Leadership Quality in 21st Century Librarianship

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Abstract:

Leadership is an important issue in all sectors wherever there is a team working together to achieve a common goal. Library is also an organization where a team of professional, semi-professional and non-professional employees strive to serve a common purpose, namely, to cater to their clientele in the best possible way. So, the leadership issue continues to hold an important niche in the management thoughts related with librarianship. With the passing of decades and centuries many things changed shapes in the arena of the Librarianship. The shift from micro to macro information, the changes in format of resources, the entrance of upcoming technologies to cause radical shift in dimensions of information storage and retrieval; and many other factors have contributed to the growth of Digital Era in 21stcentury Librarianship. There seem to be a need of thinking proactively about the ways to combat this challenge. This paper seeks to capture the ways of traditional leadership in our field. It also attempts to cover the new challenges that are cropping up in the recent years. Ultimately it endeavor's to seek out the leadership ways that helps them to suit the need of digital librarianship. The role of traditional librarians has been explored in details. Different factors responsible for the enactment of that role have been dissected. Those found lacking have been adjusted against the ones that are seemingly most effective to suit today's LIS leadership scenario. It was premised that not only the copybook leadership principles, but other heuristics also go a long way to make a good leader for the digital era librarianship. Techno-savvy, skilled leaders with an aptitude of timely psycho-social interpretation of the intricacies of the challenges of the modern day librarianship are required. Only this dedicated team leaders can motivate and lead a complex band of LIS professionals. All the aspects of digital era leadership for LIS domain came under the microscope here. The paper thus tries to present a framework to achieve better our goal and mission i.e. the ultimate user centred LIS universe under the dynamic leadership of the digital librarian in 21stcentaury.

Keywords : Librarianship, User-centred Management, Leadership Skills, Psycho-Social Skills, Orientation and Training, LIS Leaders, LIS Domain, Libraries & Information Centres

1. LIBRARIANSHIP THE PROFESSION

The future of librarianship thus hinges on what happens to the perpetually changing work of the profession in its three contexts: the context of larger social and cultural forces, the context of other competing occupations, and the context of competing organisations and commodities (Abbott, 1998, p3). Librarianship is defined in the Macquarie Dictionary as 'a profession concerned with organising collections of books and related materials in libraries and of making those resources available to readers and others'. This characterization points to the traditional functions of the librarian in the selection, acquisition, organisation and provision or delivery of books, information and knowledge to a community of readers or users. This definition does not take into account the 'larger social and cultural forces' which have transformed the nature of information through technology, the mass media and the internet. It restricts librarians to books.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of this study are given below:

1.1 To analyze and explore the changing vision and the roles of leadership qualities for library professionals so as to meet the changes and challenges of the 21stcentury.

1.2 To trace an outline of the evolution in the role of librarianship.

1.2 To discuss about the various skills needed for the library professionals to meet the present online and digital needs of the user.

3. THE TRADITIONAL DAYS:

In the initial days, books were few and far between; copied by scribes, almost always backed by the royal patronage. Users were the royalty and the topmost rung of the social layers; whereas a few very scholarly people, favoured by the affluent class might have allowed sniffing perfumes of the knowledge fragrance. With printing, there came a fresh bridge of hope in the knowledge field with books printed in multiplied numbers and more and more people came into contact of books. Gradually the Public Library Movement in different countries brought in the concept of 'People's University' and the commoners were included in the privileges of enjoyment of knowledge embodied in books.

4. THE ROLE IN TRADITIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP

With the flourishing of the libraries as a centre of knowledge, it became evident that a librarian and his team were needed for preserving the books and later the periodicals. The establishment had become vast and the basic service of preserving books along with occasional readership had multiplied into acquisition, processing, storage, dissemination, preservation and conservation. Gradually all of those blossomed into intricate branches with many library scientists offering theoretical and practical treatises on different aspects of librarianship. All of that literature was of the same opinion on one count: all were preaching custodianship.

5. THE PARADIGM SHIFT

The new age librarianship brought out several changes, the most important being the shift from possession cum custodianship to access. There were several dramatic changes in the realm of LIS. The formats were diversified from print to digital via other non-print mediums. Some such changes are listed below:

- From possession to access
- From custodianship to facilitator
- From guardian to friend (of users)
- From reader to user
- From time-bound access to any-time-access
- From space-bound access to anywhere-access
- From librarian (or library-centred) to user-centred
- From rigidity to flexibility
- From ascetic environment to informal environment
- From specified/strict norms to Information Commons
- From strict disciplined library to relaxed pursuit of knowledge
- From one format to diversified formats
- From direction (from library staff) to participation (in the decisions)

6. FROM COPYBOOK LEADERSHIP TO HEURISTICS:

Leadership is a quality to lead a team of workers. This is one of the most important qualities in the managerial capabilities. As is always said the strength of a chain is in the point of its weakest link, the librarian as a team-leader has always the role of motivator in such a way that all his team members become capable to work (at least) adequately as per the requirements of the job in hand. In the traditional era, all the roles of staff employed at different sections were well defined. The main consideration was monitoring the routine work and to supervise the exigencies. In the digital era- as we have seen above- many changes occurred to change this status quo. In fact, it is a time for constant change. In this transition period for being a dynamic leader, the librarian needs to consider several aspects:

- Leading from the front
- Practice before preaching
- Better among equals
- Friendly- not bossy- attitude
- The depth of subject knowledge in the area of the job-at hand

- Awareness of the personal as well as social limitations of the staff (as well as himself)
- Assigning right person to right work
- Understanding the special aptitudes of staff
- Keeping in mind likings and disliking of staff while allocating jobs
- Remembering the invisible presence of the users while designing services and passing this attitude to co-staff
- Instituting proper orientation training for the new recruits
- Organizing regular refresher courses for the staff
- Regular ICT Workshops for staff
- Giving extra privileges to staff as a reward and recognition of good work
- Arranging invited lectures by eminent Library & Information professionals
- Allocating suitable infrastructure for every service points Providing ergonomic as well as aesthetic furniture for the staff

FROM THE 'INFORMATION AGE' TO THE 'AGE OF KNOWLEDGE'

There are those who assert that the Age of Information is now on the wane and that western society is currently experiencing the transition to the Age of the Mind or the Knowledge Society. This transition is led by technology and has given rise to the knowledge-based organisation (Riley, 1998, p 145). With the advent of informational capitalism, the traditional focus of Library Studies or Information Science has been steadily shifting towards the management of information (or Information Management). As Muddiman notes, the foundation of traditional librarianship, with its 'ethos of progress through the diffusion of public knowledge for the general good,' is finding itself increasingly at odds with the trend towards Information Management whereby the commitment to a service profession is replaced instead by a commitment to an 'entrepreneurial market economy' (Muddiman, 1999, p7) More latterly, the discipline of Information Management is giving way to the postmodern concept of Knowledge Management-the goal of which is to 'exploit information entities in an organisation for the purpose of using that information to achieve greater value and to gain advantage over competitors' (Muddiman, 1999, p5). With Knowledge Management have emerged the key concepts of knowledge sharing, the learning organisation, the knowledge-based organisation and the knowledge audit. Consequently, some LIS educators are arguing that they need to close the gap between traditional studies and the evolving needs of the knowledge-based workplace. The new skills and competencies required include collaborative management, change management, entrepreneurial courage, strategic planning, information technology and corporate skills. A recent study has found that while LIS graduates may possess the necessary skills to take their place in the knowledge economy, the view of 'the librarian' is still impeding their entry into the Knowledge Management sector (Breen et al, 2002, p 127).

7. CORE VALUE

All professions are characterised by a body of knowledge, a set of skills or competencies, and a set of shared or core values. The first two have been discussed earlier. The core values of a profession are set out by the professional associations through which practitioners become registered or accredited. In Australia, the professional organisation is the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). The central values of Australian librarianship can be reasonably extracted and summarised from ALIA) Core Values Statement:

- Service to the community
- Democracy
- Freedom of access to information.
- Equity of access to information.
- Intellectual freedom.
- Respect for diversity
- Commitment to reformation literacy and lifelong learning.
  Additional shared values which can be gleaned from other ALIA policies are:
- Freedom from censorship.

• Privacy.
• Respect for copyright and intellectual property.
• Preservation of the human record.
  To this list, Bundy has added the following:
• Rationalism.
• Stewardship. (Bundy, 2001a, p 8)

8. FROM CUSTODIAN TO FACILITATOR

Librarianship has traversed a long journey and we have to weed out some of our older concepts while adopting quite a few new ones to suit our changing needs. The role of library leaders are now to nurture a breed of techno savvy, skilled manpower equipped to serve a new brand of techno-savvy users. Users of digital era know a lot of things beforehand. So the library team has to go a step forward and to be aware of the quality resources available in the digital (as well as print) scenario.

9. CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL ERA IN 21ST CENTAURY

Due to its radically different nature from the traditional era, digital era provides multifarious benefits but it also offers manifold challenges. So the leadership in today's environment needs many skills and competencies in today's multi-user, multitasking online learning environment. They should have adequate technical knowledge of Operating System Software, Word Processing Software, Power Point Presentation Software, Spreadsheet, Graphics, Database Management Systems, Webpage Development and Content Management Software, CD ROM Database Searching, Networking Concepts, Digital Library Management Software, etc. Free and Open Source Software are to be used as much as possible. They should have a thorough understanding of knowledge resources (both in traditional and digital form), very adoptive towards change, pro-active, strategy-planner, flexible.

10. TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Physical as well as virtual space has now been utilised for library/information activities. In this changed and challenged environment, copybook leadership is no help. So, a library leader in the digital era has to be innovative, enthusiastic, and pro-active. With clarity of vision and the judicious use of the web 2.0 tools as well as heuristic knowledge, his mission is to create a user-centred library. The journey towards 'Knowledge Economy' will only be fulfilled if all stakeholders in the knowledge chain (from inception to dissemination to feedback to further creation of new/modified knowledge) take active and interactive participation in the whole process.

11. THE FUTURE-BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Ray offers concrete suggestions to help postmodern librarians and libraries adjust to the turbulent changes of the postmodern condition. Postmodern libraries, she writes, need flexible and open boundaries and clear missions. They need to focus on relationships (internal and external) and communities. And finally, they need to focus on learning as the organising principle (Ray, 2001, p253). The qualities and competencies called for in the 21st century librarian, therefore, are flexibility, vision, the ability to think critically yet synthetically, to form partnerships, to collaborate, to continue learning and to teach others. We need to shift our professional focus from the traditional 'guardian of knowledge' to the more modern 'intermediary' to that of the postmodern 'enabler.' At the beginning of the 21st century, new core values for the profession of librarianship are emerging (Cox, 2000; Bundy, 2003a, 2003b). There is a growing body of literature detailing the collapse of community and the loss of trust between people in Western countries. Recent literature points to the library's role as contributor to 'social capital' or social cohesion. The World Bank defines 'social capital' as:
the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing incidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society-it is the glue that holds them together. Public libraries, in particular, are poised to play a crucial role in building

communities and connecting people. In providing local communities with 'a safe place to go', libraries are in a unique position to facilitate the building of trust and relationships between members of the communities they serve. The trend for the future of the profession of librarianship, therefore, is towards a community development role whereby librarians can act as facilitators and partners in the development of social capital for their local communities. In doing so, libraries can collaborate with other community agencies committed to a similar vision. To quote Hugh Mackay, the library of the future can become the new 'village green' (Mackay, 2002).

12. CONCLUSION

Whatever changes and challenges happened over the time, Creth (1996) has said that the "values that are the foundation of the library profession should remain the same into the next century…values of service, quality, universal access, and co-operation".

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