From Traditional to the Futuristic: A Paradigm Shift Towards Embedded Librarianship

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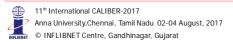
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the development of embedded librarianship, its multiple meanings, and activities in practice. Embedded librarianship is a distinctive innovation which initiates a new range of services in present day libraries. This paper defines the attributes of embedded library services such as user-oriented, group centric, expertise, etc. It also endows with suggestions for acting as a group and not as an individual, taking support from the organisation and associates, commercial outlook, exhibiting competence in risk taking, etc. It is a transformational process from traditional librarianship to the new and more active role of embedded librarianship. As compared to traditional librarianship which is based on transaction, embedded librarianship is based on a relationship with the faculty, or user community. It offers the opportunity to rethink about the traditional library services and do work that is new, more challenging, more rewarding, and more valuable to their communities. When an embedded librarian initiates interaction with the patrons, it takes them to another level of understanding with the user. This paper highlights the requirement of embedded librarians and the changing role they have to adopt and perform at present day libraries. It also presents an overview of how the concept of embedded librarianship can be incorporated into school libraries.

Keywords: Collaboration, Embedded Librarian, Information, Reference, Traditional Library

1. Introduction

The age-old definition of librarian- the custodian of books- now seems to be inharmonious to that profession in a world at the receiving end of information explosion. People/ patrons do not need to be the 'person working in the library'. They expect a person with multifarious portfolio who can help in solving their problems, not just the librarian who answers their queries. Due to the omnipresence of digital information, people no longer need to come to the libraries to get it or to use it. They procure and use the information at home, in the office, at public places, wherever and whenever they want. They can do this using the wide range of easily available electronic gadgets like desktops, laptops, smart phones or tablets. So when they need any information they don't even think of a library first. Today, people are coming to libraries, seeking a silent atmosphere to work individually or in groups, to collect required information from the complex world of internet and to carry forward their research activities, apart from their general reading requirements.

Today the trend is that the traditional reference-activities in libraries are waning. Smart librarians have recognized this. In fact, they've realized that the new environment of abundant information that offers them the opportunity to rethink and modify the traditional library services offered. They've realized that they need to be at par with the current trends in librarianship. This calls for a new pattern in their work that is more challenging, more rewarding, and more valuable to their communities.

In this process of redefining the role of librarians, the concept of embedded librarianship generates interest. The role played by librarians is undergoing a complete paradigm shift, especially, with the advent of new technologies Understanding the core concept of embedded librarianship enables them to draw a comparative study between traditional librarianship and embedded librarianship. This helps to identify the necessary changes to be adopted in the work pattern in order to fulfill the goal of embedded librarianship. Here the librarian needs to place him or her in a situation that enables close coordination and collaboration with other groups in the organization. So it becomes easier to spot opportunities and can apply the skills and expertise to problem solving. This way we, librarians can effectively apply our knowledge and skills to meet the information challenges of the digital age. The dynamics of the service provider and customer roles is thereby changing and we put ourselves in a position to control more of the work we perform.

Definition

Barbara Dewey coined the phrase "embedded librarian" in 2004. Subsequently, a number of definitions have emerged. The definition from David Shumaker and Mary Tally fits most of the embedded projects today. They define the embedded librarian as a librarian focused "on the needs of one or more specific groups, building relationships with these groups, developing a deep understanding of their work, and providing information services that are highly customized and targeted to their greatest needs" (Shumaker & Tally 2009). The skills referred in this definition are highly valued in today's libraries. Embedding moves the librarians from a supporting role towards a partnership role, enabling them to work in collaboration with students and patrons. Librarians thus navigate outside their own work units, to gain a deeper understanding of the day- to -day information needs they need to cater to.

Embedded Librarianship- a Conceptual Analysis.

Most of the information-seeking and use that formerly took place within the libraries are now taking place outside the libraries. Library resources and the open web are available anywhere, anytime. So, providing generic information or virtual reference alone will not be sufficient.

This is where the concept of embedded librarianship gains momentum. Embedded librarianship establishes a stronger connection between librarians and the communities to which they are attached. It gives them the chance to show their expertise in harnessing the required information from the vast resources available. The embedded librarian would have to address individual challenges faced by students. The information applied to those specific areas have a direct and deep impact on the research, teaching, or other work being done. This unique characteristic of an embedded librarian provides an extraordinary sense of job satisfaction.

There are three points that illustrate a span of embedded librarianship initiatives, establishing relationships with a group (or groups) in the community:

❖ Understanding the group, its values, culture, and goals.

❖ Committing to share goals with that group – goals that the librarian shares equally with other members of the group.

❖ Providing sophisticated contributions towards the achievement of those targeted goals by applying one's unique skills and insights.

The opportunities we need to discover as embedded librarians are outside the territory of the traditional information service provider. The passive, generic role of providing support and service, as in a traditional library is now an outdated concept. The mission and emphasis is to become active collaborators, and to put on maximum energy and efforts to pursue the organisational goals. We need a giant leap in the transformation from the transaction oriented role of traditional librarian to a strategic, value oriented role-in aligning ourselves with the needs of the hour.

Embedded Librarianship vs. Traditional Librarianship We can see several clear cut differences between the working patterns of embedded librarians and traditional librarians. Given below are some major differences:

❖ The embedded model **focuses on relationships, not transactions**. Traditional reference is a transactional operation. The reference desk is a place where transactions happen. Here the librarian answers the queries as and when it is required. Similarly, the long established pattern of giving a "one-shot" library instruction is transactional. The practice was that, as soon as the students or users entering the library get a brief description about how to carry out library research, the transaction was over. But in embedded librarianship, we can find everything as sequential or relational. Here one interaction leads to the second, and then to the third; Likewise, it keeps on going, with increased mutual understanding and collaboration. The process of information accumulation happens in between. The principle is the same irrespective of the area where the librarian works.

❖ The embedded model **requires librarians to specialize**. They need not have to think of being generalists. It will be very much appreciated if the users get specific and suitably customized information without much explanation about their needs,

❖ The traditional librarian always stood aloof, independent of the organization, ruling over the domains of the library. People came to the library – the librarians did not go to them. In the new model of embodiment, librarians decamp from their realm to provide highly structured, personalized information services to the user groups. This engagement can be virtual as well as physical. By moving one's office outside the library, the interaction with the user groups increases. Some cases the librarians are found to be embedded in a distance education course or a virtual work group. Even though there is no face to face interaction with the people they embedded with, they are found to be successful.

❖ The main focus of a traditional librarian is to be a service provider and their responsibility just

end there. There the environment generates practices and workflows that have endured for a long time. **Embedded librarians are Team Players**, not just mere service providers. They have a broader role. They apply their expertise, skills and competencies in a manner that enable them to drive the organization towards success.

❖ Traditional library services are more or less like a commodity. Embedded librarianship showcases the full potential of librarians in their redefined roles. There are two important points that we shouldn't lose sight of, though. The first is that the commodity services are still needed – they are just not enough by themselves. The second is that the librarians, in their new roles, need to explore better and stronger areas of expertise as part of their professional development.

Skills for Embedded Librarianship:

The information revolution has fundamentally changed our libraries to cater to the needs of the users and the society as a whole. More and more, we will leave the traditional reference desk and the traditional reference interviews and work in partnership with other organizations. This kind of transformation towards embedded librarianship will increase our role and our visibility in the community. An overall elation of skills and competencies is needed to realize this vision.

❖ Our strengths as information specialists, knowledge of information sources, and knowledge about information seeking behaviour of users are most important factors that decide our professional competencies. Finding and organizing information, and helping/ guiding people to use this information effectively should

be the key motives behind our work. They will be using new tools to accomplish these jobs. So we, as librarians need to stay up with them, and are committed to continuous learning. These fundamental principles will have to remain as our unique skill set in any context we work in.

❖ Develop personal competencies for relationship-building and collaboration. We need to make sure we have good inter- personal skills for relationship building and to work in collaboration with others. Libraries as organizations, and librarians as individuals, have not always been effective in connecting with people and groups in the past. The ability to do these things will be essential in the future. We should be up to date about the changes that happen around us like economic and scientific developments, learning theories, or social needs in our community – or whatever our team is addressing or referring to.

❖ We have to concentrate on solving problems, not on answering questions. According to the old notion, good service was basically limited to being friendly and providing accurate answers. We never bothered to find out whether our answers went deep enough to solve the questioner's actual query. What we need to do is to take up the responsibility for solving problems on a broader perspective; we should be able to trigger more questions and satisfy information needs to the core. That's what 'collaboration'brings on – to have shared goals and to share the responsibility of achieving them.

❖ Focus on answers and their analysis, not access. The old notion that our job is confined only to

provide access to information cannot be applied to the embedded librarian concept. Librarians often shy away from analysis. We feel we are not supposed to interpret information for our library users. But, in the embedded model, we need to be information analysts, with the ability to retrieve, understand, analyze, and synthesize information in order to provide the answers that will contribute to our team's success.

Net-centric Librarian or Cybrarians

Embedded librarians can also be termed as net-centric librarians as they work in a complex network. Net centric means not internet centric, but there is a network of human relationships that surrounds the librarian. So librarians are better named 'Cybrarians' and will be networked in a threefold manner:

❖ Among themselves- There will be a network among the ones working in the same field like librarians, information professionals etc. This network can be utilized for collecting, analyzing, sharing as well as disseminating information.

❖ Teams in their organization- Teaming up or networking with the teams in the organization are pivotal base of embedded librarianship. That is why embedded librarians are called team members and not just information providers.

❖ Outside information providers- Librarians often use the information provided by the outside sources like experts of other subject fields, information brokers, experts on the internet etc.

Embedded Services

Given below is a brief summary of embedded services by libraries.

❖ Customer centric and not library centric.

❖ Located outside the libraries, in an area convenient to the work groups.

❖ Focused on small groups, not the organization as a whole.

❖ Composed of specialists instead of being generalists.

❖ Apart from library skills, domain knowledge also should be applied.

❖ Delivering information alone is not enough. Aim for its analysis and synthesis also.

❖ Always in context not out of context.

❖ Built on trusted advice not service delivery.

Advantages of Embedded Librarianship

❖ Embedded librarians do not wait to be asked. The nature of work is always anticipatory in nature. The needs of the user groups are identified with their close working relationships to and then find appropriate solutions as soon as possible.

❖ Embedded librarians are much more effective because they work for the whole team. So the work is by nature, a teamwork of collaborators.

❖ The embedded librarian uses the strong working relationship formed through participation in a team to understand the team's needs. He, then addresses the issues in a customized way.

❖ The embedded librarian's work is evaluated by value added to it. The number of transactions completed is not much important here.

❖ Embedded librarians transcend 'service' because of the participatory nature of their work.

Qualities Required

❖ Be a team player.

❖ Assure support from your organization and colleagues.

❖ Have an entrepreneurial mindset.

❖ Accept risk.

❖ Decipher library science into other disciplines.

❖ Build trusted relationships.

❖ Don't try to being your comfort zone always; move out whenever possible.

❖ Don't just think, but act outside the box.

How to move forward?

❖ Take a snapshot of your campus needs and goals.

❖ Identify library friendly members of the team/ organization- core members. Start expanding from there.

❖ Work with the core members to identify the level of service needed.

❖ Provide materials about services through these core members as well as departmental meetings and small workshops.

❖ When planning and prioritizing growth in an embedded project, librarians can reduce the time spent, by re-using the content and recycling the learning objects. One method for doing so is to trace out common questions and answers and creating a knowledge base for storing them.

❖ Social networks hold promise for embedded librarians in group projects related to higher education.

An Overview of the Embedded Library Services in School Libraries:

IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto

"The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with lifelong learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens."

School libraries provide information and ideas that are fundamental to the successful functioning in today's information and knowledge-based society. Its mission, as stated in the manifesto is to offer learning services, and all the available resources to enhance their critical thinking skills and effectively use information in all formats and media.

Libraries are the knowledge management hub of the entire school. It contains several materials like archived student work, handouts, policies, and files that support learning and research. In the embedded context, school librarians have endless opportunities by working in partnership with teachers.

The school libraries support the pursuit of excellence and wholesome development of students, teachers and other library users by providing the best of available resources. Here the librarians interact actively with the students during their library periods as well as in the planning phase of an upcoming programme. Students were given personal guidance and help in locating and utilizing required documents for their projects and subjects of study. They are also provided with materials for various extra-curricular activities like quiz competitions and debates in connection with events held inside and

outside the school. As librarians are part of the teaching fraternity in schools, they are part of all the scholastic and co-scholastic activities. This proved highly beneficial as teachers could be provided with all necessary documents and materials for their teaching as well as for their allied activities in the school. Some of the activities done in the embedded manner are listed below:

❖ Students, teachers and other staff members are encouraged to enhance their reading habits by being provided with books of their interest. For these personal conversations with each individual member is carried out by the librarians.

❖ Programs like 'Theme based reading' Quiz programs, book reviews, 'Selection of the best classes in the library' during each month', 'selection of the best riders from each class every year' arts help to improve the reading habits of students.

❖ Students and teachers are provided with personalized help and support (physicists & intellectually) to access development and curricular databases, portals, websites, blogs, videos, and other media.

❖ In connection with the different cultural activities in schools, the students and teachers are provided with all the requisite information and pictures for planning, designing and decorating the venues and programmes.

Conclusion

Every field of life undergoes change with time. So does the profession of library science. In this era of rapidly changing technologies and diversified user-needs, the librarian needs to revitalize his professional role as an information expert. He should be open-minded to accept and adapt to the changes that demand better service from him. The shift from traditional librarianship to embedded librarianship and net-centric librarianship are products of such a change. The evaluation of embedded librarian is done not through the number of transactions completed, but through the value added by him to the team's project. This change does not mean that he has to leave all the traditional skills behind to embrace his new role. The basic traditional skills of collecting, processing and disseminating information still serves as the very base of the profession, but he has to strengthen them as well as adopt new skills to excel in the changed scenario. So long as he is ready to accept changes and adapt to new situations by polishing and developing his skills, he can be an integral part of that change. School librarians have great opportunities to develop an embedded role. Working in partnership with teachers, they can take their knowledge of resources and information literacy into classrooms, thereby contributing towards the noble cause of molding the future generations. To sum up, we have to ponder over the following points to revisit old concepts and accept a more potent embedded role for our professional advancement.

❖ Embedded librarianship implies a more diversified role in the profession than traditional librarianship. Here the librarian is more or less a team player than a mere information provider.

❖ Due to glut of information and advancements in technology, the role and meaning of the library has changed. Library services are also changing accordingly. People come to libraries seeking specific information. They are not satisfied to withdraw data or scraps of information anymore.

❖ Embedded librarian focuses more on relationships than transactions. They need to specialize in their field to provide analyzed information to their users.

❖ The librarian is no more a service provider. He becomes a team member in his new role and has to come out of the comfort zones of library to understand the level of service expected from him. He should venture into such unfamiliar territories to be able to provide information in a user desired format.

❖ The librarian has to change his attitude to adapt to the changed needs of the users. He should be ready to take risks, ensure support from the mother organization, and have an entrepreneurial approach to perform well. He has to build trusted relationships not only with his users, but also with other information sources outside the library.

All these make embedding the most appropriate solution for replacing the traditional stereotype reference librarianship, with a new image of effective competence and engagement.

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