

RIM Professionals: A Distinct Personality?

A study reveals that records and information management (RIM) professionals exhibit particular personality traits, which should aid those making hiring and career decisions

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As a discipline, records and information management (RIM) professionals are not much given to introspection. “Why do I like doing records-related work?” “What makes someone attracted to records management or archives management?” “What personal characteristics should one look for when interviewing applicants for a records management or archives position?” Knowing the answers to such questions could be important both to those contemplating entry into the field and those who want to establish those personality traits that suggest a successful hire. By contrast, librarians have for a long time paid a good deal of attention to the personality and image of their practitioners. (See sidebar “Examples of Book-length Studies”)

In 1976, Wilmer Maedke surveyed the records management field and noted that the most important criterion

in hiring was an “interest in records work.” For too many years, RIM managers have characterized their entry into the field in critical terms: “I just fell into it” or “I was pushed into it.” This puts the field in an unnecessarily unflattering light. There are several vocational aptitude tests (e.g., the Strong Interest Inventory) that help test takers align their interests with those who are successful in various fields.

At the Core

This article

- ▶ Outlines the methodology of a study looking at personality traits of RIM professionals
- ▶ Details desirable traits to look for in potential RIM position hires
- ▶ Compares personality traits of records managers and other information professionals

There are also standardized tests that establish a person’s ability to complete successfully an academic program in some desirable professional field (e.g., medicine, law, engineering) and, by extension, help test takers establish their “fit” with a discipline of their interest.

What, then, is already known about the personality traits of records managers? Very little. Most discussion is personal observation and anecdote. For example, in an article in *The Records Management Quarterly*, Robert Sanders suggests, “We records managers are known for our pessimistic point of view. We attend conferences devoted to planning for the worst imaginable contingencies. We participate in workshops on dealing with smoke and water damage ... However, without being ready to commit myself to an institution as a schizophrenic, I must admit that, alongside my usual pessimistic records

Library Personality Studies

- ***The Assertive Librarian***

Jannette S. Caputo
Oryx Press, 1984.

- ***The Personality and Occupational Stereotype of Public Librarian***
(dissertation)

Robert B. Clift
University of Minnesota,
1976.

- ***Staff Personality Problems in the Library Automation Process***

Jay E. Daily
Libraries Unlimited, 1985.

- ***Stereotype and Status: Librarians in the United States***

Pauline C. Wilson
Greenwood Press, 1982.

ments. Attempts to describe those characteristics typically needed for those in records management and library services have been published by several organizations. The UK Society of Archivists, for example, suggests that records managers must have the following characteristics.

- **Confident communication skills.**

Records managers deal with colleagues from all backgrounds, from the managing director/chief executive down. They also have to contact suppliers, contractors, and outside organizations.

- **Good negotiation skills.** It is not always easy to persuade senior colleagues to hand over “their” records or to agree to a retention period/destruction date for a record they wish to preserve forever.

- **Analytical thinking strengths.** Records managers need to understand how their organization works to be capable of constructing systems that are integrated with business processes and organizational culture.

- **Flexibility.** Records managers are often expected to turn their hand to anything remotely connected with the provision of information.

- **Comfort with new technology.** RIM managers must demonstrate the ability to use and adapt to rapidly evolving information communication technology (ICT) packages and systems.

In a poster titled “Competencies for Information Managers,” the Records Management Association of Australasia notes specific workplace competencies but also suggests the following as “personal behaviors and characteristics”: being discreet, thorough, ethical, and service oriented. The U.S. Special Library Association regularly provides a list of competencies – professional and personal – for those in its ranks on its website, www.sla.org/content/learn/comp2003/index.cfm.

A major funded study by Josie-Marie Griffiths and Donald King – one little

known to RIM managers – is *New Directions in Library and Information Science*. In volume eight, competencies of RIM managers are identified at different levels (entry level, mid level, and senior level). In addition to work-related competencies, notice is taken here of “personal qualities” among successful RIM managers as these are cited by successful RIM managers:

- Alertness
- Assertiveness
- Compassion/Kindness
- Confidence
- Cheerfulness
- Dependability
- Tenacity
- Diplomacy
- Emotional Stability
- Leadership Ability
- Imagination
- Inquisitiveness
- Need for achievement
- Flexibility
- Neatness

While being acutely aware of such attributes on both sides of hiring decisions is important, attributes are not the same as personality traits. Competencies may be learned and become part of one’s active **behavior**; personality can neither be learned nor changed.

Using Empirical Data

Can the personality of a RIM professional be defined? This field, as well as several other branches of the information profession, addresses the organization and storage of recorded information, but does it require unique personality traits that differ from others in the broad category of the information profession? Do the personality traits of records managers and archivists resemble each other and those of others in the information field, such as reference librarians? Systems librarians? Special librarians? In 2002, researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) began an

management self, there lives a Wannabe Optimist.”

In another article in *Records Management Quarterly*, “Recruitment to the Profession: A Key to Developing the Records Management Field,” J. Michael Pemberton anecdotally explored qualifications and personality traits of records managers, but no hard data was collected at that point.

Skills as Personality Surrogates

Until now, desirable job-related competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) have been obliquely used as characteristics in lieu of personality assess-

investigation into the personality of “information professionals.” A usable response from records managers and archivists enabled researchers to look deeper at the personality traits of this portion of the information profession, one that has otherwise not been studied in such context. With responses from 92 records managers and 155 archivists, a comparison between this specialty – collectively “records professionals” – and others in the information profession is now possible based on Lounsberry and Gibson’s Personal Style Inventory, a well-established and validated psychometric tool.

Data was collected in 2002 from participants of a non-random sample of 1,352 librarians and other information professionals who responded to solicitations (both in print and e-mail) to complete a personality inventory. The inventory was available in paper, as a Microsoft Word document delivered through e-mail, and as an online form. Subjects were solicited via e-mail messages to several information profession listservs during the summer and fall of 2002. Print surveys were handed out and left on tables at a national librarians’ conference and returned to researchers via mail.

Although geographic location was not included as a question on the inventory, e-mail extensions indicated that the respondents were not just in the United States but in several other countries as well, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and others. Library technicians or paraprofessionals, clerks, and other non-professionals were not included. The following demographic information was collected about respondents: job title (which included an “Other” choice and a blank to enter current profession); the number of years employed in current position; and number of years employed as an information professional. The demographic data is summarized in Figure 1.

Subject matter experts in the information professions were consulted in the development of the personality inventory. These experts were asked to list the

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Information Profession

Characteristic	Frequency
Job:	
Academic reference librarian	222
Archivist	155
Records manager	92
Public librarian	145
School librarian	26
Special librarian	76
Systems librarian	86
Cataloger	228
Distance education librarian	39
Other information professional	283
Years in Current Position:	
Less than 2	468
2-5	442
6-10	198
11-15	103
16-20	65
More than 20	76
Years as an Information Professional:	
Less than 2	110
2-5	308
6-10	278
11-15	208
16-20	160
More than 20	288

personality traits they believed are possessed by successful members of the information professions. The authors measured these traits using relevant components of the Personal Style Inventory, a work-based normal-personality measurement system. The information profession personality inventory consisted of 101 questions measuring 13 scales: adaptability, assertiveness, autonomy, conscientiousness, customer service,

emotional stability, extraversion, openness, optimism, teamwork, tough-mindedness, visionary work style, and work drive.

In *Personality at the Crossroads: Current Issues in Interactional Psychology*, personality traits were defined as “relatively enduring characteristics of individuals that are relatively consistent over time and across situations.” The personality traits used in this personality study

Figure 2: Example of Contextualized Question on Information Professional Personality Survey

<p>Given the chance, I would be much more interested in activities like developing procedures, specifying work practices, and allocating resources for the library or other information organization.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	<p>Given the chance, I would be much more interested in activities like creating an inspiring vision for the future of the library or other information organization.</p>
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have the following definitions.

- **Adaptability** refers to a person being flexible and able to make on-the-spot adjustments to different situations. High scorers are able to go with the flow, respond flexibly to changing circumstances, and function comfortably with change. Low scorers tend to be more rigid and inflexible, preferring to work in unchanging settings with predictable outcomes. (3 items on inventory)
- **Assertiveness** refers to a person asserting him/herself, taking charge of situations, speaking up on matters of importance, defending personal beliefs, and being forceful. (8 items on inventory)
- **Autonomy** refers to a person with a disposition to function autonomously and in a self-directed manner on one's job, to make work decisions, and to choose a course of action without reliance on others. (3 items on inventory)
- **Conscientiousness** refers to a person's conscientiousness, reliability, trustworthiness, and readiness to internalize company norms and values. (9 items on inventory)
- **Customer Service Orientation** refers to a person striving to provide highly responsive, personalized, quality service to internal and external customers, putting the customer first, and trying to make the customer satisfied, even if it means going above and beyond the normal job description or policy. (8 items on inventory)
- **Emotional Resilience** refers to the overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience of the employee in the face of job stress and pressure. This can be conceptualized as the inverse of neuroticism. (6 items on inventory)
- **Extraversion** refers to the tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, warmhearted, and talkative. (7 items on inventory)
- **Openness** refers to a person's receptivity/openness to change, innovation, new experience, and learning. (9 items on inventory)
- **Optimism** refers to a person having an optimistic, hopeful outlook concerning prospects, people, and the future, even in the face of difficulty and adversity. (6 items on inventory)
- **Teamwork** refers to a person's propensity for working as part of a team and cooperatively on work group efforts. (7 items on inventory)
- **Tough-Mindedness** refers to a person's ability to appraise information and make work decisions based on logic, facts, and data rather than feelings, values, or intuition. (8 items on inventory)
- **Visionary vs. Operational Work Style** refers to a work style that emphasizes creating an organizational vision and mission, developing corporate strategy, identifying long-term goals, and planning for future contingencies versus an operational work style, which focuses on day-to-day activities and accomplishments, short-term goals, current problems, and implementation of plans. (8 items on inventory)
- **Work Drive** refers to a person's disposition to work for long hours (including overtime) and an irregular schedule, greater investment of one's time and energy into job and career, and being motivated to extend oneself, if necessary, to finish projects, meet deadlines, be productive, and achieve job success. (8 items on inventory)

All scale items have been used extensively in a wide range of organizations and validated for a variety of jobs. Some of the questions were especially contextualized for the information professions for this study. An example of a question that was contextualized is seen in Figure 2 (above).

Participants choose that point on a sliding scale (1-5) that best represented both their preference and the strength of that preference.

Ninety-two records managers and 155 archivists responded to and completed the personality inventory. After collecting and analyzing the data, it was discovered that the relationship between archivists and records managers was statistically strong enough to treat them together under the title "records professionals." A variety of interesting comparisons can be made about this records-specific discipline within the information profession. Using the personality traits listed and defined above, the following comparisons are made based on strong degrees

of statistical significance.

- Records professionals are more **assertive** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are less **customer service oriented** than special librarians but more customer service oriented than catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **emotionally stable** than academic reference librarians and catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **emotionally resilient** than academic reference librarians and catalogers.
- Records professionals are higher in **extraversion** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are higher in **openness** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **optimistic** than academic reference librarians and catalogers.
- Records professionals score higher on **teamwork** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are lower in **tough-mindedness** than systems librarians and catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **visionary** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are less **operationally oriented** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **adaptable** than catalogers.
- Records professionals are more **conscientious** than academic reference librarians and public librarians.

While the results of this study are not earthshakingly conclusive, the study represents a first use of established psychometric methodologies to create a profile for records managers/archivists. Further refinements of this test – along with other tests, such as Myers-Briggs and the Strong Interest Inventory – should also be available to assist in assessing a personal career fit with successful records professionals. And, of course, using such tests will aid in identifying applicants who are more than merely “interested in work with records” or those who are just being “pushed into it.” ■

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