

Academic Libraries in the Participatory Age

Bibhuti Bhusan Sahoo

Abstract

Libraries are moving into a transitional state i.e. traditional library service and integration of current ICT to facilitate the services. Since the inception of libraries, libraries are trying to develop their collection in order to satisfy the need of their users. It is not possible for the librarians' to provide all desired information to their users so they depend on other libraries for the information. The Library cooperation started with the participatory culture. The library professionals cooperate each other's through various ways like inter library loan, consultancies etc. Online catalogs, high-tech campus information networks, and accelerated resource sharing present opportunities for building comprehensive information centers. The present paper discusses the participative management, team work, ICT, Library building etc among library professionals as well as the user community. The library 2.0 technologies are helpful for collaborating in information creation, storage and retrieval. The library staff needs to be more dynamic in their approach to learn the current technology and leadership skills.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Library 2.0

1. Introduction

The Singapore Public Library system was transformed from being mediocre at best to world class using information technology, progressive human-resources management, and marketing approaches unusual for government agencies. For the last 10 years, the transformation of the NLS in Singapore has been spectacular and this was captured in a Harvard Business School case study (Hallowell et al., 2001¹). From FY 1995 to FY 2000, physical loans and total membership have risen, and increased dramatically by 74.8% and 73.8% respectively, reflecting the success of the library expansion program. Concern for employees was demonstrated through a leadership style that involved people in teamwork, allowed for

alternative solutions to problems, and sought commitment on the part of employees. Employees at all levels were given additional training on how to better assist patrons and respond to their needs. The system of evaluation was brought in line with the new focus on service; comments by patrons were used as an important a measure of performance. Finally, workers who performed well were then recognized by management and shown as good examples to other staff members. Workers became involved in the process by submitting suggestions for improvements. A large proportion of these ideas were later implemented in the final plans for the new library system. Many workers were also given the opportunity to become directly involved in the process by working in teams with management, with the responsibility of finding alternative solutions to the problems facing the country's libraries. By talking to staff members and creating



ways for them to be more involved, the NLB was able to overcome some resistance to change

The above case study is the perfect example of transforming any library system to an effective library system. In this era, participation of each element in a system is very important includes the parent body administration, Library administration, library employee, Library advisory committee and the users especially the student community. Be it for the planning of a new library building or introduction of new service etc, participation approach is essential. The participatory approach always brings a better solution to any kind of new initiatives or problem. The current participative technologies like web 2.0/ library 2.0 have made the process a reality now.

2. Review of Literature

Akeroyd, (2001) reviewed the future of academic libraries and Touches upon some economic changes and looks for evidence in statistical trends derived from United Kingdom reportage. From this extrapolates scenarios relating to the function of libraries as a collection of resources, as a physical place, its role in organizing information and its service function. Library collections will continue to exist but described in different ways, whilst physical collections will mutate into multi-functional spaces. Knowledge management will become increasingly important and the overriding shift will be towards a service and support role².

In 2006³ the ACRL Research Committee shortlisted to the ten most pertinent assumptions. Some of them are as below: There will be an increased emphasis on digitizing collections, preserving digital archives, and improving methods of data storage and retrieval ;The skill set for librarians

will continue to evolve in response to the needs and expectations of the changing populations (students and faculty) that they serve; Students and faculty will increasingly demand faster and greater access to services; The demand for technology-related services will grow and require additional funding.; Higher education will increasingly view the institution as a business ; Students will increasingly view themselves as customers and consumers, Distance learning will be an increasingly more common option in higher education, and will coexist but not threaten the traditional model; Free public access to information stemming from publicly funded research will continue to grow.

Brodsky (2003)⁴ suggested that libraries must market themselves to their constituents to ensure that services are utilized and appropriate resources are allocated for all formats of library materials. By committing to a strong marketing program, the University Library at Sonoma State University developed strategic plans to gain broader support from faculty, students, administrators and greater use of services.

3. Key Terms

Participatory librarianship⁵ is an emergent approach to the profession grounded in conversation theory which states knowledge is created through conversation and libraries. Librarians and policy makers alike would need greater understanding of terms like Web 2.0, Library 2.0. The term Web 2.0 is associated with web applications that facilitate participatory information sharing⁶, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media

dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where users (consumers) are limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them. Examples of Web 2.0 include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, mashups and folksonomies. The rise of participatory networks and social sites such as Face Book, Flickr and the like is a result of people seeking to be active constructors of the knowledge. Encountering traditional encyclopedias that structure knowledge among elites and disseminate it to the masses is replaced by Wikipedia, which allows users to not only access information, but to construct it. The first is obviously as organizations that provide information online and off, libraries must accommodate users' growing expectations for participation.

Some of the other key terms were discussed below to explain the participatory culture:

A participatory organization is an organization which is built based on people participation rather than their contract obligations.⁷

Participatory management⁸ is the practice of empowering employees to participate in organizational decision making. While senior managers still retain final decision making authority when participatory management is practiced, employees are encouraged to voice their opinions about their working conditions in a safe environment, protected from the potential defensiveness of middle managers who they might criticize. There is some criticism of participatory management, particularly because it is difficult to combine this practice with a more financially oriented approach to restructuring that may require downsizing.

Participatory Development⁹ seeks to engage local populations in development projects. Most manifestations of PD seek "to give the poor a part in initiatives designed for their benefit" in the hopes that development projects will be more sustainable and successful if local populations are engaged in the development process. Participation refers to involvement whereby local populations in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. Participation requires recognition and use of local capacities and avoids the imposition of priorities from the outside."

4. Meaning of Participation

Participation is not a unitary concept, but consists of interrelated elements, which may be manifested, in the decision-making processes of an organization in a wide variety of ways. Three elements central to the concept of participation are:

- 1) influence
- 2) interaction and
- 3) information-sharing, and these require consideration.

The term 'participation' refers to influence in decision-making exerted through a process of interaction between employees, and administrators based upon information sharing. The degree to which influence is exerted determines the degree of participation, which occurs given that such influence is exerted through a process of interaction and information sharing and is not solely dependent upon coercive power.

5. Library as Place for Knowledge Storage and Collaborative Learning

Since the earliest days, Library is a large collection of books, and can refer to the place in which the

collection is housed. Today, the term can refer to any collection, including digital sources, and services. The collections can be of print, audio, and visual materials in numerous formats, including maps, prints, documents, microform (microfilm/microfiche), CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, video games, e-books, audio books and many other electronic resources.

The first libraries mainly consisted of published records, housed in a particular type of library, called archives. Archaeological findings from the ancient city-states of Sumer have revealed temple rooms full of clay tablets in cuneiform script. These archives were made up almost completely of the records of commercial transactions or inventories, with only a few documents devoted to theological matters, historical records or legends. Things were much the same in the government and temple records on papyrus of Ancient Egypt.

An academic library is a library that is attached to academic institutions, serving the teaching and research needs of students and staff. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. The current academic library set up store the information as well as to offer a place to collaborates.

We have now reached the point at which academic libraries are now hybrid operations of both print and digital services and collections, and many libraries are beginning to withdraw their old print resources and going for the e-back file access to the journals. In a hybrid information environment in which the digital dominates, Essentially, the question is—what is the role of the library as a physical place when users do not need to visit a

library building to use library services or resources? With the emergence of electronic resources, researcher and faculty members are rarely visit the library as they get almost all their required information through their desktop via campus wide network. It has been observed that less numbers of users are visiting the library regularly, except during the examination. It is understood that the user's needs a place to sit and study quietly including the usage of their personal laptop with uninterrupted power supply. Now the reading behaviour is also being changed that students studies up to late in the night. In that case the libraries needs to be opened 24 hours. In order to increase the usage of library space academic libraries need to aggressive in their approach to satisfy the students learning behavior¹⁰.

In his book *The Great Good Place* (1999), sociologist Ray Oldenburg¹¹ posited the concept of the “third place,” a place where people choose to go that is outside of their work or home. When considering the role of the library building and the needs of the users, the library can become the “third place” giving them a place to meet and create a sense of community. A third place offers a comfortable welcoming environment for informal gathering where people come and go at their leisure and nobody is “required to play host”. The comfortable setting of the third place provides users with a place to relax, feel at home, and be themselves.

6. Planning of Library Building

We are in a new era, in which the physical library building and its design are more important than ever. It is a place in which students frequently work, study and/or help one another. Indeed, they are

expected to collaborate - although collaboration still remains more of a process for business than academe. The architecture of academic libraries are much discussed across the world. Majority of the universities and other academic institutions have bigger library building. They were built when the universities/ institutions established. Most of them are now old. Academic institutions are initiated to have a new building or are in process of renovation. Now greater attention to student and faculty expectations and the impact of technology on library and information operations are combining to significantly alter library physical facilities and programme. Alliances and partnerships among a variety of academic and support units are resulting in facilities more responsive to users' work habits and their preferences for comfortable, inviting, and productive environments.

It is been observed that the interiors of most existing libraries were not designed to accommodate extensive high-tech equipment or encourage its frequent use. Librarians need to identify and bring about the design features required to make academic libraries "gateways" to the vast resources of electronic and printed information. The planning process is librarians building design and space decisions for online information access, electronic study centers, and other automated systems. The objective is to create a flexible, user-friendly design that streamlines or eliminates obstructions to information access.

There is a need to use interpolative planning as opposed to extrapolative planning in redesigning space. Interpolative planning involved focusing on "the uses of library space that cannot be simply predicted from past patterns of use" such as the users' need to create their own space for learning.

It is important for libraries to plan for what students may need in the future, needs that may divert resources from traditional library services. Academic libraries were becoming interested in creating more space for the user. Librarian/ directors repeatedly commented on the need to focus more on the user, group study space, and the need for social spaces in the library. The demand for social spaces in the library, whether it be lounges, cafes, or outdoor seating, illustrated the need to accommodate the user and provide them an environment that they find conducive to their learning. Academic libraries experienced a shift focusing more on their users or learners and their need for space rather than on creating more space for the collection. The library building must be attractive enough to attract the student community and the faculty members.

7. Library Staff and Services

In print only Library, Library staff were involved with the work of ordering, processing, cataloging and circulating materials, staff stayed in continual contact with the collection and developed a deep knowledge of its history, content and location. Faculty and students relied upon this expertise to ease the discovery and retrieval of books and articles. Various services such as interlibrary loan, acquisitions, circulation and reserves also brought users, staff and collections together and offered easy opportunities to forge friendships and to learn of future research needs. Due to the introduction of library automation, the searching and retrieval of the documents became very easy and user friendly. The practice of bundling e-resources into packages has obviated the subject expertise once required to build and maintain collections. As a result the institutional knowledge that the staff once had of

the collection has diminished. Researchers and teaching faculty are in a position to be as or more knowledgeable about the collection than their counterparts in the library. Staying aware of current trends in scholarship and scholarly communication requires more attention than in the past as both are changing rapidly. Due to the electronic access of reading materials like journals and books in format of e-journals and e-books, users get metadata and its full text through RSS feeds, alert services includes TOC and scholarly blogs, federated search engine etc. None of these require close proximity to physical collections. Therefore maintaining close contact with the libraries' core users requires a more conscious effort than in the print environment. One cannot assume that these users will use the physical library or even access the library's website. More proactive methods are called for: liaison programs, library literacy programs, outreach activities and active participation in the scholarly life of the campus.

The explosion of new technologies and information resources have led library administrators are forced to carefully evaluate how adequately library staffs are prepared to support new and changing services. Libraries, like all other institutions, must change. They must adapt to the changing environment and proactively prepare for the future. One step in the preparation for the future is the identification and development of core competencies for library staff. Skills stressed as necessary often include team building, quality management, and problem solving, classification, cataloguing and ICT skills include Open Source Softwares, Website development, digitization projects, institutional repositories and research methodology require staff with high computer and information technology skill. With majority of library staffs expected to retire in the next few years, there is an opportunity to reshape the library staff. To do so will require

strong leadership, clear goals and new organizational structures.

8. Information Technology(IT) and Academic Library

The libraries are the leader in the use of IT. Libraries started using computers during 1980's in India. The computers were used as searching through DIALOG system and automation based on CDS/ISIS through NISSAT. The library automation software became popular in early 1990s in India. CDS/ISIS was a talk of the professional during 1990's. The INTERNET also became popular in early 1990. The libraries were using bibliographic databases in CDROMs. The web has made so much information more easily accessible than ever before in history. Students prefer using the Web because they find it is easier and more convenient than using complex library resources. In the past, libraries did not have to compete with such information services as Google and Amazon.com. Now majority of libraries have their own library website. The library profession is now heavily involved in providing access to information through library websites and it is a challenge to design a website that has reliable content and a user interface that is easy and intuitive to those who use it. Now library websites are becoming dynamic. Today's savvy library users are starting to equate the library Web site with the physical library. Library professionals started talking about Open Source Software (OSS) in late 1990s. The OSS was implemented especially in building digital libraries, library automation, content management System. In 2005, the professional started talking about web 2.0 and Library 2.0. The institutional Repositories were being established at institutional level. The UGC has made mandatory to submit the thesis to Sodhganga, a participatory based repository meant for the Universities. Some of the other services

Open Journal/book, Virtual Reference Services and Community Involvement are also popular in the field.

We must find ways to promote the values, expertise, and leadership of the profession throughout the campus to ensure appreciation for the roles librarians do and can play. Though access to information is increasingly decentralized, and computer labs now compete with libraries as campus gathering points, librarians must demonstrate to the campus community that the library remains central to academic effort. If we don't act, someone else will step in and fill the vacuum. In the past few years libraries are facing increased competition and the impact of new technologies. But these threats may also be challenges. They give libraries the opportunity to redesign their own future. Library staffs need to be proactive in implementing new technology in information handling. Mobile technology, cloud computing, library consortia and e-books will continue to attract strong interest among the library professionals.

9. Library 2.0

The Library 2.0¹² movement emerged as a response to the technologies and concepts in the Web 2.0 movement and has been taking the library world by storm. Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 as a word describing the second generation of the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 is the development of the World Wide Web moving from the stagnant Web 1.0 to a more user-driven, collaborative, participatory, and personalized Web. It is often called the Read/Write Web because of its participatory and collaborative nature. One of the main emphases of Web 2.0 is collaboration or sharing which, along with easy-to-use tools, allows active participation by users in helping to create and develop content. Weblogs and Wikis are two of the most popular applications affiliated with Web 2.0. The development of

technological tools that are easy to use has been a reason that Web 2.0 has become so popular like social networking sites, especially among younger Internet users. This popularity among younger individuals is one of the reasons why university personnel must become familiar with the concepts and technologies in Web 2.0, because students are heavy users of it. Web 2.0 involves a variety of activities and technologies: publishing through blogs, Wikis and podcasts; social networking through sites such as MySpace and Facebook; content creation and networks through Wikis such as Wikipedia; virtual networking in Second Life; and content distribution sites through which content is created, collected, and distributed. Library 2.0 takes the tools of Web 2.0 and moves them into a library setting with libraries that are user-centered, networking faculty, students, and librarians to create a vital and evolving organization designed to meet the needs of the current information culture. Library 2.0 is especially relevant to institutions providing services to off-campus students. Many students taking courses remotely have full-time jobs and busy lives beyond their coursework. Providing those students with a customizable, personalized, and collaborative library assists in their success as a student. Using Web 2.0 technologies and other social networking tools in the library setting brings the library to our users, making them more relevant in today's information society.

10. Conclusion

The participatory approach on a was observed in the form of library consortia. Various library consortia are developed in India like INDEST-AICTE Consortium, UGC-INFONET DL consortium etc at National level by the government of India to promote the usage of e-resources and universal availability of majority of e-resources. We library professionals are collaborating since the

inception of the library through library cooperation/inter library loan. Since it is very difficult for a library to acquire the universe of knowledge, it is necessary for us to be more participatory to satisfy the need of the users. This changing trends of technology and its associate constituent like; System Interaction tools, Interoperability, Open url, Open Web, World-Cat, Digital Repository, Federated search, discovery service, Virtual Space/Services, Digital Divide, Alliance/Engagement, E-learning/literacy, Collaboration of Social Media (blog, wikis, myspace, facebook etc.,) and Internet explosion become the key explorative approaches to libraries in this participatory age. The implications of these activities are enormous for academia and for academic libraries. At this context majority of Indian libraries are little behind to adapt these new technologies, although majority of them are aware of the necessity. But the problems is the prevailing socio-economical situations, leadership, lack of skilled personnel, problem in information architecture and fail to understand the changing nature of user. So today library must be multipurpose. Library facilities must promote rather than restrict interaction; they must encourage user collaboration and project-based learning.

References

1. HALLOWELL R, KNOOP C and NEO B S. Transforming Singapore's Public Libraries, Harvard Business School Case, 2001, 9-802-009, Boston.
2. AKEROYD, John (2001) "The future of academic libraries", Aslib Proceedings, 2001, 53 (3), p.79 - 84
3. MULLINS, James L., ALLEN, Frank R., and HUFFORD, Jon R., Top ten assumptions for the future of academic libraries and librarians A report from the ACRL research committee. College & Research Libraries News, 2007 - crln.acrl.org
4. BRODSKY, Karen. If You Build It Will They Come? Using a New Library Building to Establish a Culture of Marketing, The Reference Librarian, 2003, 39:82, p.183-197
5. LANKES, R.D.The ethics of participatory librarianship. Journal of Library Administration, 2008, 47 (3-4), p. 233-241.
6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_organization
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_management
9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_development
10. MONTGOMERY, Susan E. & MILLER, Jonathan. The Third Place: The Library as Collaborative and Community Space in a Time of Fiscal Restraint, College & Undergraduate Libraries, 2011, 18:2-3, p.228-238.
11. OLDENBURG, R. Making college a great place to talk. In The best of planning for higher education, 1997, 90-94. <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED472314.pdf>
12. SODT, Jill M. and SUMMEY, Terri Pedersen. Beyond the Library's Walls: Using Library 2.0 Tools to Reach Out to All Users, Journal of Library Administration, 2009, 49:1-2, p. 97-109.

About Author

Dr. Bibhuti Bhusan Sahoo, Assistant Librarian,
Central Library, IIT Delhi, Delhi.
E-mail: bibhuti.sahoo@gmail.com