

A STUDY OF THE NEED FOR ESTABLISHING A PHILIPPINE INDEXING SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper attempts to determine whether or not there is an existing indexing society and where there is none explores the necessity of establishing an indexing society in the context of issues facing indexers in the Philippines today. The paper outlines a vision for the society where, aside from being a site for the creation of models for standardization and control, the society serves as a center of exchange whose primary goal is to initiate programs to improve the state of the art as well as the professional lives of its members. It goes on to demonstrate that the establishment of the society, while it does not in itself solve the issues facing the profession, provides a formal space where these issues can be collectively discussed to solve problems and improve the quality of the discourse.

Keywords: indexing society, Philippine Indexing Society, professional associations, standardization, indexing, abstracting

Introduction

Indexing and abstracting are essential to information systems. They are important because they facilitate information retrieval and accurate representation of vast amounts of data, data without which would otherwise be lost. Indexing plays such a pivotal role in an information driven economy that it should in theory hardly experience neglect.

This is sadly not the case in the Philippines. The profession of indexing is neither in demand nor very well known. Those who practice it do not practice it on its own but only as a part of the tasks of a librarian in general and even then just as a side note to more important tasks like cataloging. Indeed it is taken for granted that librarians could take care of it themselves if left to the task. While this is in some ways true, it disregards the fact that indexing is an important task that alone needs some degree of specialization. It disregards the fact that indexing is the product of skilled labor and lies behind the

effectiveness of many information retrieval systems. The question now is: what is to be done?

Our answer to this question is to establish an indexing society. This paper explores the possibility and necessity of establishing one in light of the prevailing opinion among indexers. Because of the great lack of information and literature on the subject of indexers, specifically in the Philippines, this paper sets forth to provide primary data of an otherwise neglected field in the context of drumming up interest in indexing and establishing a Philippine Indexing Society.

Purpose of the Study

This paper has three goals:

1. To determine if there is an existing indexing society and if none, to explore the necessity of establishing one.
2. To provide basic data regarding practicing indexers
3. To lay the groundwork for future attempts, discussions and studies on the subject by creating a database of potential members and studying the opinions of practicing indexers.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Methodology and Approach

The method undertaken in this study was to survey around 200 indexers, librarians and students of library and information studies in order to gather information on the profession as well as to create a list of people that can be invited, in the event the society would be founded. The survey-takers were selected either through notable connections with the information profession such as companies like Innodata or librarianship conferences where the surveys were distributed or through the help of students as part of an LIS 64 (indexing and abstracting) requirement where the students were asked to find, survey and interview information professionals regarding the indexing society. The pool of students came from a board exam review hosted by the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Sciences and the participants were for the most part either fresh graduates of a Library Science or related degree or unlicensed librarians who have worked in libraries for some time, usually a year, and were composed of prospective librarians both from within and outside the University of the Philippines.

Both practicing indexers and students were included in the study. The reason for this was that the authors not only wanted to know about current practitioners but also prospective indexers, particularly those about to enter the profession. To reach them, surveys were distributed to talks hosted

by professional library organizations, to libraries, through online surveys and as part of a class activity. Both were surveyed regarding their background and linkages to the practice of indexing: how long they have been practicing (or have been made familiar with in the case of students), what their opinions are about the profession, whether they are familiar with any already existing indexing society, whether indexers as a profession should found one and whether they would be willing join one. These questions were posed as a 'yes' or 'no' choice followed by a space for indicating the reasons for their opinion in the form of open ended questions. The survey was conducted over the course of two years taking input from several student submissions every semester as well as distribution of the surveys by the researchers themselves through the help of relevant institutions such as library conferences like ALAM and the UP SLIS board exam review. The surveys and interviews were conducted at a place of convenience for the survey-taker and interviewee such as on the premises of their workplace. Not all survey-takers were interviewed. As in the case of Innodata where quota restrictions on the employees prevented us from interviewing the staff, the researchers were satisfied with completed surveys.

Limitations

The study does not aim to be representative of the whole country. The study is limited to the National Capital Region, which, though arguably a small part of the Philippines, is however significant in that it is the intellectual center of the country and its most developed region. Furthermore because of the paucity of structures for properly identifying indexers in the Philippines (there is, to the researchers' knowledge, no directory of indexers in the Philippines) and the need to develop a database of potential entrants into the society, the authors had to resort to snowball sampling. As such, the survey was distributed primarily to places traditionally associated to indexing such as the library which will likely affect the numerical results and demographics of the survey.

Results and Discussion

Surveys: Conducting a Rough Demography of Indexers and Assessing the Demand for an Association

For the results of the survey, refer to the following diagrams:

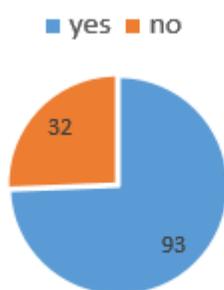


Figure 2. Librarian?

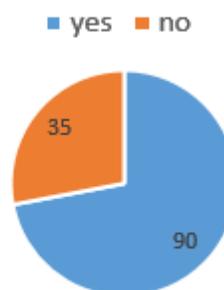


Figure 3. LIS degree?

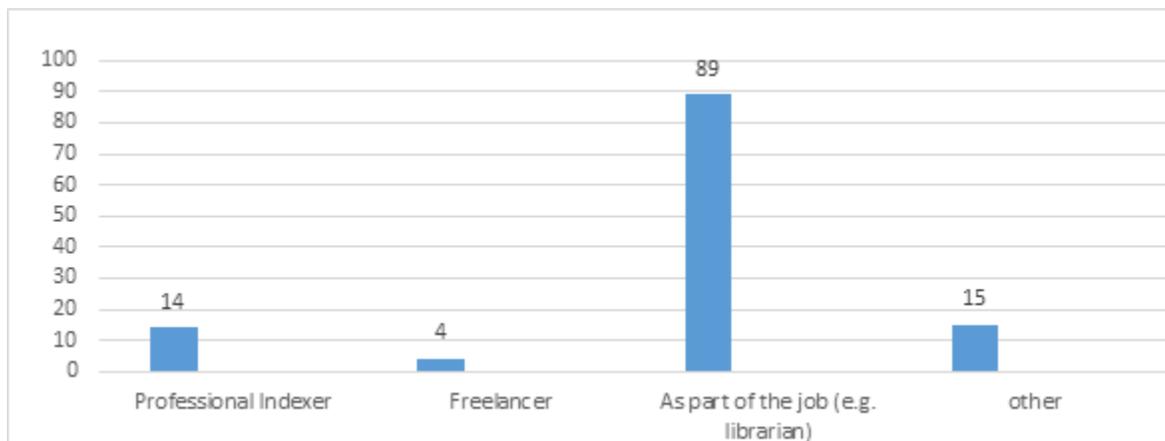


Figure 4. How did you become an indexer? (professionals)

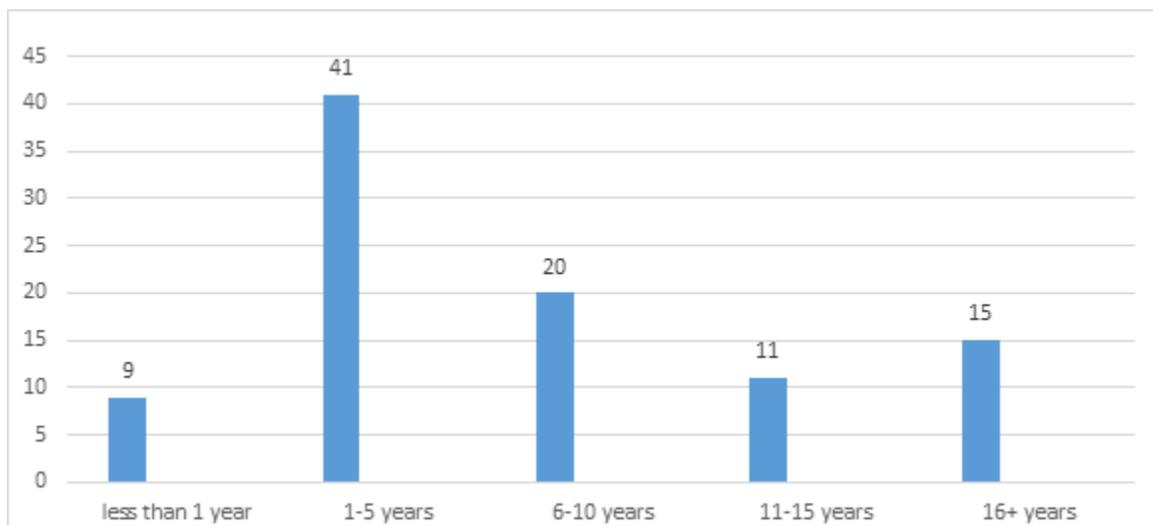


Figure 5. How long have you been in indexing?

Table 1

Answers from Professional Indexers

	Yes	No	Percent 'yes'
Should we establish a Philippine Indexing Society?	95	30	76%
Are you willing to join if invited to the society?	93	32	74%
Do you see yourself as an indexer in the next 5 years?	78	47	62%

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Table 2

Answers from Students

	Yes	No	Percent 'yes'
Should we establish a Philippine Indexing Society?	46	14	76%
Are you willing to join if invited to the society?	41	19	68%
Do you see yourself as an indexer in the next 5 years?	31	29	52%

What can we conclude from this data? That there is more or less a majority (above 60%) in favor of establishing the society although those in disagreement are still sizeable enough. We can at least ensure that there will be a core group if ever a society is founded. The results of the third question, however, are more troubling as the size of the 'no' are much larger especially among the students. The surveys usually reflect ambivalence toward the idea. In the open ended portion of the survey form, the question was either left blank or marked with an "I don't know" but the most common reason for not considering indexing is that "it's not my thing". A society requires the involvement of its members in its area of interest and it must secure the entry of a new generation if it is to survive. If ever the society is to be founded, a prime objective would be to promote indexing as a profession among students. For now, we can recommend that the society can be founded. The best recommendation to be made is to plan the society under the assumption that it will be a small group at first then work from there. The following section recapitulates the results of the interviews.

Interviews: Assessing issues facing indexers today

By observing the arguments and concerns raised by the interviewees, we can identify issues that are prevalent in the field of Philippine indexing. Because raising the topic of forming an organization will necessarily elicit expectations from the organization, we can draw from these expectations ideas of what the society must contend with and what the society can offer. The goal here is to engage these contentions and prove that establishing the society is necessary.

Before we engage the arguments, however, we must ask a preliminary question: is there an already existing society of Filipino indexers? As far as our research has gone, there is none. No formal venue, save for online forums and informal networks or one that is national in scope. The closest we get to a formal society is the indexing team of FamilySearch.org run by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints and the Baguio Association of Indexers also associated with the LDS church. In lieu of an existing indexing society we now consider the arguments for and against.

The arguments common to those in favor can be summarized as follows:

- An indexing society will provide a good basis for the standardization for guidelines, procedures, conduct and rates.

- It would provide an avenue for meeting new people, sharing ideas, holding conferences and best practices
- It would generate interest in the profession.

The arguments for the opposite side are as follows:

- There is no pressing need for a society of indexers because there is no demand or critical mass.
- Indexing is naturally part of a librarian's job and does not need to be treated as a separate task with its own association.
- There are already too many library associations in the Philippines.
- There is no need to standardize practices for indexing.

From these arguments alone, we can identify a set of key issues that concern indexers here in the Philippines:

- There are contending opinions as to whether or not we should standardize practices in indexing
- Indexers and their field do not get enough attention
- Indexing has not come of its own in the Philippines. Rather than being looked at as a potential field of specialization it is viewed as merely a subskill for librarians
- There is a debate as to whether there should be a special venue for indexing.

A cursory glance at the above listed issues reveals that the problem can be boiled down to one central contention: that indexing as a practice is not developed enough so as to warrant a special "space" of its own, that it is an essentially marginal discourse in the field of librarianship. Our argument is that it is precisely because of this—because otherwise no one else would develop the discipline—that we need to establish an indexing society. However, we must first contextualize the problem. In order to do that we must understand and elaborate on the contentions of those who disagree.

Demand and Critical Mass

First is the problem of demand and critical mass. The development of associations and societies primarily depends first on need, second on numbers. Without need, there is no primary force that motivates the society, without numbers there wouldn't be a sufficient maintaining force to perpetuate the activity. Because there is neither demand nor the numbers to fill it, an association would thus become a needless creation that cannot be populated. The logic of this argument seems sound.

One way to view the question of demand for indexers at least locally is to look at the supply of the material that produces the demand. If we look at the book market alone things don't look too bright. According to the National Book Development Board's State of the Book Industry Address, during 2014 the Philippines produced 6000 new titles each year. Compare this with Vietnam's 20, 000 and

Malaysia's 10, 000 and it is clear that the Philippines lags behind its Asian counterparts (Villa, 2014). Alternatively, we can look at statistics regarding scholarly research. According to Nguyen and Pham (2011), bibliometric data shows that of 165,020 original scholarly articles produced between 1991 and 2010, only 5% belong to the Philippines compared to Vietnam's 6%, Malaysia's 16%, Thailand's 21% and Singapore's 45% with the number of articles growing only 13% each year. Whether it is journals or books, the Philippines has not had a reputation for being a reader's country. Notwithstanding the positive outlook of some of the interviewees regarding demand, the poor book market implies that there is not much demand for indexing which, barring computer and online indexing, is dependent on the market for books and journals.

Redundancy

The next problem is that the profession of indexing by its not generally being practiced as a stand-alone activity here in the Philippines does not require its own assembly. It is sad that despite its variety, indexing has not come to its own as a profession here in the Philippines. This is part and parcel of the larger question of demand and is reflective of it. Because we aren't a society that produces books, the number of indexers is proportionately low and as such the standing of indexing as a profession has been reduced to the status of a sideline to the larger tasks of a librarian. This view is amply reflected in the form of Republic Act 9246 "The Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003" which treats indexing as only one of the services offered by a librarian and not a specialization in its own right.

This is also tied to the contention among the interviewees that there are already too many associations for librarians. Because there are already associations that may offer the same services (conferences, gatherings, publications) any other association may prove redundant.

Standardization

Last is the idea that there is no need to standardize indexing practices. It will be difficult if not contradictory to standardize rules for a material whose nature must adapt to the needs of individual indexing tasks or companies. In the words of one of the interviewees, "How do you generate general practices for specific goals?" How do you create adaptable enough general guidelines that work alongside the differing practices and needs of indexing companies and institutions?

Towards Establishing an Indexing Society: Response and Analysis

The above arguments demonstrate the following assumptions: (1) Existing structures are sufficient for the development of indexing as a discipline and a profession; and (2) An indexing society on its own will have no appreciable effect on the state of indexing.

As it stands, indexing is a marginalized discourse in the field of Philippine Librarianship. Of 114 articles published in the Journal of Philippine Librarianship since 2007, only 1 is about indexing and even then its relationship is only tangential (Faller, 2007). Considering that this has been up to now

the only periodical publication of scholarly work of the discipline in the Philippines, this is doubly troubling (VonJobi, 2015). This is also reflected in Cabbab's (2013) study that showed that between the second semester of 2007 and the summer of 2013 only 11 out of 242 undergraduate theses were about either cataloging or indexing. We can conclude that even if there are already existing structures that represent the interests of librarianship, the degree to which indexing is represented within those very structures is minimal.

That is not to say that there are no issues facing indexers today. According to Faderon's study (2011), there were several issues being faced by indexing as a profession here in the Philippines today. Among these include: (1) Different criteria are used in evaluating and selecting journal titles, other materials and articles; (2) Use of varied formats to record the bibliographic references; (3) Varied practices in recording journal titles, names of months and other common terms; and (4) Dilemmas in indexing articles written in the vernacular languages and in what language to represent the subject content, etc. As we can see, despite the inattention the field receives, there are several problems that need to be addressed.

However, one could argue that the degree to which indexing is represented is a mere reflection of the demand for indexing in the Philippines. The key here is that indexing is not seen as profitable. Because certain tasks need more organization than others, people would group themselves together for knowledge, protection and to divide tasks so that it appears that associations are the products of these rather than the cause. However, instead of viewing the association as the coming together of activity, one could view it as a consolidator of opportunity. A society lends itself to the solution of the problem by acting as a hub that connects workers and employment.

Demand in fact need not come from the Philippines alone. Because most of the work comes from abroad the only question is how to organize ourselves and get to it. This is easy for large companies who have established relationships with publishers and other companies abroad but the same cannot be said for smaller companies and institutions or freelancers looking for work. Whereas an individual might not have sufficient will or resources to locate or pursue an opportunity, a society might have an edge. By bringing people in the indexing business together, the society might be able to amass a network of contacts through which an individual member might be able to find work. From these, the society could hold conventions and locate contracts for its members. Being able to hold training courses, transmit best practices, the society will become a hub for higher quality work and skills and therefore attract more employment. This in turn will attract new members who will then perpetuate the society. As we can see, the problem of demand and mass solves itself through the creation of the society.

But what about the state of the discourse? Will having increased employment really improve the quality of the discourse? The answer to this is yes. By making indexing a profitable line of work, this

will increase the population and dedication of workers in the field. A dedicated workforce is one better attuned to problems and more familiar with developments in the field, allowing them to contribute their own output to the development of the discipline.

The fact that indexing is a sideline need not preclude the formation of an assembly or society of indexers. In fact, it strengthens the need for forming a society. First, because it means that librarians are compromising knowledge and skills by not specializing and second, because it does not answer what must be done for freelancers and non-librarians working in indexing. Resources concentrated in the society can be used to develop educational programs designed to raise the skills and level of awareness of practicing indexers in the Philippines. Moreover, the idea of educational programs could be expanded to include training abroad or to extend invitations to foreign speakers in order to bring back practices and ideas developed there in order to improve the discourse here.

What the Society can provide the indexing community are three things: an organizer, a forum and an agent. Through the society, indexers will be able to come together to discuss the issues that are facing the profession today. A society provides the framework for collaborative undertakings with related professionals (Fisher, 1997). One of the ways that the society can contribute is through developing joint research projects or joint research programs with other library associations when interests converge. The fact that not all practicing indexers are librarians points to the possibility of outside opinion, practice and resources being included in the research agenda, enriching output by virtue of diversity.

As a center for best practices, a society will have the advantage that

1. It can generate models as well as transmit them.
2. With enough members it becomes a pool of specialization
3. It transmits more skills and ideas than the freelancer will be able to learn on his own

In discussing human assets, we inevitably discuss career development. One of the things a society can offer is a place to develop one's professional standing by participating in value-added activities (Frank, 1997). Among other things, a society provides opportunities for publication, networking, giving talks, attending seminars and workshops and taking a leadership position in an inter-institutional organization. Indexers can develop skills and take advantage of networks to take up roles in education, systems development, analysis, optimization and the like. The society itself can be conceived as an organization developing its own projects alongside already existing professional organizations, drawing on and enriching the experience of its members.

Moreover, a society not only exposes an individual to a professional environment but validates the profession as well. It does this by promoting the discipline and taking the initiative for its development. Promoting the discipline implies being able to identify key areas of operation and/or

growth and two of these are education and industry. According to the interviews one of the bigger problems facing indexing in the Philippines is that Philippine companies don't appreciate the value of indexing in their business processes. It is up to the society to take the opportunity to educate a wider audience of the value of indexing.

Conclusion

The problem at hand is essentially an economic one. The discipline isn't growing primarily because indexers are: (1) not talking to each other; and (2) too few. The discipline moreover is not seen as profitable or prestigious and hence there is little interest in developing it. It follows from this that it would become, inevitably, a marginal discipline by virtue of the cash value it possesses. Thus, devoting a special space for it seems tangential: if no one cares, why? That however is the crux of the problem. It is by the very assumption that it doesn't deserve a special space that the condition perpetuates. It is our argument that through the act of creating that space—specifically by creating a space that enlarges the value of the profession—do we enable the conditions to change. This is essentially the idea we are proposing. By creating a support system alongside which professionals can grow both by helping them secure better opportunities through training and networking, and by pulling together resources to bring the jobs to the indexers, we can increase the profitability and the prestige of indexing. By training indexers to create high-quality work, the society would draw attention to itself and its members, promoting both and drawing employment. In turn employment will attract new indexers to the field and the society. As the society grows and finally becomes a legally sanctioned regulator of professional affairs, it can offer both security to its members and a guarantee of quality to its clients. In turn, as it grows it becomes better positioned to market itself to a wider audience. By increasing the profitability and prestige, we increase the population of professional indexers and through them develop a critical mass upon which the intellectual growth of the discourse depends.

We have seen that there is interest in founding the society and that a core group can be invited to form the basis for founding the society. The authors have presented arguments as to why a society should be founded: that existing structures are insufficient and that the society when founded will have an appreciable effect on the present state of affairs. Even if the society does not solve the issues identified above, what it does is that it provides a formal space wherein these issues may be discussed and given due attention. All that is needed now is the initiative to create the society and a plan to spell out the details of its operation. The authors do not expect either to form overnight. However, what is important is that the thought should be considered and that the arguments offered above are a step towards developing a perspective for tackling the problem.

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