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Library Professionals in Infospere: Challenges and Tactics

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Abstract – The infospere of which library science is indivisible part, is expanding exponentially. In the recent years of information technology library profession underwent thorough changes. The society advancing in generation and dissemination of information is now shaped into a knowledge society that includes all the intelligentsia hiding no geographical barriers. A library professional is a knowledge professional. A library professional has to play a professional role not just institutionally but globally. Eventually, it is natural that the issues at global level are the doorsteps and to be entertained with professional dexterities. The issues arising thereby are similar over the globe. According the tactics of handling these issues are same arbitrarily. This demands to have competitive rectitude at world standards with efficient knowledge management.

Keywords – knowledge society, library professional, infospere, knowledge management, global issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

For last few the forces of globalisation have been redefining the economic, social, political, cultural, arena of human life decisively. The changes in the field of Information Technology are revolutionary that in turn revolutionised the process of globalization, especially in the seventies of twentieth century. Initiation in the processes of information handling, transmission, storage and retrieval become the key to human programmes and development and qualitatively different ways of life.

In the emerging society which is the information and knowledge society amidst knowledge and information; and the application of knowledge and information to knowledge generation and information processing and communication became the basic constituents of human progress. Library is a service-oriented organisation and users are its focus; customer satisfaction is their highest priority.

Library professionals are knowledge workers who are engaged in the activities of creating, using and distributing information and knowledge over the globe. Library professionals are subjected to new

professional challenges to be faced with competency within the well-established laws of library science.

II. KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The transformation of existing societal structures by knowledge as a core resource for economic growth, employment and as a factor of production constitutes the criteria for designating advanced modern society as a Knowledge Society.

The emphasis is not on the knowledge anybody has but the knowledge one produces. Knowledge resides exclusively in people. This is vastly underused resource, which offers the opportunity for any country to make major breakthrough, and catch up with countries presently more developed. It may be stated that the emergence of knowledge society means an ever increasing demand for a well-educated and skilled workforce across the whole economy. In this connection, it is worth noting that the appointment of the National Knowledge Commission by the Government of India has been a step in the right direction. This has been entrusted with the preparation of a blueprint for reform of our knowledge related institutions and infrastructure. It has submitted its report that will take us a long way in the knowledge society.

The confrontation of librarianship with the new niches of infospere. Infospere is a neologism. It denotes the whole informational environment constituted by all informational entities thus including informational agents as well, their properties, interactions, process and mutual relations. It is an environment comparable to, but different from cyberspace which is only one of its sub-regions, as it were, since it also includes off-line and analogue spaces of information. It is a concept that is rapidly evolving.

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS IN LIBRARY SCIENCE

In information and knowledge society, science plays an increased role in the productive forces;

professional, scientific and technical groups will rise into prominence in addition to the vast expansion of information technology, which include a converging set of technologies in microelectronics, computing, telecommunications/broadcasting and electronics etc. This will be the new axial principle of the economy and society. The computer play a pivotal role. Here the information is treated as a commodity and the possession of information does give more power to its owner. There is more and more penetration of information into more traditional areas of agriculture, manufacturing and services. There are major social changes resulting from the establishment of new telecommunications infrastructure over the globe. New forms of social interaction based on electronic communications devices are replacing older types of social relations. There is more application of IT to overcome the ecological and environmental problems associated with industrialism as well.

Knowledge workers of the knowledge society are distinctively different from those of the traditional society workers. They are defined as the symbolic analysts who manipulates symbols rather than machines. They are associated primarily in service sector. Knowledge workers systematically accumulate knowledge, share it and deploy it purposefully. Continuously improving the stock of knowledge will be critical for their success. Knowledge workers handle intangible assets rather than that tangible and are valued high in modern economies. The knowledge society is an emerging society whose economic base is widely shaped by the processes of generation, dissemination and exploitation of knowledge. There is a profound change in theory and practice of library profession over the passage of time. The advent of internet completely changed the perception of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). With the innovative initiations of online libraries that provide not just text in virtual format but other means of knowledge and information like audio files, videos, infographics, etc., the librarianship has been redefined over last few decades. Moreover the giant projects of online archives of documents ranging from pamphlets to bulky volumes of the series of books have been undertaken and updated continuously.

The developed countries are mainly leading while the developing countries are also in the scene. The concept of globalization is prevalent in every domain of life. The gigantic networks of the online libraries are being interconnected to create the world wide library where the institutional libraries can be seen as the leaves connected to the

nodes of the countries. In this scenario, the profession of librarianship cannot be thought as an isolated chunk of rigidly defined tasks. A librarian appointed by an institution is no more segregated from the requirements that a computer professional should fulfill. The librarianship is more demanding and more challenging with and without academic obligations. The library science is accompanying an art that conditionally requires skills of presentation of and delivery to the clientele. The librarian is exposed to global abstraction of librarianship which demands a multidisciplinary part with competence. The librarians are now the knowledge workers.

IV. LIBRARY – A KNOWLEDGE PROFESSION

Library and Information Science professional has legitimate claim to be included in the knowledge profession. This professional has the education, knowledge and skill to manage large collections of knowledge resources of various types including their electronic versions. The professional is also knowledgeable and has the skill and experience of many decades in the processing, organisation, and retrieval from such sources to produce various types of information products and services desired by end-users. Manual and technology-based tools and techniques for accomplishing such tasks have been developed. However, the library science professionals need to expand their horizon along with their potential clientele, and extend interaction and collaboration – across disciplines and user groups of different interests and service requirements.

Of the two principal dimensions of knowledge management are Semantic dimension and collaborative dimension. The library science professionals have long been performing adequately in the semantic dimension. But in the collaboration dimension they need to advance much further. The investment and effort in this dimension will not only enable them obtain feedback of the use of the existing information system but also develop their capability to move closer to providing full-fledged knowledge-based products and services to all categories of users assist in knowledge discovery and innovations, etc. by applying techniques and technologies available in other specialisations exempli gratia natural language processing, artificial intelligence, imaging, web-design, etc. It is widely accepted that an library professional, especially one who has to manage and organise information resources in specialised fields and interact with and provide information services to

subject specialists will perform better if s/he has a background or analytical knowledge of the main subject areas of the user groups. This issue is even better appreciated in the case of a knowledge processing.

However, it has also to be recognised that a knowledge possessing such an ideal competence; combination of subject knowledge with expertise in knowledge resources management, may not always be available. In large organisations there may be teams of subject specialists and information specialists working together to derive best of both worlds as it were. In smaller organisations, which are much larger in number, such teams may not be realised easily. More often than not, it is for the library professional to acquire domain knowledge.

V. GLOBAL ISSUES IN LIBRARIANSHIP Library

professionals are educating themselves on developments in ICTs and knowledge management. During the past decade education and training in information science and cognate subjects have become available at school and higher education levels. There are several issues that of concern pertaining to library professionals including digital libraries, library networks, ethics, professional associations, national and international information organisations, norms of staffing, laws of library science, archiving, computerization of libraries, resourcing, etc.

A. Changing Library Work

Library is a service-oriented organisation and users are its focus; customer satisfaction is their highest priority. To meet this mission, the typical tasks that librarians do are several such as to manage and resource a library, supervise and lead staff, design, direct, formulate policies and apply them to services to meet the information needs of users. They provide expert advice or consultancy services on strategic library management matters. They develop strategic plans, prepare budget and make submissions and briefings before general management. In larger libraries, librarians manage major projects including

Infusion of information technology systems and applications, provide leadership, perform managerial and specialist roles, engage in decision making and judgment on strategic matters.

Some librarians undertake programmes to market and promote library and information services. In sum, librarians manage information organisations, information resources, information services and

apply several tools and technologies for the purpose.

Library performance depends upon how effectively do librarians perform their roles and responsibilities at different levels of management and how do they share their responsibilities among different classes of library staff in meeting their mission.

The library technology landscape is changing rapidly. For managing their mandated missions and services, libraries are showing growing dependence on internet and networks, library management systems and many kinds of other technologies. The emerging digital publication trends, new forms of scholarship and publication and virtual forms of publication in various formats have shifted the focus in librarianship from library centered service to information centered service. Technology has since become mission critical to the libraries to manage complex collections of print, digital and electronic materials, to deal with both owned and licensed content, to better integrate with the enterprise infrastructure of the broader institutions through Web services and Application Programming Interface are to present modern user interfaces.

B. Skills and Knowledge

The library environment within which librarians execute their core mission has changed dramatically. The use of electronic information and related technologies has become indispensable in the delivery of library services. Users are adapting to a new and ever changing digital information environment. To provide innovative, value-added services and to meet the evolving needs, new areas of expertise are developing. These considerations make it clear that the professional librarians must adapt to the changing information environment and build skills and knowledge accordingly. They need to develop core competencies in three broad areas *videre licet* information technologies, librarianship, and organisation management so that they can play their roles and fulfil their responsibilities to the expectations of user clientele.

Core competencies are defined as a combination of skills and knowledge in such domains of knowledge as are important for organisational success, personal performance and career development. Besides, professional librarians need to possess certain personal competencies to work effectively and contribute positively to their organisations, users and profession. In particular, personal competencies range from being strong communicators to demonstrating value-addition of

their contributions, to remaining flexible and positive in an ever-changing environment.

Fortunately, one need not have to acquire all of these Competencies to be an effective library and information professional. What one does need is just a mix of competencies from each category; some traditional librarianship skills, some value-adding skills, some level of familiarity with IT, some generic skills and some of the attitudes and traits and some domain knowledge. To remain relevant and effective in contemporary IT dominated environment, professional librarians need to be broad-based to know a little of everything; they also need to be an expert in a small number of areas.

One needs different sets of competencies for different types of information jobs in different environments. Information professionals working in corporate organisations and corporate libraries will probably need more value-adding skills, entrepreneurial skills and domain knowledge. Professionals working in academic libraries probably require more technology skills as well as traditional skills. Public librarians need more social and community building skills. As the work environment can change rapidly, information professionals need to assess periodically which new skills they need to acquire and which current skills need to be strengthened. However, because of the individual's education background, aptitude and personality, it may be difficult to acquire certain types of competencies.

C. Library Associations

There is an underlying unity of purpose provide a good library and information service. This basic approach has unified all persons working in libraries and information/documentation centres to come together to form associations to focus attention on their common objectives. Library associations are learned societies. They promote development of the library movement in a country. They strive for better provision of library and information services. In this process, library associations also strive for advancement of the profession and the professionals. Professional associations are made up of, by and for the professionals in the fields concerned, *exempli gratia* librarians, library staff members, library science teachers, users of libraries and library associations. All these sectors are eligible for membership of library association. An association is what its members make of it by their active collaboration

and participation in its programmes and activities. As a fresh entrant to the profession, it is worthwhile for librarian to know how you can participate in the activities of the professional associations to serve their, ultimate cause.

A library professional should strive hard to qualify the norms of the profession. One should know your responsibilities and obligations to the profession, *id est* striving for improvement of library and information systems and services and advancement of library and information science. The image of a profession is built up by its members. Qualitative performance of duties and adherence to ethical principles and standards are essential to bring credibility, and to hold the status of the profession high. This can be achieved by active participation in the professional activities of the association at national and international level.

D. Library Networks

Libraries exist to serve their users. They have to satisfy their users by providing them the right information, in the right quantity, in the right form at the right time. The needs of users are diverse depending upon their characteristics like age, educational background, socio-economic status, and the context in which they need the information. To satisfy the diverse needs of their users, libraries depend upon each other. It is expressed by the term 'library cooperation'. The most basic form of this cooperation starts with sharing of documents amongst libraries. Libraries satisfy the document requirement of their users through 'Inter-Library Loan' from other libraries that has been evolved into 'Resource Sharing' wherein libraries share resources other than documents also. These resources include physical, intellectual and conceptual resources. This change speaks of the level of interdependence of libraries.

The developments in storage and telecommunication technology have facilitated libraries to establish library networks and that facilitates better connection amongst libraries. Library networks have enabled libraries to come together to serve their users better. The library consortium is the latest form of library cooperation wherein libraries and publishers have come together to take the benefit of network technology and web based e-resources.

E. Ethical Issues and Challenges

Ethics are essential elements for the profession of librarianship. Librarianship has an indispensable role in the society in collecting, preserving and disseminating knowledge. Library professionals have to deal with users, administration, and people in book and information trade and colleagues.

There are varied expectations from different groups at different stages from the library professionals. To resolve these complexities while practicing the profession, certain moral guidelines or ethical norms are essential.

Librarianship as a vocation has evolved through the ages, allowing values to accrue to the principles observed in the long sojourn of human civilization. It has undergone certain metamorphosis. The modern professional librarian displays in his principles of acquisition, organisation, utilization and ultimate dissemination of knowledge. Professional ethics is the science of right conduct and character; the science which treats of the nature and grounds of moral obligation; the doctrine of man's duty in respect of himself and the right of others. Professional librarians have provided with a creed and a code of ethics and it should be remembered in this context that the principles of library service, ethics of librarianship and librarian's creed are all indistinguishable features in the moral, intellectual and professional makeup of the librarian.

F. Digital Library

Digital libraries pose serious challenges in case of creation and deployment with efficiency. Most understanding of digital library probably assume that it will be accessible via the internet, though not necessarily to everyone. But the idea of digitization is perhaps the only characteristic of a digital library on which there is universal agreement. Digital library is popularly viewed as an electronic version of a library. The term digital library evokes a different impression in various groups. To some it simply means computerization of traditional libraries. But to others who have studied library science, it indicates carrying out the function of libraries in a new way, encompassing new types of information resources, new approaches to acquisition, new methods of storage and preservation, more reliance on electronic systems and networks. But to a computer professional, a digital library is simply a distributed text-based information system, a collection of distributed information service, etc. A digital library is a library of digital documents, artifacts and records. The advantage of having library material in digital form are the content occupies less space and can be replicated and used electronically, the content can be made available on networks, the search for content can be automated. A library professional needs to avail the available sources to use them as resources.

G. Resource Sharing

Libraries have changed from stand-alone entities to networked organisations, from collection-based to access-based, from physical existents to electronic and virtual libraries and their services moving from document-based to information based. It is a demanding situation for libraries when information available is plenty and demand is high. It has to be fulfilled instantly from just-in-time collection. It is here that the concept of resource sharing has come into picture. Libraries share their resources to serve their users in an effective and efficient manner. Services under resource sharing include inter library loan, cooperative cataloguing, cooperative collection development and joint storage of materials.

Literally resource sharing means joint use of resources. Resource refers to the source which one uses to get some work done. Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science defines resource as a person, thing or action to which one resorts to, when needed. To be more specific, we can say the resources in a library are staff, infrastructure, documents, and services. Sharing entails a relationship of reciprocity where the two parties offer their resources to each other for mutual benefit. Brewer defines it as an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of cooperative processes and mechanisms. Philip Sewell opines that resource sharing is an evolution of the concept existing earlier as library cooperation. The difference being that library cooperation assumes two or more libraries existing and working jointly to achieve their goals whereas in resource sharing, it is presumed that there exist a group of users putting demand on libraries. Libraries on the other hand come together to pool their resources to satisfy these demands. Resources may be physical or intellectual, the former refer to the documents and infrastructure, whereas the latter refer to the human resources expertise, which libraries can utilise to plan, implement or evaluate their services and routines. Resource sharing could be done in two ways: by working separately and sharing or by working together and sharing. While working together, they collaborate to produce bibliographical tools, software; acquire materials; organise conferences and workshops for research and training of personnel.

VI. CONCLUSION

After industrialisation society moved towards a post-industrial information age where production dissemination, and deployment of knowledge became the basis of productivity and social advancement. Mobilisation of human knowledge resources that includes specialisation, expertise and skills is an important aspect of the activities of the

knowledge professional. Various aspects of knowledge management that a knowledge professional need to be conversant with are equally applicable to library professionals.

A library professional can transform himself/herself into a knowledge professional. Library networks play a major role in bridging the gap between academic libraries and information centres and ensure resource sharing. Librarianship though started as vocation soon became profession having a specialised body of knowledge and specialised skills to serve the users with best collections of information that are organised for easy access. Thus the librarians ought to follow standard moral principles in selection, collection, and organisation and dissemination of knowledge. It has been emphasised that in a knowledge society it becomes crucial that the professionals have the skills and competencies relating to the selection and use of information. The code of ethics in librarianship has a vital role to play as it helps a professional to know what is expected of him and how he should conduct himself to meet the demands of the clientele and uphold values to keep up the profession's image. It has a role in protection clientele, librarians and enhancing the status of the profession.

To remain relevant in the challenging infosphere and to fulfil their roles and responsibilities to meet the expectations of users, professional librarians need to develop core competencies. The knowledge of addressing the emerging issues in library science, attributed by know-how and know-who, in the form of the dexterities essential to deal with codified knowledge is emphatically more important than that was ever before.

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