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Classification of Support Staff in a Consortium Medical Library: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

A representative committee of Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center Library staff and faculty, under the direction of the library administration, successfully redesigned a job classification system for the library's nonprofessional staff. In the new system all nonprofessionals are assigned to one of five grade levels, each with a corresponding salary range. To determine its appropriate grade level each job is analyzed and assigned a numerical value using a point system based on a set of five factors, each of which is assigned a relative number of points. The factors used to measure jobs are: education and experience, complexity of work, administrative accountability, manual skill, and contact with users. Each factor is described according to degrees, so that a job can be given partial credit for a factor. An advisory staff classification committee now participates in the ongoing administration of the classification system.

THE established practice in libraries of all types is to organize the personnel functions of the library within the library itself, rather than to depend upon the personnel office of a parent institution. Therefore, libraries are becoming involved in a variety of personnel issues, including the quite basic one of equal pay for equal work. A common method of insuring that this is achieved is to develop a job classification system within the library that establishes a logical, systematic, and equitable pay structure for the nonprofessional staff; such a structure is an essential component of sound library management as well as a legal mandate. In addition to providing a pay structure for staff members, a job classification system serves as a valuable administrative tool for use in staff recruitment, selection, career development, and performance appraisal, as well as in financial management and budgeting.

Job classification systems—whether the system used in civil service or the more complex quantitative factor and points systems now coming into wider use—systematically rank jobs according to

their relative value to the organization. They typically group jobs requiring substantially similar knowledge and skills in the same grade level, under the assumption that these jobs warrant equal pay. A salary range is then assigned to each grade level in the classification system. Essential to both a factor system and a point system is a job analysis and evaluation technique that measures each job (not the person in the job) against a set of such factors as education, degree of job complexity, supervisory responsibility, and public contact. The Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center (HAM—TMC) Library recently underwent the development of the type of staff classification system just described. The resulting system consists of five grade levels. All nonprofessional library positions are classified and placed into one of the five grades, using a point system based around the five key factors of education and experience, administrative accountability, manual skill, complexity and difficulty of work, and contact with users. The library's experience in developing its own classification system should be of use to other libraries planning a similar project.

THE LIBRARY SETTING

The HAM—TMC Library is a consortium library governed by a library board composed of eleven representatives from five of its eighteen supporting institutions: Houston Academy of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, The University of Texas, Texas Woman's University, and Texas Medical Center, Inc. Due to this unique consortium arrangement the internal structure of the library has been created independently of any single parent institution. As the library's user population has steadily grown over the years to include over 13,000 physicians, medical, nursing, graduate, dental, and allied health students, faculty members, and hospital personnel, the library staff

has expanded to a current staff of seventeen professionals and thirty-six nonprofessional FTEs.

THE INITIAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE STAFF

The total lack of a structure for overall personnel management, as well as the need to administer a logical and equitable pay plan, prompted the library administration in 1974 to classify all nonprofessional library staff positions. Using data from written job descriptions and interviews with department heads, the nineteen nonprofessional staff positions of that time were assigned to one of four grade levels based on a simple fifty-point scale. Each of the thirteen factors was assigned a relative number of the total fifty points: experience (four points), education (seven points), manual skill (two points), physical effort (one point), complexity of work (nine points), seriousness of error (three points), contact with readers (four points), contact with other departments (one point), responsibility for library funds or property (two points), responsibility for confidential information (two points), performance of work without immediate supervision (three points), supervision of others (nine points), and attendance (three points). Each position was then evaluated against this list of factors and given points for those factors relevant to the position, with the position receiving all or none of the points assigned to a factor. A position receiving credit for all factors would receive the maximum point total of fifty and was classified as Grade 4. A Grade 3 position, on the other hand, would receive from thirty-one through forty points on the scale.

Problems

Although this original system successfully classified the existing staff positions in 1974, the size of the staff grew and specifications for library positions became more complex, eventually rendering the simple point system inadequate. The most obvious problem with the system was that it was not designed to allow a position to receive partial credit for a factor. A position was given either full or no points for work complexity—for example—when, more accurately, certain positions deserved at least some points for the factor. Problems also arose from the too brief factor descriptions, which, although originally adequate to distinguish between library jobs, no longer supported clear, unambiguous interpretation. In addition, questions were raised about the ranking and weighting of the factors. Another problem, perhaps related to those

above, concerned administration of the system. It was felt that the system did not provide the library administration with enough data to make job classification decisions that were consistent across the technical, public, and administrative services departments.

REVIEW OF JOB EVALUATION METHODS

In response to these problems, in October 1976 two librarians were assigned the task of reviewing recent literature for information on job evaluation and classification systems that would be applicable to the situation in the HAM—TMC Library. The search found information on library systems in such publications as the *SPEC Kit on Personnel Classification Schemes and Job Descriptions* [1], published by the Association of Research Libraries, and the ALA publication *Personnel Utilization in Libraries: A Systems Approach* [2]. Information on current personnel practices in business and in the public sector was found to be widely scattered, though available [3]. An excellent text on job evaluation in the public sector, published after the library was well into its study, was an invaluable source of information [4].

The literature survey revealed that four job evaluation and analysis methods were being used in various types of organizations to establish classification systems: (1) simple job ranking, (2) grading, (3) factor comparison, and (4) the point method. In the first system jobs are simply ranked from high to low, based upon their relative importance to the organization. This is clearly the simplest of the job evaluation techniques. The second system, the grading system, is familiar to most people as the technique used in civil service. This system involves defining a number of broad classifications and fitting each job into its appropriate class. The factor comparison and the point methods are confusingly similar, in that each involves measuring jobs against a set of factors. The point system is the most widely used method of job evaluation in current practice; in this system each position in the organization is rated against an established set of factors, each of which has been assigned a numerical value. The factor system, however, is more complex, requiring a minimum of fifteen to twenty-five key jobs for successful implementation, and hence is applicable only to large organizations. Because of the size of the HAM—TMC Library and the relative simplicity of the point system, the library decided to adopt the point system to classify its staff positions.

REVISIONS OF THE LIBRARY'S CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

After the preliminary investigation of the literature, it was felt that a decision to retain a point system as the library's job evaluation technique was soundly supported in the literature. The next step in the process of redesigning the staff classification process was significant: rather than calling in the "experts," in November 1976 the executive director appointed an ad hoc committee within the library to work carefully with the administration in revising the point system then being used. The effective use of committees in the delegation of certain administrative functions is widely accepted. The decision to appoint such a committee to develop a staff classification plan for the library was prompted by the particular nature of the project: because resolution of existing classification problems and successful implementation of any new system required staff acceptance of the system, staff participation in the development of the system was considered essential. The Ad Hoc Committee on Staff Classification consisted of three librarians and three members of the library's nonprofessional staff, and with one exception all departments in the library were represented.

In order to meet its goal of having a final draft of a revised and expanded point system by the summer of 1977, the committee outlined the following first steps at its initial meeting: to read additional background literature on classification systems; to study the point system used in the library; to expand the descriptions of the thirteen factors currently used in rating jobs; to establish degrees for each factor, so that a job could be given partial credit; and finally, to evaluate the numerical weights given to each of the factors. Of course, final proof of the new system's validity and usefulness would be determined by reevaluating each library job according to the system as soon as it was developed. If the new system could place jobs logically, as assessed by the library's administration and its department heads, and could resolve the shortcomings of the system then in use, the committee would consider its work a success.

Definition of Factors

After becoming knowledgeable about classification systems in general and the library's point system in particular, the committee began to write complete and unambiguous descriptions for all of the thirteen original job classification factors. Each

factor description was also broken down into degrees. However, after carefully studying all the factors the committee discovered that the original thirteen factors could be reduced to six, which were clearly the most important to the goals of the library: (1) education, (2) experience, (3) complexity and difficulty of work, (4) supervisory responsibility, (5) manual skill, and (6) contact with users. The committee felt that the seven other factors either were too difficult to define objectively or aided little in comparing actual job value and, in fact, actually served detrimentally as "fudge factors." The committee felt confident about this considerable modification, because according to experts in the personnel field, the trend is to limit the number of factors used to those considered critical.

Choosing, defining, and establishing degrees for each of the six factors required nearly four months of one-hour, weekly meetings by the committee. The committee drew upon considerable background material in defining the factors. For example, Lynch's article, "A framework for a comparative analysis of library work" [5], was very helpful in defining the factor "complexity and difficulty of work." Complete definitions of the factors are given in Appendix 1.

In addition, other changes in factors were made. The factors "education" and "experience" were combined, because it was felt that the basic knowledge requirements of a position could often be equally fulfilled by either relevant experience or formal education. This change resulted in five rather than six factors. Supervisory responsibilities were incorporated into the factor "administrative accountability," which included major financial responsibility as well. The committee then made a second major revision to the old system by assigning different ranks and weights to the five factors. Decisions about the relative importance of one factor over another in deciding job value were difficult to make and required the combined judgment of committee members and library administration. Table 1 shows the factor weights as they were finally assigned.

The most apparent changes from the old system are the increased and equal weights given to manual skill and to contact with users. Because technical and administrative services jobs are clerical in nature, manual skills such as typing do affect job value to a considerable extent. The weight given to the factor "contact with users," on the other hand, reflects the public services objectives of

SUPPORT STAFF IN A CONSORTIUM MEDICAL LIBRARY

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE WEIGHT OF FACTORS

Old Factors	% of Total	New Factors	% of Total
Experience/education (combined)	22	Experience/education (combined)	25
Complexity of work	18	Complexity of work	25
Supervisory responsibility	18	Administrative accountability	20
Contact with users	8	Contact with users	15
Manual skill	4	Manual skills	15
Remaining factors	30		100
	100		

the organization. These two factors were weighted equally, therefore, to balance the requirements of technical, administrative, and public services positions.

Factor Point Scale Developed

The committee then faced the difficult task of devising a numerical scheme that would objectively assign positions to grades. Information about the mechanics of such a scheme was furnished by experienced local professionals in the field of job classification. The scheme finally developed takes into account two different variables: (1) the degree breakdown of the factors and (2) the percentage weights assigned to each factor. The objective of this scheme was to assign a point value to each degree of each factor. This would mean that a job could be rated numerically by determining the appropriate degree of each factor that the position required and then totaling the points assigned to degrees of each factor. This total score would then objectively reflect job value relative to other positions.

To complete the numerical scheme the procedure described below was followed:

1. A matrix was constructed consisting of the

maximum number of degrees (5) assigned any factor and the factors themselves (see Table 2).

2. The lowest common denominator of the number of degrees in all the factors was determined. That is, two factors had 5 degrees, two had 4, and one had 3; the lowest common denominator of 5, 4, and 3 is 60.
3. The lowest common denominator was then divided by the number of degrees assigned to each factor and this figure multiplied by the percent weight assigned to the factor.
4. The point value was entered in the cell of the matrix in which a degree was possible for that factor.

For example, the factor "administrative accountability" has 4 degrees. Taking the third degree, we divide the number of degrees in this factor, 4, into the lowest common denominator, 60, resulting in 15. Then, multiplying this figure and the percentage weight of this factor, 20, we obtain 300, which we then multiply by the degree to get 900 points, to be assigned to the third degree of the factor "administrative accountability."

To determine the maximum point value for any position in the library, we simply added the maxi-

TABLE 2
FACTOR POINT SCALE

Degrees	Education and Experience	Complexity and Difficulty of Work	Administrative Accountability	Contact with Users	Manual Skill
1	300	375	300	300	180
2	600	750	600	600	360
3	900	1,125	900	900	540
4	1,200	1,500	1,200	—	720
5	1,500	—	—	—	900
Maximum points per factor	1,500	1,500	1,200	900	900

mum number of points possible for all factors. In our scheme this figure was 6,000 points.

Grading Structure

The next step in the total process was to determine the point ranges to which grades should be assigned. For example, between what two point scores would Grade 3 positions fall? The dividing lines were determined from job values in the library. The committee, after painstakingly determining point values for each job in the library, used standard linear regression on the lowest, median, and highest point values to determine the dividing points between grades. Because this technique required that an odd number of grades be used, the committee added a fifth grade level to the previously existing four, rather than reduce the number of grades to three. The new grading structure is shown in Table 3.

In summary, the changes that were made in the method of evaluating the library's positions were: (1) more detailed factor descriptions, (2) the use of factor degrees, (3) alterations in the ranking and weighting of factors, and (4) the addition of a fifth grade. The revised system did have an effect on the distribution of jobs in the library. Although most jobs remained within the same class, several were reclassified because of those changes. None, however, needed downgrading because of conservative grading under the previous system. All changes in grade were consistent and well supported, and the correct grade level of several "borderline" jobs became more apparent, because the more refined factor criteria supported more subtle distinctions between job requirements. Guidelines for the new grade levels are presented in Appendix 2.

Presentation to the Library Staff

The final step in the staff classification process was to present the new system to the library staff. The committee felt strongly that, unless the staff both understood and accepted the plan, the system

would not be readily accepted or effectively implemented. The committee, as a representative body, presented the system to the staff in small departmental meetings. The presentations were carefully planned, using audiovisuals and participative exercises to help the employees fully understand the system. During the presentations answers to questions that were raised about where individuals fit into the new grading structure were deferred until private conferences with the individuals' department heads could be arranged. The presentations were well received, and staff understanding has proved to be an important factor in the successful implementation of the new system.

CONCLUSION

The ad hoc committee successfully completed its project in July 1977. Although the new grade structure was created from, and its validity tested by, the relative placement of the existing nonprofessional positions, the library was successful in developing a new classification system that could serve in the future as a workable administrative tool. The new system is internally consistent, provides enough data to support classification decisions, and clearly reflects the value of jobs within the library. The committee in its final report recommended that a permanent committee of similar composition be involved in the ongoing implementation of the classification system. It reasoned that (1) because job evaluation—no matter how objective the method used—is so dependent on judgment, a committee could make decisions based on wider experience and knowledge than could any one individual and (2) staff participation in the administration of the system would support the acceptance of the system. A permanent committee has since been formed and serves in an advisory capacity to the library administration. The committee, appointed yearly, meets regularly and serves to recommend grade-level assignments for new positions, to recommend classification changes for current positions because of changes in responsibility, and to audit position classifications regularly to insure fairness and consistency. The new system has continued to meet the library's need for a logical and equitable pay structure for its nonprofessional staff, and staff participation in its administration has played a vital role in the job satisfaction of library staff members.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Ad Hoc Committee on Staff Classification was composed of the following members: Sara Jean

TABLE 3
THE GRADING STRUCTURES

Grade	Point Ranges
1	2,139 and below
2	2,140-3,126
3	3,127-4,112
4	4,113-5,089
5	5,090 and above

SUPPORT STAFF IN A CONSORTIUM MEDICAL LIBRARY

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APPENDIX 1
DESCRIPTION OF THREE FACTORS

Complexity and Difficulty of Work

Explanation: The predictability or routineness of work performed determines the degree of judgment and versatility required to perform it.

Judgment: Quality and variety of decisions that must be made in response to problems or questions encountered while doing work.

Versatility: Ability to handle diverse routines concurrently.

Degree	Points	Description
1	375	Work consists primarily of a single predictable routine—photocopying, shelving, filing, etc. Minimal versatility and judgment required in completing that routine. Average initiation period: one month.
2	750	Some versatility required to effectively master several routines according to written or verbal instructions. Problems encountered in work are predictable and made within set procedures. Average initiation period: one to three months.
3	1,125	Moderate versatility and some judgment required in handling a variety of routines. Problems

Degree	Points	Description
		encountered in work are less predictable and not always covered by instructions. However, decisions are made according to existing precedent. Average initiation period: three to six months.
4	1,500	Requires considerable judgment and versatility in following diverse routines. Problems encountered are predictable. Decisions involve independent appraisal of alternatives. Average initiation period: six to twelve months.

Administrative Accountability

Explanation: This factor measures the extent to which the person in a position is accountable to the library for the performance of others in a unit or department or for administrative functions.

Degree	Points	Description
1	300	No administrative accountability.
2	600	Task supervision. Involves monitoring procedure(s) within the department head's area of responsibility. May be responsible for the initial training and ongoing instruction or direction of another person in the department. (At least forty hours FTE.)
3	900	Administrative assistance. 1. Primary responsibilities include assigned administrative accountability for department procedures or personnel in such areas as scheduling, updating department procedures manual, etc. May serve as contact person in department in absence of department head. 2. Primary responsibilities involve handling and bookkeeping of library's financial and budgetary records.
4	1,200	Accountable for the performance of a unit* or a department or for managerial functions such as planning, organizing, and implementing.

*A unit is defined in this context as a functional entity involving the work of at least two people in addition to a supervisor.

Discussion. In the highest degree of supervisory responsibility (Degree 4), the person in the position is delegated managerial authority; that is, in addition to performing the managerial functions such as planning, organizing, and directing, this person may be authorized with administrative consultation to hire, discipline, and dismiss others.

In Degree 3 the person facilitates the overall performance of the department through administrative functions or is accountable to the library administration for financial records, but has no managerial authority.

In Degree 2 the person may monitor the tasks of another in the department, but has no managerial authority to discipline, etc.

Contact with Users

Explanation. This factor measures the extent to which the person in a position is required to work in a public services or administrative capacity where certain personal traits are required for the job to be performed effectively. Such traits may include a professional attitude, tact, diplomacy, persuasiveness, a lack of defensiveness, a sensitivity to strangers, alertness, humor, patience, congeniality, good judgment, a pleasant speaking voice, and attention to appearance.

Degree	Points	Description
1	300	Job responsibilities do not include formal contact with library users.
2	600	Job responsibilities include approximately two hours daily routine face-to-face or phone contact with the library's public.
3	900	Primary job responsibilities bring one either into constant (approximately four hours daily) face-to-face or phone contact with the library's public (quantity of contact) or require contact involving highly sensitive administrative matters (quality of contact).

Discussion. It is through this factor that recognition is given to the particular requirements, not compensated for by other factors, of positions involving public contact. It is assumed that the "library's public" includes other libraries, as well as administrators from participating institutions in the Texas Medical Center.

Credit is given in Degree 3 for either the frequency and pressure of contact in public services or the quality of contact required in certain administrative positions.

APPENDIX 2
GUIDELINES FOR GRADES

Grade 1: Position Scale 2,139 and Below

A high school diploma is suggested for this grade. No experience is required. Work consists primarily of a single, predictable routine, such as shelving or photocopying, requiring no previously learned skill. Grade 1 jobs involve no administrative accountability and minimal contact with library users.

Grade 2: Position Scale 2,140-3,126

A high school diploma is suggested for Grade 2 jobs. In addition, either high school work relevant to the position or six months of experience is desirable. Work consists of several predictable routines that may require either some degree of manual skill or contact with users.

Grade 3: Position Scale 3,127-4,112

Either technical school, business school, community college, some college background, or at least one year of relevant experience, in addition to a high school diploma, is desirable for a position at this level. This is often a key public service position or one requiring considerable manual skill. Work requires moderate versatility and some judgment to solve problems that may occur. Position may involve administrative accountability.

Grade 4: Position Scale 4,113-5,089

A college degree or college or technical school background with three years of relevant experience are desirable to meet the performance standards of such a position. Work is complex and unpredictable, sometimes requiring a high degree of manual skill or contact with users. Position often requires considerable administrative accountability.

Grade 5: Position Scale 5,090 and Above

This grade is reserved for those few nonprofessional positions in which a high degree of almost all factors is required. In this position a college degree or college or technical school background with at least three years of experience is desirable. A high degree of skill may be required. Work is complex and unpredictable and would, in addition, involve both administrative accountability and contact with library users.