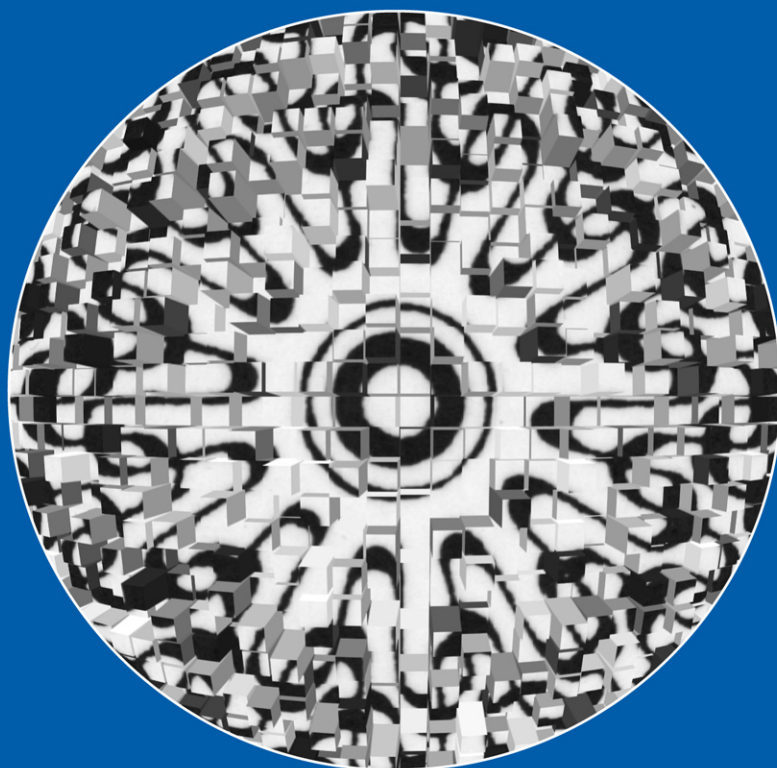


Cataloguing Without Tears

Managing knowledge in the
information society

Jane M. Read



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Cataloguing Without Tears

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WITH CARTOONS BY ADRIAN CZAJKOWSKI



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To my husband, Bill

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Introduction

So, you have become a cataloguer. Congratulations! Or maybe you have just become a metadata engineer. Congratulations again – you could equally well be called a cataloguer, because your job is essentially the same.¹ Your new job is challenging, intellectually demanding and absolutely vital to the operation of your information service. Or, in other words, you are the one who provides clues (in the form of catalogue records) which enable your colleagues and your clients to find the information they need quickly and efficiently.

That's the upside of the job. The downside is that cataloguing can often be boring and repetitive. Positive feedback from users of the catalogue is rare. Finally, cataloguers are regarded as nerdy even by other librarians. This, despite the fact that in the so-called 'knowledge economy' it is more important than ever before to have documents and other information resources accurately described with appropriate subject terms. Otherwise the famous aphorism about the Internet will come true in your organisation: 'The truth is out there... but I'm damned if I can find it.'

The purpose of this book is to provide an introduction to descriptive and subject cataloguing (but not classification) for librarians and other information professionals. It is

arranged in two main parts. Part 1, *The big picture*, relates the theory of cataloguing to the practice of defining a cataloguing policy for your organisation, selecting suitable staff and choosing a cataloguing standard. Part 2, *The nitty-gritty*, considers some of the specific problems which you are likely to encounter as a cataloguer. An appendix follows which consists of a select list of resources for cataloguers.

Many great experts have written on the subject of knowledge management and how it differs from information management. The problem is that they don't agree among themselves:

Information is not a synonym for knowledge, which is an intellectual concept, referring to the condition of knowing or understanding something ... Information and knowledge can be seen as closely related and complementary stages along the same road ... (Webb, 1998)

...information has no value, ie does not become knowledge, until it is used... (Ryan, 1999)

Personally, I would agree (up to a point) with the first writer and disagree violently with the second, but a debate on exactly what is meant by knowledge management and how it differs from information management, though interesting, does not help with the practical problem of how best to describe the materials in your library on the database so that library users can find what they want quickly and efficiently. So don't worry too much about whether you are cataloguing

knowledge or information – concentrate on relatively easy questions such as what the title is and who published it.

In writing this book, I have tried to avoid jargon as much as possible but there are times when it is easier to use the correct (subject-specific) word to describe something than to provide a laborious explanation in plain English. Also, if you want other people to believe that you know what you are talking about it is sometimes important to use the buzzwords they are used to, so you need to learn them. Most of the jargon in this book may be found in Chapters 4, 5 and 8; I will be explaining it as I go along.

While we're on the subject of jargon, you will notice as you read through the text that I rarely use the word 'book' to describe things which you might be cataloguing. The reason for this coyness is that books are only one of many different formats you may encounter in your career. I usually use the word 'document' to denote books, journals, pamphlets, videos, pictures, computer files, web pages, audio tapes, manuscripts... 'Document' is not really an ideal term, because it implies a printed or written text to most people, but it's a little less vague than the other words in current use: 'resource' (popular among metadata engineers) and 'work' (as used in the International Standard for Bibliographic Description). I have also chosen to refer to your job as 'cataloguing' rather than 'metadata engineering', mainly because most people have some idea of what a catalogue is (and therefore what a cataloguer does) but need to have 'metadata' and 'metadata engineer' explained. Also, although it would be semantically correct to describe all

cataloguers as metadata engineers (metadata just means data about data, so all library catalogues are sets of metadata) in practice the term is mainly used by those working on electronic resources such as websites and e-journals.

What you catalogue and how you catalogue it will depend to a large extent on who your library is intended to serve, and to a lesser extent on who is available to do the work and how much time they have to do it in. You could be working on your own in a small corporate library or with a team of several people in an academic library; you could be the only specialist cataloguer on the staff of a public library, or a cog in the cataloguing department of a national library. Your work might consist of cataloguing only items on one subject or in one language, or you might be expected to catalogue anything and everything acquired by your library, from books and journals to electronic documents and cuddly toys. You might have other tasks besides cataloguing to fit into your working day. One day, perhaps you could aspire to being a head cataloguer, in charge of a large department of cataloguing professionals and responsible for maintaining a huge database to internationally accepted standards, or even rise to the dizzy heights of being one of the people who writes international standards!

Cataloguers work in many different environments and create many different kinds of catalogue. I have therefore assumed that:

- you are creating records for an online public access catalogue (OPAC) or computer database;