latvia.
2. The section should decide upon the future of the LBB JSS blog, which is to continue to serve as the largest professional LIS blog in the country. The section has formed several development scenarios, including creation of a unified web platform for the whole LBB or involving other sections with content creation. The main reason is to increase information flow.
3. Information flow is also ensured via several mailing lists; however, none of them reach new professionals. Members are also open to more social information sharing, which is to be proposed during creation of LBB's strategy.
4. LBB JSS serves as a kick-off platform for the association that is well informed about happenings, aims and visions of other sections and divisions so it can guide newcomers or members that are about to leave.
5. Implementation of a voluntary mentor program that connects new professionals and established professionals for mentorship, guidance, joint projects, research etc. It should help to promote innovative ideas of new professionals through the voice of established members.
6. The most noticed activities and projects of the section are universal and all inclusive, while events directed at new professionals have gone unnoticed. Therefore, implementation of these projects is to be carried out in cooperation with the relevant section of the LBB. For example, "The Humour Archive of Latvian Libraries" is to be maintained together with the LBB Library Research and Development Section, while coordination of semi-annual "Library Day in the Life Project" is carried out with help of the Public Libraries Section.

Conclusions

The action plan means that, in order to attract new professionals to the association, it is important to raise the overall profile of the association. As shown by the research, LBB JSS is mostly viewed as creative, full of enthusiasm, with a variety of activities, while LBB is considered to be very substantial and traditional, but chaotic at the same time. It is needed for the association to become a respected body within the LIS community of Latvia for all professionals to strive towards. The number of new professionals in Latvian libraries is small; therefore, LBB JSS is more about innovation and contemporary librarianship rather than career guidance. The difference between the two meanings of the term “new” is tricky; therefore, the LBB JSS can envelop both. It can become a platform for innovation for the whole association and for librarianship in Latvia. As for that aim, it is important to develop strong ties within the LBB that will transfer the level of identification of members which then in turn will become obvious to potential members.

References

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New Professionals Section of the Library Association of Latvia

E-mail: lbb.jss@gmail.com

Blog: <http://lbbjss.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/lbbjss>

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lbbjss>

Prezi: <http://prezi.com/user/lbbjss/>

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