

## **Asia-Pacific Library and Information Conference 2018**

### **Lightning Talk: An overview and proposed outcomes**

#### **Presentation Title: Job Redesign: building staff capabilities for libraries of the future**

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#### **An Overview**

This is a sharing of experience on the ongoing efforts at job redesign by the Public Libraries of the National Library Board (NLB). The impetus for job redesign arose from the need to build a responsive future-ready workforce, competent in both functional and professional skills to deliver the Libraries of the Future (LoTF) Master Plan. NLB's aim is to develop a future-ready work force through:

- Upskilling and redesigning jobs that align to the delivery of new services that enhance the customers' experience
- Building staff competencies through a robust staff development process

The visitorship and loans of the public libraries in Singapore had increased steadily until 2011. But since then, a sharp decline was observed. These trends were also detected in other public libraries internationally, such as UK, US, Australia and Hong Kong. The declines in Singapore were due to higher penetration of internet and smart phone that facilitate easy access to an abundance of free content, competing demand on users' leisure time, and greater affordability to purchase print and e-books.

The LoTF Master Plan has set out the ambition for NLB public library services for the next 5 years (2016-2021) to reinvent itself and to reverse the declining trends of visitorship and loans of public libraries.

From 2016 and over the next 2 to 3 years, four segments of jobs in the Public Libraries (PLs) will be redesigned and these include: Managers, Librarians, Library Officers and Administrative Officers. This would likely be the largest scale job redesign and upskilling done in NLB, involving over 300 staff. We will provide a quick look at the structure of the PL and the different levels of job and roles. In fact, the journey of Job Redesign had started prior to 2016 with us making effort to build a culture for staff to be receptive to adaptation and changes in job scope and motivated in continuous learning.

The focus of this presentation is on the job redesign of the Library Officers (LOs, otherwise referred to as para-professionals), and the shift in their jobs to take on higher value added work. We will share on what made it possible, from conceptualization to implementation, and briefly touch on the following areas:

1. The Public Library Operations Structure
2. The need for change
3. Engaging The Organization and Managing Change
4. Training for Library Officers and Librarians
5. Implementation – Challenges Faced

One of the main reason that made it possible for the job redesign effort to be implemented on such a wide-scale is because the public libraries exist under a single network ie NLB. Such a structure allows the seeding of a culture that could spark the

interest in staff to change and adapt so as to be proactive to changes, whether it is internal change or external pressure.

**Outcomes:**

The job redesign for LOs has gone into the implementation stage but evaluation on the effectiveness of the change will continue. The changes in the work flow provided the LOs with the bandwidth to assume higher value work which used to be done by librarians. We are mindful that some staff would need a longer period to adapt to their roles and the changes made took this into account as well.

We continuously track the learning points from the initial efforts at job redesigning and take note of feedback both from staff and customers. We use different instruments to gain insights into work processes and areas for improvement; from commissioning a manpower study by an external firm to conducting internal surveys, focus group sessions and meetings with staff, as well as feedback received during training sessions. Feedback from patrons were gathered through daily customer engagement, both face-to-face and via feedback channels.

The initial feedback received has been heartening and positive as staff cited an increase in motivation at work especially with the deepened knowledge and skills in customer engagement. However, we also note the areas to improve in the work process and implementation as well as adapting to varying staff's capability to assume the new scope.

While the LOs adapt to their new roles, we have started to look into redesigning the job of librarians so that their competency in information management and content knowledge would be further tapped to help users to better navigate resources in this internet age and keep pace with the advance information landscape. We will also be looking into the manager's job redesign, the outcome of which is to focus on creating new values for the community.

The Job Redesign initiative was executed to streamline our staff skills to deliver services and content that are shaped not only by the changing trends and technology but to support the national strategic direction. With the re-designed jobs, we aim to be more effective in delivering the vision of NLB's Libraries of the Future Master Plan, which is to provide seamless access to information, deliver personalised and customized services to library users and foster collaborative learning.

This is a continuous journey for NLB. While we move on to the next phases, it is important to continue the streamlining of operations/work processes and DIY services so that we could enhance staff's capability and content knowledge. On a wider spectrum, NLB has a role to play in promoting and supporting the national agenda of building A Smart Nation. Our programmes and services would have to be extended to promote digital readiness and support the development of future skills.