
PG College Librarians in the 21st Century: Changing Roles and Responsibilities

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Introduction

Information Scenario keeps changing with 'the development of national and global information infrastructure. The 'Information Technology' Revolution has brought about impact upon the society and economy activities. Information has become a significant component of world economy activity and being recognized as a major economic resource. Harker (1996) claimed that a tidal wave of change is headed towards the telecommunication industry, and it will ultimately transform the economic, social and political environment for nearly every person in the world. This change has been referred to as the 3T Wave, 'The Information Revolution' by Alvin Toffler, and the 'Infocosm' by Anderson Consulting and 'Convergence by Gemini Consulting. Keiser (1992) added that technological advancements in telecommunications allowed information users to exchange information more freely and globally. Living standards have been raised and the problems of everyday living eased considerably. Much of the change is being brought by technological innovation and the information revolution-the convergence of computing, communication and information. Organisations that acknowledge and prepare for this revolution will emerge as winners.

Librarianship is now at crossroads. The avalanche of document and information has posed serious problems to the traditional methods of organizing libraries and information centers. Actually, these methods are fast crumbling down. New methods of handling documents and information have been thought out in the West and librarians in the United States of America are already in the dawn of the paperless society. In Japan, which has gone several steps further than the developed countries of the West, the home computer has become a normal feature. probably, in the 21st century, there will be no need for large collections of books, or for huge, imposing buildings to house such collections. It would also not be necessary to appoint a fleet of professional staff to look after such libraries. Everybody concerned- the librarians and the information scientists, the readers and the research workers-would have to stay at their homes and operate their computer terminals to supply the information required or to receive the information needed (Desh pande, 1986).

Scope

This paper deals with how the conventional libraries are in the path of change due to various reasons and most striking one is impact of ICT. Further, this article deals with in this changing environment, what are the roles and responsibilities of library professionals.

Impact of Technology on Library Services

In academic environment, library is a place of intellectual stimulation and knowledge centre. It holds thousands of results of past research studies providing scope for further research. Until 1980s, the information seekers were greatly dependent on print resources and libraries were unique places for provision of such information. The past two decades have seen demand for new patterns of scholarly information. These technological advancements have made significant impact on the growth of knowledge and unlocking of human potential. In library environment, the impact is clearly visible on information resources services and people. Some of the notable impacts have been illustrated in the following:

Product

- **Changing document collections:** In the past the word collection referred mostly to the print materials. Today a library collection goes beyond the print materials and includes the CD-ROMs, audio-video cassettes, e-books, e-journals also;
- **The storage media:** The traditional paper as medium of storage is getting replaced with electronic media such as tapes, CDs/DVDs, and Web pages;
- **Format:** the traditional text format is being enriched by graphics and voice

Functions

Automation of library in-house operations

Various in-house operations in the library like book acquisitions, processing, and circulations, maintenance, reminders, and serials management are repetitive in nature. The need for automation are repetitive in nature. The need for automation arises as to reduce the effort and time required for these jobs. In addition to these, there are occasional functions like preparation of statistical reports. Computers are used in creating databases of information to form a basis for retrieving the relevant information when required by the user. The statistical reports related to transactions. budget expenditures, and other key issues can be generated with ease.

Resource Sharing: The ICT has helped in establishing networking. The library networking and resource sharing is more often carried out effectively through Internet and intranet. Library networks have expanded the limitation of the scope of resource sharing from inter library loan and document supply to sharing materials, functions, services and expertise.

Reprography: The invention and entry of reprographic or duplication techniques into the portals of libraries made many things easier for libraries as well as the readers. This helped the readers to get the copies of the documents and to reproduce rare/torn out books,, this also helps to save the library budget spent on purchase of back issues of journals or reprints, to preserve the handwritten manuscripts;

Communication : The advent of communication technology has revolutionized the activities of library and information system. Today the Internet provides efficient means of communication and Libraries/librarians are using it extensively to communicate with vendors of library products and services, scholars, researchers and users via email;

The Internet technology : Gave birth to another powerful media called e-discussion forums. These forums connect people for networking, exchange the information and solutions to problems and navigate documents all over the world;

Search engines and instant message : The emergence of free search engines like Google, yahoo and MSN, do provide wide scope for information search across the globe and connecting many people instantly;

Quality of Service : Application of information technology has contributed immensely for the improvement in provision of quick, quality services the libraries try to achieve customers' satisfaction.

People-Customers/Users

Choice of Sources : The technology has enabled the users to have multiple sources of information such as Internet, commercial information service providers. As a result, the library is not the only source of information provision for information seekers;

Death of Distance : The emergence of the Internet has paved the way for access to global information trespassing all geographical barriers:

Diminishing Time-Zones : The present day information seekers can obtain the information overcoming the time barriers;

Remote Access : Currently, information seekers can access the worldwide information across the globe through their desktops without any time limitations (24x7x365 days);

Basic Skills : Unlike in past the current users need to possess basic technical skills to access the information in electronic media;

On line Search : Another impact is access to variety of commercial and non-commercial information sources including bibliographic and full text databases, tables of contents of primary journals, electronic and online journals, books and newsletter, library catalogues and Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), graphics data bases etc, Now through network one can access a remote computer. And use it interactively as if the local computer were a terminal of that host machine. Automatic indexing, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Current Awareness Service (CAS) activities are added services to the IT based library Services.

People-Staff

Duties and Responsibilities of the Library Professionals

In this age of information technology the duties of library professionals have changed. Earlier the librarians were considered as the custodian of books or information. The

changing environment forces the librarian to restructure their library to suit the requirements of their customers. Today the libraries require a dynamic librarian, who is ready to accept the changes and challenges. Thomas Frey (2005), Executive Director of the DaVinci Institute, Colorado traced 10 key changing trends like i) communication systems, ii) replacement of existing technology by new one, iii) size of storage device, iv) search technology, v) time compression of readers, vi) verbal society, vii) demand for global information, viii) global systems, ix) transition from product economy to experience economy and x) library as cultural centre that are affecting the development of the next generation library.

The 'Change'

Forces for Change

Computer technologies are a major force that affected all concerned in the value added information chain including libraries and information professionals. Not only the world becoming an interconnected global community, it has changed and shifts the fundamental roles, paradigms and organizational culture of libraries and information professionals as well. Opportunities have never been better for the librarian in a non-traditional setting. The Internet and cutting-edge information technology have created new jobs and demand new skills. The image of the profession, if not more positive than before, is certainly changing as new jobs are emerging. Now is the time from the profession to show the rest of the world what skills its members possess and how those skills mesh with the emerging job requirements. Change is running rampant in libraries with technology as the driving force. From recent writings and literatures, the paradigm shifts for libraries and information professionals can be seen as indicated in Tables 1 and 2 that is from the traditional setting to an electronic era.

Information professionals as the resource person in the libraries too, have shifted their activities and roles due to these changes. Table 2 indicates the trend of paradigm shifts for the information professionals from the traditional roles to a new role.

Why The Need to 'change'?

'Change' is the only constraint facing libraries and information professionals in the 21st century. Academic libraries and especially PG college libraries have to change and expand their horizons for the following reasons :

- a) Positioning the library as leading players in the information industry and major providers of information services using the latest and advanced IT.
- b) Competitive with other information providers, including information brokers and networks because of the marked increase in user expectation.
- c) The techno-revolution is recreating the workplace and academic libraries as organizations are not immune for its impact.

- d) Shift in focus and it is vital that the information age must now give way to the communication age (Burrus, 1993).
- e) The concept of the library as a warehouse of information has lost validity.
- f) Enhance skills in leadership, business relationships and technology through change opportunities.

Roles and Responsibilities of Librarians

Positions and Duties

Specific duties vary depending on the size and type of library. Olivia Crosby described librarians as 'Information experts in the information age'. Responsibilities of librarians as stated in Wikipedia are as follows :

Table 1 : Paradigm shift for libraries

Library before Electronic Era	Library in Electronic Era
Printed with fixed, permanent, collections	Electronic formatted text
Go to the library	Library at the door steps
Own collection and museum of distributed information confined with the library	Virtual collections and information resources
Static library facilities with fixed stacks	Dynamic without stacks
Hierarchical organizational structure	Non-hierarchical organizational
Management style-Rank and File	Electronic file formats
Standard reference services.	Online reference services
Free library services	Free and fee-based library services
Small scale budgets	Need large scale budgets
Need large physical space	Less space required

Table 2 : Shift in roles for information professionals

Traditional Roles	New Roles
Job designation : Librarian	Information manager, System Administrator
Name of Profession : Library Science	Information Science and Technology
Custodian of books and keeper of knowledge	Information and knowledge dissemination
Preoccupation with collections	Preoccupation with information
Collection maintenance and custodial tasks	Information Resource Management

- Researching topics of interest for their constituencies
- Referring patrons to other community organizations and government offices
- Suggesting appropriate books ('readers' advisory') for children of different reading levels, and recommending novels for recreational reading

- Facilitating and promoting reading clubs
- Developing programs for library users of all ages and backgrounds
- Managing access to electronic information resources
- Building collections to respond to changing community needs or demands
- Creating pathfinders
- Writing grants to gain funding for expanded program or collections
- Digitising collections for online access
- Answering incoming reference questions via telephone, postal mail, email, fax and chat
- Making and enforcing computer appointments on the public access Internet computers (Wikipedia).

1. **The Changing Role of Librarian**

Information Technology is rapidly changing the whole world creating new challenges and opportunities. Library and Information Service (LIS) profession is one of the most challenging professions in the knowledge society, combining expertise in information management with the information and communication Technology (ICT) competencies. The ICT has tremendous impact on library operation, resource, services, staff and users. The LIS professionals are confronting challenging dynamic technological environment demanding the extensive and effective utilisation of ICT in order to survive and meet the changing complex information needs of user community. The change is the law of nature.

The ICT is driving force of change in library. Change is inevitable for the survival and success of nay library in the changing technological world. The LIS professionals must develop expert technological competencies required to make best use of the opportunities, the ICT offers in order to provide a gateway access to wide range and variety of information resources and services.

2. **New Challenges For Library and Information Service Professionals**

The major challenges for library and information science professionals as stated by (Ramana, 2006) are in the following :

- Information Explosion
- The ICT Revolution
- Explosive growth and usage of Web resources
- Dwindling library budgets
- Escalating cost of printed documents
- Intensive use of digital resources
- Heightened level of users' expectations

- Interactive virtual learning environment
- Evolution of virtual educational institutions
- Changing nature and number of information resources
- New patterns of scholarly publishing and communication
- Development of digital, virtual and hybrid libraries
- Online bookshops & information services

These challenges have called for reorientation, reengineering, transformation and great changes in the information environment, library functions and the roles of library and information service professionals.

Conclusion

Libraries need to change quite dramatically to modernize almost every aspect of their operations, information resources and services in order to meet the rising users' expectations. As the world advances, the library must also evolve and redesign their activities in order to deliver highly quality, need-based and value-added services according to the expectations of today's library users. The change is inevitable for the survival and success of any library in the changing technological world. The LIS professionals must develop expert technological competencies required to make best use of the opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors profoundly acknowledge the authors whose works has been cited and also inadvertently not cited few authors name due to non availability of correct references, but ungrudgingly convey thanks to all.

**Librarian*

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