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Abstract

"Time is an illusion, lunchtime doubly so" said Ford Prefect, in The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams (2005). Lunch (and time) flies! However, thinking about time can be heavy. It flies, slips away, passes, heals, and is lost, found, made, wasted, spent, used, counted and killed. Still it continues, and each one of us must figure out what to do with it—an entire dimension. Few would argue that it is important to use time well, but we often take for granted our largely untrained, yet skillful, accomplishment of that goal. Time is important, critical in fact, yet we seldom spend it honing our management talents. If we do decide to take the time, there exists no lack of literature to help. What does that literature tell us? This study will review book literature on time management in libraries and present a time study that is the result of the author's research on the topic, providing recommendations for future studies.

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Originate, Create, Renovate, and Innovate: Leading Revolution in the Academic Library

Where Did My Time Go? Time Management in Libraries

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Abstract

"Time is an illusion, lunchtime doubly so" said Ford Prefect, in *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (2005). Lunch (and time) flies! However, thinking about time can be heavy. It flies, slips away, passes, heals, and is lost, found, made, wasted, spent, used, counted and killed. Still it continues, and each one of us must figure out what to do with it—an entire dimension. Few would argue that it is important to use time well, but we often take for granted our largely untrained, yet skillful, accomplishment of that goal. Time is important, critical in fact, yet we seldom spend it honing our management talents. If we do decide to take the time, there exists no lack of literature to help. What does that literature tell us? This study will review book literature on time management in libraries and present a time study that is the result of the author's research on the topic, providing recommendations for future studies.

Literature Review

As Hines writes (2010, p. 1), a "cottage industry" promoting personal productivity experienced a boom in the 1950s and 1960s, as the study of productivity and job effectiveness grew from labor economics into management psychology and business, and as the United States experienced a boom in productivity. This attention to personal productivity grew through the self-improvement movement of the 1960s and 1970s. A search of WorldCat on the subject phrase "time management" (limited to books), conducted on November 11, 2010, illuminates the growth in associated publications during these years (Fig. 1).

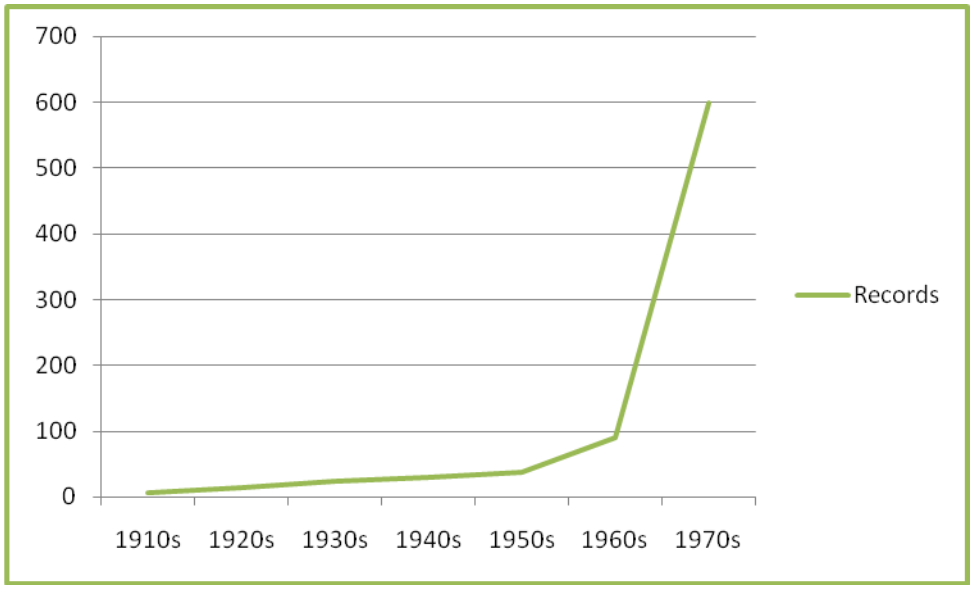

Figure 1. Number of records in WorldCat (viewed Nov. 11, 2010) with subject heading "time management," by publication date.

By the 1980s, there are too many records for WorldCat to display without further qualification. The subject focus also experiences a change over time, as time management for homemakers and salesmen begins to be accompanied by time management for teachers, students and principals, and subsequently by time management for business, and general time management in the 1960s. Although several publications have emphasized time management in school libraries or special libraries, this study will focus on libraries in general and academic libraries. As might be expected, similar ideas and concepts recur in the literature, with some shifts over time.

Although Thomas and Ward published an "exploratory survey" in 1973, time management literature in book form, targeted specifically toward libraries and librarians, does not show up in force until the 1980s. Journal articles also begin to show significantly in the 1980s, a time when there were "dramatic changes in the role of the academic librarian, with some of these changes due, in part, to the increased availability of and improved access to computing and information technology (Rice-Lively, p. 33). According to Rice-Lively's timeline (p. 39), this is a time when there were murmurings of a "paperless society" and the "end of libraries," which may very well have contributed to a greater focus on personal performance.

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The Thomas and Ward 1973 exploratory study, according to Burkett (1976), showed that:

"a very large proportion of a chief librarian's time is spent on non-routine and unscheduled activities. Many and complex demands claim his attention. There seem to be few settled periods devoted to a single activity. Especially worrying is the time to read and think." (Rice-Lively, p. 22)

In 1986, Gothberg and Riggs published *Time Management Study in Academic Libraries* as the final report of a Librarian/Scholar Grant from the Council on Library Resources. Continuing a management emphasis, the paper studied time management among directors of large academic libraries, and includes information on delegation, time wasters, and hours and percentages of time spent on management activities.

In the early 1990s, books were published drawing the focus away from management and toward a more general library audience. Among them is Cochran's *Time Management Handbook for Librarians.* Paquette, in a review of the publication, writes "Librarians have a heightened interest in a need for time management skills, and this book recognizes the unique nature of library operations," adding "For most of us the library school curriculum did not address such practical skills (Paquette, 1992, p. 391). Cochran's book catered to small or one-person staff libraries, according to Paquette, with on the job examples.

Later in the decade (1997), *Getting Results with Time Management* by Ailsa Masterton was published in the Successful LIS professional series. Oppenheim wrote about this book that it lacked coverage of existing time management products (software and hard copy), but that "broad principles—why manage time; how time is wasted; planning; why meeting[s] fail … good time management practice, including personal organization; and the use of the diary, are well explained" (Oppenheim, 1998, p. 164). Oppenheim also mentions that the book contains blank sample worksheets.

The new millennium brought Siess' *Time Management, Planning, and Prioritization for Librarians* (2002). This book is touted as especially supportive of librarians with few support staff (to which to delegate work). Although the book is written for librarians, much of the content is derived or adapted from popular business authors, such as Stephen R. Covey and Robert Kaplan. An appendix provides blank forms, also adapted from popular business, and often without adaptations making them unique to libraries. Siess quotes Cochran, indicating that librarians do not manage time as much as they should because they have not been trained to do so (p. 20). She also claims a dearth of both professional literature and continuing education opportunities in time management. This training is essential because "librarians feel that the principles of time management—planning, prioritization, and saying no—are not compatible with good library practice" (p. 19).

In the second chapter of the book, devoted to time management, Siess covers efficiency versus effectiveness (we need both); getting organized; timing (when to work and when not to); time-use analysis, and procrastination. "The most important tool for time management," Siess writes, "is a time audit or time log" (p. 28). Her time audit includes a beginning estimate of how time is spent, to be compared to the actual measurements. The appendix includes a time log form on which to list activities and times, under the sample topics of "Quick reference; Phone; Circulation; Online and WWW; Housekeeping; In-House Meeting; Outside meeting; Professional activities; and Personal. A sample time log form is presented filled out for one person's one-day morning time-use.

A publication that includes time management and draws on the strengths of theories in business in a more focused manner is the most recent--Samantha Hines' 2010 *Productivity for Librarians: How to Get More Done in Less Time.* Hines chooses a few popular productivity theories and focuses on them. They include: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People; Getting Things Done; The Four-Hour Workweek; and Zen to Done, among a few others. The topics she covers in the time management chapter include: identifying peak productivity times; defending your time; multitasking; meetings; office hours; priorities;

delegating; and calendar tools. An annotated, subject organized bibliography includes many web resources and includes reviews of web-based tools, updating the technology of tools offered. Hines feels that librarians "merit a whole book on productivity" because of three factors: "de-professionalisation, the proliferation of information resources, and the growing expectation of immediate gratification by users" (p. 5). De-professionalization can result in radical responsibility changes. She mentions catalogers who are forced to manage, and reference staff who might perform marketing, while students or paraprofessionals perform their traditional duties. Patrons researching on the internet rather than in the libraries may reduce support, which increases financial pressure on the institutions. The second two factors, "infobesity" and users' expectations, are well-known time pressures.

One thing that becomes very clear in a review of the literature of time management in libraries, and of time management in general, is that there are many similarities in topical coverage and in tools promoted (to-do lists, for example), although the technology may change. Advice is largely derivative of other sources and repetitive. One of the reasons the author chose to focus on one small group of publications is that many of the publications on time management are similar. Much that is written in a book like *Managing Time* (Walster, 1993), written for public and school librarians, could be applied in another setting, an academic library for example.

Another clear point from the literature is that librarian responsibilities continue to undergo radical change, sometimes creating stress. Professional librarians might not be able to control the demands of users or the advances of technology, but they usually have a degree of control over how they spend their time. This control is "a powerful tool in reducing stress and getting more done and it can be accomplished with a little hard work and dedication" (Hines, 2010, p. 7).

A review of the literature shows that most resources include a "time diary" or "time log" as a place to begin time use analysis. Few provide more than a cursory example of an actual time log. In this study an actual time log will be evaluated in terms of usefulness.

Method

This was a time study with one participant, the author, a professional cataloger, M.F.A., M.L.S., at a mid-sized academic university in the Midwest. The participant has been cataloging for 15 years, all of which were worked at institutions requiring statistical gathering as a routine job function. She has experience of 9 years of light time analysis (up to five or six tasks), with tasks assigned to every 15 minutes.

Time was recorded for the study using BubbleTimer, an internet personal productivity application—http://bubbletimer.com (2008-2010). BubbleTimer records time by task in 15 minute increments. The application can produce a report for total time spent on each task daily, or a report for the total time spent on all tasks for a custom defined span of time (defined by user). Reports can be exported to Excel spreadsheets. Tasks are defined by the user.

The study was conducted using data from a two month span of time, from August 1, 2010 to September 30, 2010. Tasks were defined informally during the course of the study. On 10/11/2010, the author generated a report from BubbleTimer that included a breakdown of daily totals as well as a total for each task for the entire period. Vacation time, sick time, lunch time and breaks were not included in the study. Any time worked beyond a 40 hour workweek is included. The researcher concentrated on discovering how much time she spends on traditional cataloging tasks.

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Results

Data resulting from the exercise is as follows (Figure 2). Measurements are in hours:

Figure 2

Assessment Committee	2.50
Cataloging—Axe	66.50
Cataloging Training	1.50
Colleague Support	1.00
Consortium Service	11.25
Cataloging—Career Center	1.25
Database Maintenance	41.75
Displays	10.00
Email	17.75
Farm History Project	2.00
International Friends	41.50
Leadership Training	2.25
Liaison Duties	5.25
Library Committee	5.50
Cataloging—MS—Bays	3.50
Mending	6.50
Name Authority Cooperative	10.00
Planning	3.00
Product Research	7.25
Professional Development	20.50
Reference	12.25
Research	3.50
Staff Meeting	4.00
Tenure Dossier	23.50
Time Management	0.75
Web Committee	2.25
Total	307.00

Charts were created with minimal expertise in the use of Microsoft Excel. The author found it easier to enter the data from printed report sheets rather than use the export function of Bubble Timer.

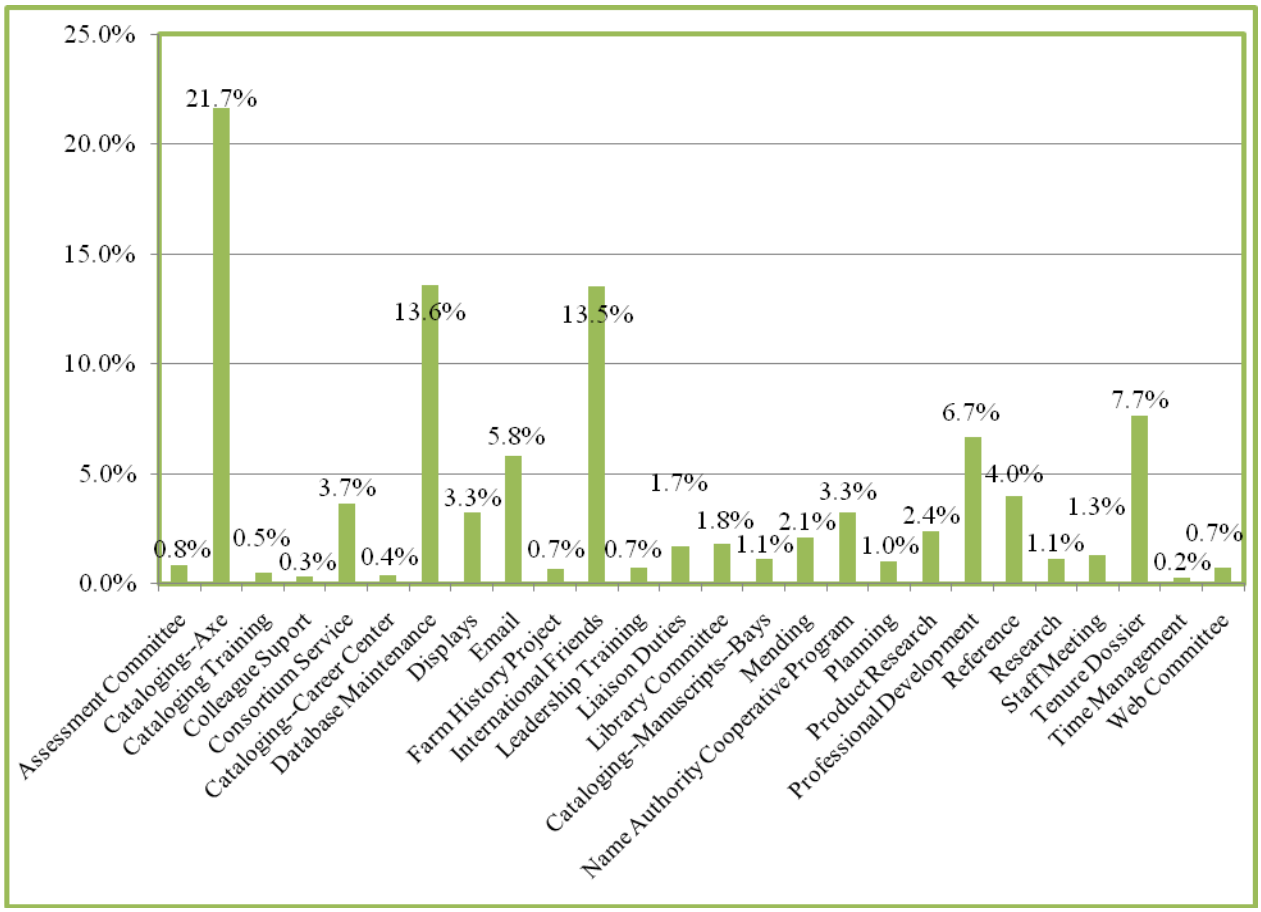

Figure 3. Two-month study of time percentages spent on researcher-defined tasks.

It is possible that a researcher with more Excel experience might find it easy to manipulate data directly from the export. Figure 3 charts the resulting data set as percentages of time spent on each activity. Task labels reflect informal gathering of an initial data set in an environment of changing responsibilities. A future study would possibly benefit from finer analysis of tasks and task categories. For example, cataloging activities might be analyzed in more detail by cataloging task, such as copy cataloging, original cataloging, etc.

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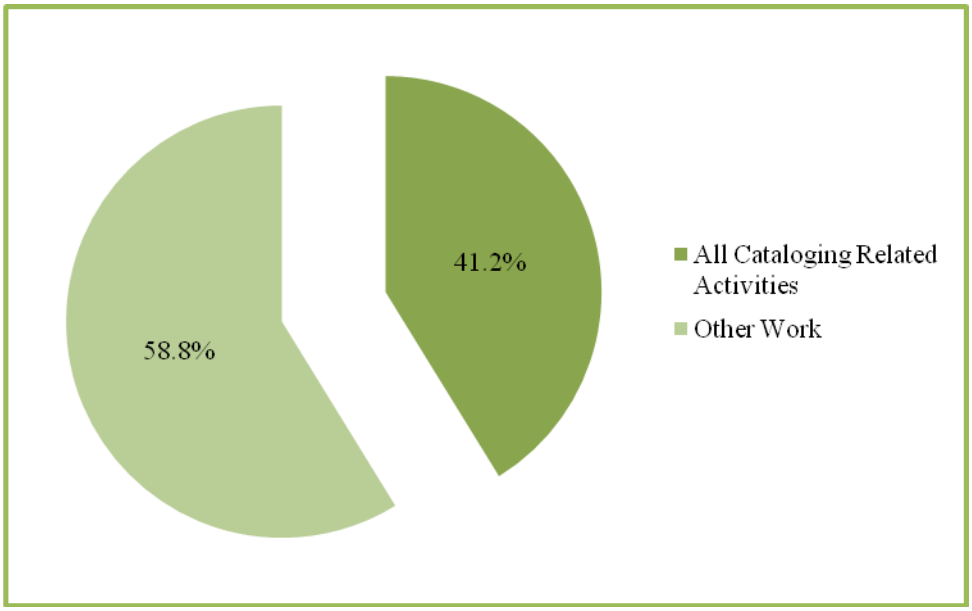

Figure 4. Chart of cataloging related activities vs. other activities.

In Figure 4, cataloging related activities include: “Cataloging Axe” materials (Axe is the main library); cataloging special collections (“Manuscripts—Bays”, and “Farm History Project”); “Cataloging—Career Center” (i.e. CRC, a small on-campus library); “Cataloging Training”; “Name Authority Cooperative Program” (i.e. NACO; institution is independent in personal name creation in the National Authority File, and is currently training in other NACO functions); “Database Maintenance” (this includes authority work in the library database and any bibliographical changes such as deletes, merges, and revisions). Cataloging activities alone are charted in Figure 5, where the two categories of special collections cataloging are considered combined.

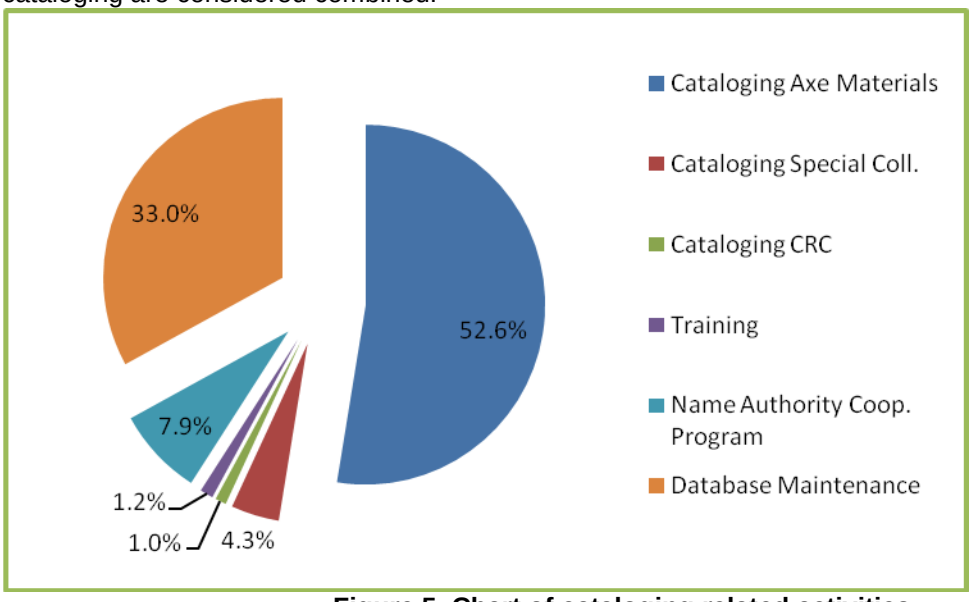

Figure 5. Chart of cataloging related activities.

Discussion

Although the researcher did not write an initial prediction as Siess suggests (2002, p. 28), she was not surprised that, during the study period, she spent a majority of time on non-cataloging activities (Figs. 3&4) in her changing environment. Although the cataloger spent more time cataloging materials for the main library than she did any other task, other tasks combined overshadow cataloging. International Friends, a non-cataloging, non-library related University service task, takes up a surprisingly large portion of time. This duty is seasonal, so studies over a longer period of time (1 or 2 years, perhaps, in an academic environment) might reveal a more balanced percentage. E-mail takes up too much time, while Research and Liaison Duties (interfacing with faculty) possibly do not take up enough time for a balanced workload in this position. The researcher was also surprised that maintenance of the catalog commanded such a large percentage of cataloging activities (Fig. 5).

These realizations are quite valuable, in the researcher's immediate performance of her duties and perhaps as valuable over a long period of time. For example, she might explore new ways to manage e-mail such as better filtering, or time limits. The study shows that, although a short period of time is spent each day on e-mail, these short times add up to a larger percentage than is desired. Tasks that seem underserved can be developed in the very near future. As regards long-term strategy, this study and its continuance may be crucial to decision-making in reorganization or allocation of staff resources. For example, if a large portion of database maintenance were outsourced, the percentage of time spent cataloging might be significantly diminished, freeing time for even more non-traditional duties. Alternatively, the cataloger might concentrate more effort on database maintenance, while reducing time spent on non-cataloging activities. Since data is available, decisions can be made based on facts rather than guesswork.

The researcher found that it was initially difficult, even for an experienced time logger to re-learn the discipline necessary to log all day every day, while actual time spent in managing the exercise was minimal, even negligible (see Fig. 3, "Time Management"). The initiative of the participant cannot be overemphasized. The participant must both discipline herself in order to record the data, but also participate fully in evaluation of the data, since there are many complicating factors (seasonal tasks, interaction with activities of other staff members, etc.). However, the study can be quite revealing and definitely worth the time and discipline necessary.

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