The Role of Ethics in Library and Information Practice

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Applied ethics finds application in all spheres of social life, one of which is the field of library and information science. Ethics is an important pillar contributing to the systematic order of the library and its collection. Ethical principles are contained in key documents such as the Librarian's Code of Ethics, partly in the Library (Lending) Regulations, and should therefore be adopted by every member of staff. The library profession consists not only of working with information, namely making it available, but also of setting up effective communication towards users (readers) in the form of defining optimal solutions eliminating the problems that arise. The aim of our efforts is to capture the most common problems that arise from misunderstandings between librarian and user (reader) and to make clear what specific role ethical values play in library and information practice.

Keywords: ethics, librarianship, communication, information, management

Introduction

Ethical rules guarantee the functioning of society because they contribute to the common good. The good is a universal ethical category reflecting the principle of moral action, which is related to the properly adjusted inner voice of man in the form of conscience. Conscience here performs the function of a voice shaping the thoughts and opinions of the human individual. Conscience educates to responsibility fulfilling the status of an important moral value of man. Ethics as a philosophical discipline exploring morality plays a key role here. The aim of ethics as a social science discipline is to set moral parameters related to knowledge, doing good, and achieving the general welfare. The general welfare encompasses the material and spiritual conditions necessary for the functioning of society as a whole; it is, by the way, an elementary human need with an ethical charge (Vajda, 2004). It is a value embodying the good translated into a normative form, to which the different types of ethical codes refer. In practice, codes of ethics possess strong moral authority contributing to social welfare (Byrne, 2002). Nowadays it is very difficult to reach a general consensus. Society is totally polarised by politicians from both streams of opinion, there are constant culture wars, pointless arguments about which superpower will guarantee us peace, etc. The main interest of modern globalisation is also to spread tension through the protagonists, which often also serves to distract attention from other important issues, especially economic ones (the rise in poverty, the price of food, etc.). Even the greatest peacemaker can never, in his efforts, get everyone to like each other. Then we would have to live in a Potemkin village. Consensus is virtually impossible, but some compromise can be achieved through mutual respect. The key essence of respect is that each person is free to express his or her opinion publicly without fear of any possible persecution. At present, we live in a kind of vacuum in which one immutable truth is presented through the media and any opponent is automatically branded as an inconvenient individual.

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A pluralistic society should emphasize the diversity of opinions, points of view, and perceptions on the issues discussed about the direction of society. Words such as respect and tolerance are an excellent remedy for the sore wounds of society. It is only after adopting the aforementioned practice of cementing public opinion that we will be able to move forward as a society. The issue of mutual respect is a very topical issue from a social point of view.

Methodology

The contribution reflects on the position of the library and information services employee infield practice through the prism of defining personal contribution as well as occupational risks. The above issues are explored in applied ethics as a content standard through the definition of value aspects. The aim of this contribution is to define the contact parameters between ethics and library and information science, which is particularly evident in interpersonal relationships (librarian versus user/reader), to clarify the practical mission of the Librarian's Code of Ethics (IFLA), and to point out the importance of adhering to ethical parameters in cataloguing. In general, we will work with a descriptive method, the purpose of which is to capture the position of the librarian and the purpose of compliance with the legislative process in library and information practice. In places we will also use thematic analysis in bridging the interplay between ethics and library and information science. Our efforts will culminate in a synthesis reflecting on the behavioral dimension of the library and information services employee at the end of the contribution.

Ethics and Library and Information Science

There is a kind of mutual symbiosis between ethics and library and information science, which mainly concerns social relations. In this context, behavioral regulators also come into play, replicating legislative regulations and the nature of the social climate. Rules of good behavior educate and humanize society. In this respect, we see their greatest benefit, particularly in raising social awareness. Social awareness must meet the attributes of a functioning whole guaranteeing the normality and fairness of ethical conduct. The ethical theory of utilitarianism is generally logical: "The moral criterion of an action is its usefulness in producing goodness, happiness, well-being. What is ethically significant is not the motive or the intention or the moral subject, but the result of the action, the act." (Fobelová, Martinkovičová, & Čierna, 2018, p. 14). The resultant effect of a completed act is judged in light of the prevailing atmosphere in society.

We also find ethics implemented in the development of library and information services. The basis of a librarian's work is communication with people, more precisely with individual categories of users (readers) regardless of socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education). In this context, it is necessary to adapt the communication style to children and young people, adults and seniors, university students, secondary school students, disadvantaged groups, as well as to users who have completed only primary education, on the basis of the given criteria. The librarian should have respect for the person, the basis of which is an open, friendly approach, the proper aim of which is a sensitive perception of the user's (reader's) needs in the form of a clear ability to capture and, above all, anticipate his or her expectations. The need for active listening in the form of mutual dialogue is in place here:

> Dialogue is an important attribute of ethical competence in practice. We regard it as a means that creates the precondition for the successful institutionalization of ethics and, in the process of ethics enforcement itself, as a means of strengthening the ethical environment in the organization. (Fobel, 2012, p. 17)

Librarians see their work not only as a profession, but also as a mission because it is a public service. Librarian Ľubica Korgová in her paper states a remarkable fact: "The meaning of the librarian's work should be the awareness that he is it for the user and not the user for him." (2004, p. 107).

Psychologically, he/she must have a healthy self-esteem, it is not desirable if the library profession is carried out by a person with a strongly introverted and extroverted nature, because this may discourage many users (readers). The trigger for the above case is managerial problems related to the strong self-esteem of the librarian, which may also make the user (reader) feel inferior, oppressed and may discourage him/her from visiting the library in the future. Similarly, if the library profession is carried out by a strong introvert, when the overall credit of the employee is lowered, the librarian needs to empathize with the user's needs and understand their world. The essence of librarianship is the building of social contacts and relationships:

> Relationships in the library, as a service-providing institution, are based on temporal and spatial proximity and a common interest—on the part of the librarian—to provide, on the part of the user to obtain a service, information, etc. (Voznıková 2011, p. 308)

The aforementioned mastery is a guarantee of success in the form of building trust between the librarian and the user (reader). Trust is the key to maintaining social contacts. The librarian represents the cultural and scientific organization externally, so he or she should take care not only about how he or she behaves towards others, but also how he or she dresses. Dress is also a statement of attitude towards others (specifically colleagues, but also visitors). Dress etiquette is particularly important in communicating with the public. Clothing must meet the attributes of cleanliness and decency. In this context, the attribute of moderation in dress also comes into play. This is the virtue of good feelings (the ability to empathize with others) avoiding any extreme that crosses the boundaries of decency (Rajský, 2021). Ripped and baggy pants and shirts, short miniskirts, low-cut blouses, dirty shoes, and the use of repulsive fashion accessories (for example piercings, long nails, etc.) are considered to be absolutely inappropriate clothing. The above issues resulting from inappropriate dress contribute to the library's diminished credibility. Librarians have a role in creating the image of the library as an organization. The issue of aesthetics is also linked to the library profession. Aesthetics is a scientific category that explores beauty and consequently ennobles the human spirit. Society must stand on established values in the form of building ethical rules if it is to survive and move forward. The foundation is to do no harm to others. The importance of the librarian's social responsibility lies primarily in the provision of information services in the interest of social, cultural, and economic prosperity (IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers, 2012). Making information accessible is extremely important for the functioning of the library process as a whole. The librarian is expected to have refined skills in the form of bridging a clear alignment between social, cultural, and economic values.

All these values practically educate us for responsibility. Ethical values are integrated, indivisible, and universally applicable. In a global sense, they contribute to the sustainable development of society (Pechočiaková Svitačová, 2020). Library practice is a great example of skill acquisition. The goal of responsibility is to learn the rules that need to be respected, even in the form of the ability to handle individual stressful situations. The librarian often has to act promptly to meet the needs of the user (reader). This position is filled by a person who is knowledgeable in the field, feels and acts humanely, has a sense of team communication, and has no problem with routine administrative tasks. Proficiency in administration is a key requirement for admission to the post of library and information services staff. Information literacy is a benchmark for a librarian to be true in the course

of his/her profession. Closely related to librarianship is the automation process, by which we mean the use of computer and telecommunication technology in the library in order to increase the quality and efficiency of library-information services (Zendulková 2005). The librarian has perfect computer skills, can work with MS WORD processor, MS EXCEL spreadsheet editor, can also prepare a presentation in MS PowerPoint, electronic mail is implemented through MS Outlook software. Knowledge of written communication is based on the librarian's precise stylistic skills (appropriate choice of linguistic devices, adherence to word order, etc.), grammatical principles (correct writing of small and capital letters, iota and epsilon, knowledge of punctuation marks, etc.), and linguistic skills (mastery of spelling terms, etc.). Knowledge of a foreign language (English) is also required, particularly when dealing with foreign e-mail correspondence. Language is also a significant means of communication with the public. Librarians in their profession can get by with ordinary conversation in a foreign language, they don't have to perform excellently as in large corporations, it is enough if they know typical phrases (e.g. Could I help you in any way? What (what book title) would you like to borrow? ...). From the librarian's point of view, eye contact and face-to-face communication are necessary in the conversation with the reader (user). Any transgression is a manifestation of the librarian's insecurity in their profession.

The position of librarian should therefore be held by an individual with strong principles who has a sense of meeting deadlines, building team spirit, and also working on personal (career) development. The librarian is constantly subject to a learning process, especially in information technology. Related to information technology is software work. Knowledge of library computer programs is essential here. The librarian is trained under the supervision of a competent staff member (tutor) in the use of the various library and information systems. The library of the Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava works with the KOHA library-information system, which was developed at the Slovak National Library in Martin. This library software is quite easy to manipulate data related to the registration of loans, return or reservation of library documents, and their search in the working catalogue. Librarians use the KOHA library information system to create a new holding record defining the location of the document in the library collection (creation of a signature, accession number, etc.). Within the procedure, mandatory and optional fields are filled in. Mandatory fields refer to the filling in of the name of the processed document, the creation of the label, the date and time of the transaction, the definition of general information, and the agency that carries out the relevant cataloguing (for example, The University Library in Bratislava, The Slovak National Museum-Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava, etc.). Optional fields reflect the publisher data of the document, language, annotation, subject headings (MDT creation), the name of the document author, or if they are not filled in, nothing happens; the system simply lets us go on.

Working with data is important in cataloguing. The individual data files are stored on a fixed medium resembling an electronic information database. What is required of the librarian here is a reliable approach, the importance of which lies in the precision and logicalness of the data processing. Cataloguing rules must be respected because they contribute to the orderly organization of the library collection, for which the librarian assumes responsibility (manages and makes available). This also raises considerations about the ethical parameters of cataloguing, which protect the interests not only of cataloguers and users, but also of reference librarians in library and information services. Cataloguing ethics encompasses a set of ethical principles and values that provide an important guide for the work of cataloguers and metadata creators (Špániová, 2023). Here, the logical statement applies, "The prevailing view is that the more detailed the bibliographic record, the faster and more efficient the library's provision of reference information services, and vice versa." (Špániová, 2023, p. 155). The competence of a librarian depends on the proper justification of each work action performed. Regularity

of actions contributes to a kind of dynamism. The cataloguer's work contributes to the sorting and storage of the library collection, to make it available to the user (reader); it is mostly routine work.

Library (borrowing) regulations govern the relationship between the librarian and the user (reader). It is the basic strategic document for the implementation of library services—special, supplementary, and methodological. Its established rules must be respected because they guarantee order and security. The library (borrowing) regulations are drawn up by the library, must be available in a publicly accessible place, and mention the method, scope, and payment for the provision of library and information services (Zákon o knižniciach č. 126/2015 Z. z). As far as lending services are concerned, the library of the Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava also provides absentee services (the possibility of borrowing documents outside the library premises) for internal readers (domestic employees). The borrowing period is a matter of mutual agreement between the librarian and the user (reader). For external readers, individual documents are available only in the form of a presentation (the possibility of viewing documents only on the library premises). The visitor is entitled to make photographic records using mobile scanning technology (iPhones, tablets). In this regard, it is necessary to respect the Copyright Act, on the basis of which the visitor may make records only for study purposes, not for commercial purposes (Autorský zákon č. 185/2015 Z. z). From an ethical point of view, there is an overlap between the values of honesty, responsibility, and conscientiousness. These ethical values are intended to contribute to the strengthening of a person's cultural identity. Igor Lomnický, a university teacher, explains the essence of cultural identity in more detail:

> The essential ideas revealing the issue of cultural identity are the broad area of cultural tolerance, which can be best demonstrated through valuable human creations in specific multidimensional creative activities. To understand this context, it is important to understand culture and its moral postulates. (Lomnický, 2011, p. 21)

The common denominator of ethical values is respect for the written rules that are enshrined in the library (lending) regulations. If they are circumvented, the potential user (reader) is threatened with economic sanctions. In the event of failure to return a borrowed document, he/she is obliged to replace it with an identical, different document or pay a fine. Similarly, the borrowed document must be handled carefully by the user (reader) to avoid any damage. Disciplined behavior is also extremely important in the field of librarianship. One learns discipline almost throughout life. In this, too, ethics greatly aids his socialization. The code of ethics mentioned above is also a key means of socializing a librarian (Schachaf, 2005). The SNM-Museum of Jewish Culture library provides library and information services for readers during selected time periods, namely weekdays (Monday to Friday) from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm. The visitor (external reader) is obliged to announce his/her visit to the library in advance to the responsible staff member, who is the librarian. He/she should contact the librarian in writing by email or by telephone. The external reader studies the borrowed documents in the SNM-Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava library. The electronic document reader is not available in our library due to capacity reasons (small space, note by the author). The study of documents is carried out under the professional supervision of a librarian. This service is provided free of charge to the reader.

Education and Problems of Librarians

Librarians exchange expertise through training events on combating misinformation, ICT development, and methodological advice for libraries. The status of a training event is fulfilled by a scientific seminar, an international conference, or a symposium. Individual events are products of libraries because they are held in the

communal spaces of the institutions concerned. Here it is necessary to pay attention to the promotion of cultural events as much time as to their organization, especially through social media (Hrčková, 2017). The importance of educational events lies in the socialization and integration of the library and information services employee into the work process. The meeting of the supporters of the Society of Slovak Librarians and Libraries (further SSKK) is held at least once a year, the main initiative is taken by the chairwoman of the SSKK, its content is usually related to the annual report for the previous calendar year (library management), the introduction of new members of the SSKK (each participant gives his/her name, surname, institution, and job title), and a small treat in the form of refreshments. The meeting is usually held in the spring months and is estimated to last about two hours. Another important event is Week of Slovak Libraries, which is also organized by the National Bank of Slovakia during the spring months. The aim of the event is to raise awareness of libraries for different generations of readers. Lectures by experts working in the field of librarianship, science, and information are presented at the event. Individual libraries are conceived as cultural and scientific institutions, educational and research centers, and centers of mutual learning. The libraries' staffs inform the public about their services, cooperation, most often in the framework of interlibrary loan services, and present the library collection. Participants have the opportunity to ask additional questions of the presenters in order to stimulate discussion. The Slovak National Museum-Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava librarians also participates in methodological trainings (for example Music Cabinet, Cabinet of Manuscripts, Old and Rare Prints of the University Library in Bratislava, Slovak National Library, Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, The Museum of Education and Pedagogy), events aimed at launching new books and mapping diplomatic missions (for example NATO Depository Library of the University Library in Bratislava), and engages in publishing activities in periodicals focusing on librarianship issues (for example Knižnica, Bulletin Slovenskej asociácie knižníc, Informačné technológie a knižnice). Publication activities include the production of articles mapping the library's scientific and research activities: The SNM-Museum of Jewish Culture (for example Rešeršné služby knižnice, Využitie knižnično-informačného systému KOHA pre potreby katalogizácie fondov SNM-MŽK, Tridsať rokov knižnice SNM-Múzea židovskej kultúry). Readers can learn more about the mission of the museum library. Specialist libraries generally address the tasks arising from the activities of the museum department, fulfill the status of important information sources, and generally provide services to research, cultural, and management staff (Matthaeidesová, 1984). Publishing information about the library has its own charm, as it is a form of publicity to spread the reputation of the institution. Authors of articles are obliged to provide truthful, relevant, and balanced information. The librarian's code of ethics falls under the area of deontological ethics. In general, the code represents a set of rules and guidelines for a given group of people, which must be respected with regard to specific moral values and standards (Zaviš, 2017). Codes of ethics are undergoing professional adjustment, acquiring a new specialization, until recently the most discussed issue was related to the solution of ethical dilemmas of library and information workers (Korgová, 2010). In this case, by ethical dilemmas we mean the unraveling of a puzzle of steps related to personnel issues in the library and information sphere, especially in the matter of staff selection (quality versus connections), or their dismissal (due to organizational changes), borrowing library documents (granting an exemption for absentee study for a well-known media personality), and so on. These are difficult decisions to be made by the head of the department or the director of the cultural institution. The key is to arrive at a principled position that is least damaging to the institution's reputation. The privacy of the individual must also be properly protected. Incidentally, privacy protection is a part of information policy, the importance of which lies in the regulation of the creation, dissemination, and use of information (Šušol,

2011). The Librarian shall not publish the name list of library patrons through the press. This form of protection is also guaranteed by GDPR. General information about the library can be presented through the online space of a particular website. Ideally, it should be accessible in both languages, Slovak and English. Library Slovak National Museum-Museum of Jewish Culture does not yet have its own website, we are open to the vision of setting one up in the future. We would like to consult with experts in web development (IT staff). In this context, we also want to place emphasis on the graphic aspect of the website, whose value lies in attracting the attention of the readers as much as possible. The issue of web design is particularly important in the field of marketing communication. Information needs not only to be conveyed, but also to be made available in an engaging and attractive way. In this aspect lies the mastery of the success of the library and information services employee.

Conclusion

Ethics is intrinsically linked to librarianship, the importance of which also lies in service to others. This social science discipline is linked to the field of interpersonal relations, which are particularly important in cultural institutions. Interpersonal relations in general must meet the elementary attributes of decency and normality, because they guarantee the functioning of society as a whole. Employees of library and information services are obliged to acquaint themselves informatively with key legislative documents contributing to a certain extent to the social order. Codes of ethics are generally normative in nature, their purpose being to take into account the nature of established social values in the state. Established social values are mainly linked to the construction of a systemic order that is sacred to public opinion. The librarian must have a refined ability to inform the public correctly, recommending relevant sources for study to readers (users) based on logical facts. In conveying information, staff meet the standard of objectivity, which is a matter of the rules of decorum. An important part of the library profession is the question of the librarian's social responsibility not only to others but also to himself. In this case, responsibility is a dichotomous category emphasizing, on the one hand, the need to meet the diverse needs of users (readers), where a great deal of courage, prompt response, and humanity are required; on the other hand, the librarian must face new challenges in the form of further training to improve his or her qualifications. The status of a library and information services worker can only be held by a person who knows and applies the laws of ethical behavior, understands the cultural processes in a globalised society and values, above all, the freedom and dignity of human beings. The librarian fulfils the function of an assistant in solving individual problems of the user (reader) by helping him/her to find an ethically acceptable starting point, copying the observance of generally valid moral standards. In general, the position of librarian is to be held by a humanly mature personality with moral values who respects the principles of goodness, truth, and justice. A librarian with a properly adjusted moral compass is inspired by them in the exercise of his profession, which to some extent contributes to the ethization of society. In the present post-modern era, it is also necessary to pay attention to the question of the formation of man from a moral point of view. The above criterion poses a challenge for the exploration of a portfolio of applied ethics addressing also the problems of the librarian in field (employee) practice.

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