TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO USERS/STAFF FOR OPTIMUM USE OF LIBRARY RESOURCES : A CASE OF CENTRE ON RURAL DOCUMENTATION (CORD)

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Abstract

The great libraries of the future are not those with great collections but those with great staff, knowledge must be rediscovered in the library before it is used (Lowry, 1991). The trained and dedicated librarian would act as an intermediary in this rediscovery process. The paper highlights the efforts made by CORD, NIRD to identify the information needs of the users, barriers in accessing information, best practices for effective use of information etc were discussed in an open form consisting of working librarians, faculty, experts, library staff etc. to find solutions for the optimum use of Library Resources. Further emphasised the importance of training for the staff/users to serve the user community by using latest technologies, in the similar lines the users also get trained to tap the resources available internally and Globally. For this purpose CORD is conducting three training programmes in an year for the staff and three for the users in this direction.

Keywords : Library Resources, CORD, Users.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the library as a resource centre and the endeavor of the management to exploit the resources gathered over the years with a lot of investment, need not be over emphasized. However, it has been the experience of many a library, especially those attached to organisations, the use of their resources appear to be little compared to the efforts put in building up the resources. As such there appears to be a constant need to initiate outreach programmes in order to enhance the usage of the library to the maximum extent.

Library is looked upon as a centre for learning. The Library has to strive to repackage the material that is received in the library in the form of Alerts, reviews, digests, abstracts and databases to enhance library utilization and improve readership. Also, in view of the rapid developments in Information and Communication Technologies, the role of a librarian is not like what it used to be a few decades ago. Added to IT, satellite communication systems, networking, Internet and intellectual property rights, have all made the library environment more complex. Further, the budgetary constraints, inadequate infrastructure, falling standards in human resources are all compelling the librarian to change his attitude from a mere custodian of information to that of a facilitator. As the library is a service institution there should be close interaction between the information providers, processors and users to enhance the effectivity of any resource centre

Keeping in view the above factors, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) conducted a learning programme on. This programme provided a forum for the users of information and the library personnel to come together, to understand each others way of dealing with information and how the information barriers can be overcome and what best practices are to be adopted to increase the utilization of the resources of the Library through various training programmes .

2.   LIBRARY UTILIZATION AND READERSHIP ENHANCEMENT (LURE)

When CORD conducted the one-day programme **LURE I** in 1991, had a modest goal to find out the ways and means to increase the library utilization by adopting innovative methods to lure the readers. This was based on a feeling that we have been investing in the library huge amounts of money year after year, trying to equip the library with more relevant reading material and also recruit trained personnel to make the resources more useful.

While we are trying to build up a tempo, we had a feeling somewhere along the line that the readers or users are still not coming along with us. This feeling lead us to an introspection which gave rise to the impetus for conducting a programme for the first time on LURE in 1991. As stated earlier, the learning programme provided an opportunity for interaction between the library professionals and our own users in understanding the lacunae in promoting exploitation of library resources.

In the first workshop on LURE in 1991 several issues were thrown up such as the following.

3.   ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

As the reader is reluctant to come to library, it may be necessary that the library has to go to the reader. Naturally, that situation will determine the kind of services that are planned or envisaged to enhance the usage of the library. The issues that influence the usage hinge upon how the information needs are gauged and the methods that are adopted to identify those needs. Some of the other major issues identified are:

1.   Focus of the parent organisation

2.   Information collection

3.   Information processing

4.   Information search in the Internet era

5.   Information dissemination

6.   Information barriers

The workshop offered a set of simple but effective steps to increase the library use with suggestions like involvement of users in procurement of literature, client based services etc., The other major recommendations include: (a) The book selection and acquisition are both important and modalities like participatory practices have to be followed; (b) User education and user services have to be frequently conducted by the library to improve the interaction between users and the library personnel; (c) A brochure on the library highlighting the library collection, cataloging and classification system followed and the services offered would be more useful; (d) immediate computerization of all activities of library; (e)   creation of new services like abstracting, alerting service, reference and making digests on specific topics etc., (f) augmentation of facilities for document supply and other physical facilities like proper sign boards, stools to reach higher shelves, etc., and (g) strengthening of the resource sharing at the local level.

These recommendations were taken seriously as they were particularly important in the over all development of the library utilization. Fortunately, most of the suggestions would be implemented with a telling effect on the positive response of the readers.

4.   LURE - II

After a gap of nearly two years, CORD thought of again reviewing the library utilization with the completion of library automation. Accordingly, in 1993 a second programme on LURE was conducted. This time with a difference. The impetus came from the management of parent organization. There was a constant refrain from the management that with automation is there any improvement in the utilization of library resources? How many faculty are visiting the library? What is the ratio between faculty and participants of various training programmes that visit the library? What special arrangements were made to familiarize the participants with the new automation etc., These were a few of the questions that were bothering the management. Also, with computerization of library procedures, a new barrier is likely to be perceived by the users. Such 'Automation anxiety' may have to be taken into consideration in designing training programmes on library initiation. Accordingly, the participants were chosen from not only the users of the library but also the participants of the then running courses, besides other librarians of neighbouring institutions.

The programme was conducted in 3 sessions. In these sessions several papers based on cases illustrating the circulation facility, visitors register, pattern of usage of library on different dates and use of various information products of CORD were presented. These studies provided a picture of the pattern of library usage after the automation which appeared to be promising and provided the guidance as to how to increase awareness and access to information. Several suggestions emerged based on the discussions and some of which are as follows:—

i.   Information Products

1.   The coverage of indexing and abstracting services done through CORD Index and CORD Abstracts is found to be satisfactory. However, emphasis may have to be given to the immediate interest of the faculty members depending on their research and training programmes.

2.   The journals that are covered in CORD Alerts may have to be displayed at a designed place for their immediate location and identification of articles given in the service.

ii.   Maintenance

1.   Upkeep and maintenance of various sections will provide the necessary incentive for the users to browse.

2.   Library staff should be trained and motivated to assist the readers.

iii.   User Studies

1.   Though the faculty members are patronising the library, there is a scope for improvement.

2.   Visitors to the Library are not always recording their visits in the prescribed register and so it did not reflect the total visits made by the academic staff in comparison with non-academic staff. A strict vigil on the visitors register may have to be maintained to satisfy the management.

The other major recommendations include (a) promotion of library with a professional image is essential; (b) Library staff should be trained in inter-personnel communication skills; (c) There is a need to display current journals in more attractive and useful manner like displaying latest issues at a prominent place, rearranging of primary journals in alphabetical sequence, etc., (d) NIRD publications should be displayed prominently for outside visitors. (e) A marketing approach to its library and information products is essential. For this purpose Library counters and surrounding areas should be used for display of not only for acquired publications but also NIRD publications. (f) There are about 3000 participants in a year coming to NIRD to participate in the training programmes, who should be given orientation tour to the library for better appreciation of the resources. Also, a session on information resources, and information management relevant to the theme of any course wherever possible should be arranged apart from

display of the publications pertaining to the training programme. (g) A faculty directory, user manual, training of staff on information technology etc., are other suggestions that emerged from the programme.

After LURE-II in 1993 there was marked improvement in the appreciation of library services, the physical facilities and the environment in the library. Non-book material like CD-ROMS, videos, electronic journal have slowly started to show their presence. In the mid 90s internet opened gates to the Information sources world wide, and made possible access to information from a remote location. As a result it has become more important to look into the problems of transforming a traditional library into an information clearinghouse.

5.   LURE - III

Against this backdrop a 3rd LURE programme was conducted in the year 1998 after a gap of 5 years. This learning programme was made into a National Workshop inviting papers from all over India on various themes such as library utilisation; techniques of readership enhancement; evaluation of library services; internet and changing role of the librarian etc., (NIRD, 1998).

Participants from several parts of the country made their presentations based on their own back-home experience in user education and identification of user needs. This workshop revealed various kinds of experiments that are on-going in several parts of the country by innovative librarians and demystifying the Internet for the librarian and the user. Information search in the Internet era has totally changed the way the readers look for information. Searching Internet should become a matter of routine in any special library, to make the expression "Internet is Librarianship" truly applicable. Some of the other major recommendations of the workshop were:

1.   Continuous study of user needs.

2.   Development of communication skills of the library personnel.

3.   Role of parent organization in recognising the contribution of their libraries and supporting their activity.

4.   Design and update of user manual in the fast changing information technology environment.

5.   Change of attitude of librarians to the market driven economy and interact with the users more closely and make users appreciate the library services.

6.   A thematic approach to all the library services have to be i.e., the information products of the library like CORD INDEX, CORD ABSTRACTS should follow the themes identified for the research and training of the institute.

7.   The Selective Dissemination of Information(SDI) service can perhaps be concentrated on a faculty or a discipline at a time. Once a faculty is studied for a period of 6 months or so as a focussed group the impact on the group and its activities perhaps be quantitatively measured.

CORD is giving continuous training to the Library staff in the above areas in order to serve the clientele for effective use of Library Resources. They are also deputing the staff to other training programmes to get trained in these as well as new emerging areas. Simultaneously providing training and support to the users for better utiliztion of the resources without any barriers.

Thus a new era emerged where information driven activities gained importance which will hopefully energize the users as well as information specialists to come together and work for the better uilization of information following the best practices in information dissemination through regular training programmes.

6. CONCLUSION

The best practices that are to be adopted in any library are basically to take into consideration the user needs. As the needs vary from time to time based on the activities that are taken up by the users, a periodical assessment of user needs is essential. Also, it would be essential to keep good relations with support departments such as administration, computer centre, information and communication and media services to project the library activities properly as well as to support its services internally. (Barlow et al, 2000)

The best practices are those which will reduce the library anxiety and invite readers to come to the library. The great libraries of the future are not those with great collections but those with great staff, knowledge must be rediscovered in the library before it is used (Lowry, 1991). The trained and dedicated librarian would act as an intermediary in this rediscovery process.

For this purpose, the librarian has to be proficient in conceiving and designing appropriate information products, training modules and luring the readers to the library in order to enhance the readership. He has to truly act as a facilitator and a total quality conscious person, keeping in view the user needs to continuously better the best practices. Hence continuous training is required for the staff to serve the user better and maximum support and necessary training has to be provided for the user/clientele for effective use of Library Resources.

7. REFERENCES

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