Information Management in Academic Library Environment : An Appraisal

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Abstract

Every activity in the field of information science and technology is related to the complex process of information management. Historical background, the factors of origin and characteristics of information management are mentioned. Other related aspects like human resource and infrastructural development, user education, and counselling are also discussed. The new environment has brought changes in the characteristics of information systems, styles of management attitudes and skills of staff. These changes demand an understanding of information work and the new technology over which the manager has to function.

Introduction

Information management can be viewed as the keystone of information science and technology. Every activity in this eclectic profession from user requirements, system design and evaluation to documents and knowledge representation, a database organisation, storage and retrieval techniques, hard and soft technology applications, as well as repackaging, dissemination, and marketing relates to the complex process of managing information.

The birth of information management took place on the day on which the Paperwork Reduction Act (1980) was entered upon the statute book of the United States of America. However, truly information management began at least two thousands years ago and then known as 'military intelligence'.

The decade of the 1980s is revealing trends that reflect the convergence of information sciences, information technologies and information mangement professions alongwith the widespread need to manage information as a resource. In particular as office automation products and concepts are adopted by more and more organisations, the need for serious information management increases exponentially.

An overview of the past decade indicates the origins of information management. The most significant developments were: i) the institutionalisation of computer technologies as organisational resources; (ii) the conveying information and communications technologies and their effect on society; (iii) national attention to information and knowledge management; and (iv) the professionalisation of information management disciplines.

Information management includes the management of information in any form, particularly the written form. Documents whether on paper, electronic or image form a major part of the information that today's technologies address.

Information management is "the efficient and effective co-ordination of information from internal and external sources"[3]. World War II provides us with excellent examples of how effective information management can make the difference between defeat and victory.

Formal Management Information[1] and Decision Support Systems[2] are not particularly common in libraries, researchers in other organisational environments are beginning to look beyond them for relative failure of some systems to new methods of organising information and to the application of artificial intelligence to managerial decision making.

"Information management is concerned with obtaining the best possible value for money from an organization's information resources[2]". 'Value for money' can be applied to all aspects of information and expect to come up with answers which depending on the aspect of information it addressed, improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness. 'Information resources' cover both data and information and to include all information irrespective of the media on which it was recorded.

It is worth noting that the term 'Information Resource Management' has tended to be used by many American commentators, although the definition used is similar to that of information management.

The characeristics of information management are :

1. Like money, manpower and materials, information is a resource requiring proper management;

2. Information management depends on someone's responsibilities;

3. Information management makes up aware about new developments;

4. Understanding of information flow is required in information management;

5. Information management means planning and co-ordination in respect of utilization of information skills, technology and sources.

Human Resource and Infrastructural Development

There is no more complicated area of managing academic libraries than dealing with the human forces that affect job performance. Each person is different, and each job entails its own tasks and work environment. In addition, supervisors react uniquely to each employee. Information managers have discovered time and again that there is no simple formula that relieves them of trying to understand employees as people. This is good in one sense, because it forces the manager to treat employees as individuals, but it also makes it hard to create general policies and programs for all employees. It places special and difficult demands on the supervisor to be personally responsive to individual needs. Underlying all the concern for employees must be the fundamental goal of prodctivity; the manager must ask, "How do I structure the workplace to get the most out of my staff ?"

The manger's task is daunting : he or she is expected to stimulate high productivity among the staff while simultaneously maintaining high job satisfaction and morale and keeping turnover, absenteeism, and conflict low. All of this requires an understanding of not one but three fundamental concepts : job satisafaction, human motivation and job commitment.

Dealing with the human factors that affect the work place requires special sensitivity on the part of the information manager. Among the actions the library employer should take to provide for a productive work force are the following :

   i) Realistic job previews for incoming employees

  ii) Clarify organisational goals and values

 iii) Make job tasks interesting

  iv) Expose the new employee to work that develops commitment.

   v) Set challenging goals

  vi) Provide opportunities for employees to demonstrate commitment

 vii) Provide responsible jobs

viii) Create opportunities for building social bonds

  ix) Create fair evaluation and compensation systems

   x) Good orientation, training and staff development

  xi) Design motivational programs for different career stages

User Education

User education is constituted of the four inter-related components viz. user awareness[3], library orientation[4], interest profiling[5] and bibliographic instruction[6]. Once users have been made aware of the library as a primary source of information, then they must be oriented to library facilities. Thus user awareness is the initial stage, preceding library orientation. Interest profilling should precede bibliographic instruction. Library orientation and bibliographic instruction form the basic componets of user education. Library orientation precedes bibliographic instruction. In an idealistic approach, the two are inseparable. Library orientation is supposed to lay ground work for bibliographic instruction whereby the users can become effective users.

Overall goals and objectives of user education are very often depend on the basis of the concept of user needs.

Counselling

The application of 'Information Management' concept to the harnessing of distributed information and computing resources in the university sector in the United Kingdom, North America and Luxemberg has been introduced in the early 1980s in Harvard Business School, MIT, Sloan School of Management, Henley Distance Learning and the Open Tech (M.Sc), Association for Computing Machinery Curriculum Committee on Information Systems, London Business School, Europe Institute of Information Management, Sheffield University etc.

It is time to give up our empirical approach to Information Management and to treat it as a mature subject. There is a need for more research on the application of Information Management in all kinds of organizations in all over the World that goes beyond the case study approach. In particular, we need to gain a better understanding of the relationship between Information Management and other aspects of management.

There is also need for much more and better training in Information Management for all types of managers. Different training programmes can be tailored to individual requirements.

Both short term and long term training is necessary but the value of training will continue to be limited unless and until the subject has the solid foundation that only systematic study and research can provide. The long-term training will eventually produce people with special qualifications in Information Management.

Conclusion

Characteristics of information systems, styles of management attitudes and skills of staff, are changing rapidly in the shift from data processing of 1960s to information technology.

The changing role of information scientist and library staff can cause anxieties about their future, and changing work patterns are always unsetting. The management of information professionals during a period of change is thus a demanding task, requiring both an understanding of information work and, increasingly, the new technology over which the manager has to function.

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