

Library Automation

Editors

P.B. Ghante

Dr. Ashok Yakkaldevi

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Solapur-413005

Contact No: +91 9595 359 435

Cell: +91 9595359435

Website: <http://www.lbp.org>

Email ID: lbp@lbp.org



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**P.B.Ghante
Dr. Ashok Yakkaldevi**

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Contact No. : +91 9595 359 435

Website : <http://www.isrj.org>

Email ID : ayisrj@yahoo.in

Chapter 10
Managing Ict-Driven Libraries in Nigeria: Critical Leadership
Issues

Nkiko Christopher

Abstract

The paper examined the nexus between the application of information and communication technology to library services and leadership. It noted the pervasiveness of ICT across all professions as global best practices. It alerts that the twenty-first century libraries are currently faced with technology savvy clientele and more sophisticated patrons expecting services that can compete favourably with or better organised than Google and other retrieval systems. The paper x-rayed the current state of libraries in Nigeria and averred that innovative leadership is a critical precondition to mainstreaming the Nigerian libraries to an enviable pedestal that approximates to international standards. Other critical leadership issues identified for effective management of ICT- driven libraries in Nigeria include: leaders capacity to facilitate change, demonstrating and justifying returns on investment, ICT capacity building initiatives for librarians, benchmarking practices, understanding back-up and Anti Intrusion systems, adequate power supply and bandwidth as well as ensuring that aggregators of electronic resources indemnify libraries against infringement of copyright.

Keywords: - ICT-driven libraries, leadership and innovation in libraries, Nigeria libraries, back-up and intrusion systems, returns on investment.

Managing Ict-Driven Libraries in Nigeria: Critical Leadership Issues

Great and vibrant libraries are now measured by the level of automation, Internet connectivity, and accessibility to other libraries on real time basis, subscription to reputable online databases as well as quality of collections (Nkiko, 2007). Information and communication technology (ICT) has, thus become a defining parameter in delineating libraries. The ones that are fully ICT driven are regarded as modern while those manually-driven are termed traditional. The current global standard is that libraries thrive on the application of technologies in their quest for excellent service delivery. To disregard leveraging with this benchmark is to accept extinction and irrelevance.

It is in line with the foregoing assertion that Ajayi (2003) contended that:

Any industry that sidelines ICT has simply signed a "death warrant" on its continued relevance. The library represents one area that has experienced this revolution. The fact that we live in knowledge-based society with the need for universal access has made it necessary for the library to redefine its role and mode of service delivery. The traditional "brick and mortar" libraries need to give way to libraries that are not limited by geography. It is essential for libraries to reinvent themselves if they hope to develop and facilitate access to information in this digital age.

The rapidity and seemingly unpredictable changes discernible in the library and information profession have conspired to put the twenty-first century librarians in an unprecedented apprehension. Singh (2010) noted that there is growing and fierce competition from other information providers and companies like Google. It is therefore a critical and defining moment for the LIS professionals. The technological revolution occasioned by ICT is pervasive across all professions and not

limited to librarianship. Modern technologies remain largely mere tools in the hand of the professionals. For example the capability of retrieving information about symptoms, and drug prescriptions with regard to specific ailments from the Internet, does not make one a medical doctor. The mastery of auto-card alone does not define an Architect. The librarian should therefore jettison any form of apprehension or aversion to ICT and be comfortable with the digital environment as well as its concomitant nuances and intricacies

Librarians are expected to grow their leadership competencies and skills to manage the emerging changes in libraries. The extent to which libraries will adapt to technologies and mainstream to global standards would be a reflection of its leadership. Ammons-stephens (2009) and Armstrong (2009) observed that widening digital divide, resistance to change, declining culture of reading and assimilation as well as poor skills are traceable to leadership deficit in the libraries and the parent institutions. The nexus between leadership and any form of advancement is undeniable. The famous maxim by Maxwell that everything rises and falls on leadership is incontrovertible. This perspective would be further elaborated later in this paper. However, it may be necessary at this juncture, to reflect on the inevitability of adopting ICTs in library operations.

Why ICT in the Libraries

In discussing the pervasiveness of information technology, Toffler Alvin (1976) noted that “the illiterates of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn”. It is now global best practices and standards to have libraries automated such that bibliographic records are digitized and accessible on institutional web-based catalogues devoid of time and

space limitations. Libraries as gateways to knowledge now subscribe to electronic databases containing plethora of electronic books and journals. Modern libraries also facilitate connectivity to the global information networks through the Internet. It would amount to backwardness, obsolescence and stagnation for any institution not to be in a haste to leverage up with the current trends. Aina (2004) and Meredith (2006) underscore the fact that ICT is now a core component of any library and information science curriculum at all levels.

Considering the limitless scope of the Internet and World Wide Web to retrieving information for scholars who hitherto relied on the traditional library catalogue, the information seeking behaviour of an average person has been revolutionalized. The usual first point of call for information seekers in the twenty-first century is the Internet (Rao and Babu, 2001; Coffman, 2012, Purdue, 2012). The seemingly threat of the Internet to library catalogues demands the integration of technology, information and learning into the emerging model for libraries to be relevant. (Drake, 1996; Morris, 1999; Rao and Babu, 2012).

Closely related to the foregoing, is the issue of meeting the expectations of twenty-first century library users. The libraries are currently faced with information communication technology savvy clientele and more sophisticated patrons expecting services that can compete favourably with or better organised than GOOGLE, Amazon and other retrieval systems. Our present patrons would want to see the full deployment of catalogue 2.0. This presupposes interactive and collaborative catalogue that provides multifaceted access points for quick and easy retrieval and navigation of library holdings (Nkiko, 2013). Library services must be tailored to meet the needs of users for sustainability and continued patronage.

In articulating the benefits of an ICT-driven library system, Cochrane (1992); Henderson (1992); Nkiko (2008); Suther (2014) noted the following:

- It allows easy integration of various services
- It facilitates cooperation and formation of library network
- It helps to avoid duplication of efforts within a library and between libraries in a network
- It eliminates some uninteresting repetitive work
- It helps to increase the range of services offered
- It increases efficiency
- It helps the preservation of library materials
- It provides basis for the virtual library platform

THE STATE OF LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

Having established the ubiquity of ICT and transformations taking place in libraries across the world, it may be necessary to identify the current state of affairs with respect to library operations in Nigeria. Mortenson Centre for International Library Programs (2004) on its report to the Carnegie Corporation regarding findings of its study of East and West Africa academic libraries noted the following:

(a) Library Buildings and Equipment

Most library buildings showed signs of wear and tear. In some universities plans were under way for extension to current facilities or to build a new facility. Few buildings had the necessary or safe wiring for technology. It was not uncommon to see numerous extension cords due to lack of power outlets. Most buildings lacked security features and few had accessibility features. Much of the furniture was worn out and shelving was not always secure.

(b) Computer Equipment

The total number of computers and printers for student and staff access was inadequate. Most librarians shared computers among themselves, and students were frequently seen two or three to a machine. The speed of repairs for damaged equipment was affected by the ability to procure component parts.

(c) Networks and Bandwidth

Most Universities had laid fibre optics. However, not all the fibre was in use. Six of the main libraries had fibre run to the exterior wall; it was their responsibility to arrange connectivity from inside the building to the backbone. Distant and departmental libraries may be less well connected. Internet access was via satellite; the best capacity was a 1.5 megabyte downlink and a 1.0 megabyte uplink. The lowest capacity was 1.0 megabyte downlink and 512-kilobyte uplink. This was insufficient; however, the cost prohibits increased access.

(d) Retrospective Conversion

The conversion of the print catalogue to digital records was time consuming and expensive. Some libraries had completed the retrospective conversion in-house; two had begun the conversion process on an apparently limited scale, and others were still discussing strategies for the process. It should be noted that the integrated library system cannot fully function without the central database.

(e) Online Public Access Catalogues

The online public access catalogue (OPAC) is the premier product of any modern library. However, it is only as good as the database behind it. The University libraries possessed varying degrees of expertise in and even comprehension of, the significance of a robust

digital catalogue. Related procedures such as weeding of the collection and inventory control require attention and created immediate training needs. Each of the libraries was undertaking initiatives relating to technologies. Few had purchased an integrated library system; some have installed and customized open source systems whereas majority is still manually-driven. Librarians were learning on the job about technology, and familiarity was often not common among library staff.

(f) Vendor relations

Libraries in this part of Africa were seriously constrained in their evaluation and selection process, as vendors were simply unwilling to provide onsite demonstrations. Support for products was similarly offered at a distance, and the cost of onsite training was extremely high.

(g) Isolation from what is happening in library and information world

In many cases, most librarians were learning about technologies through literature, since they were unable to travel to conferences with many vendors present, and there were no libraries nearby that have already implemented full technologies.

(h) Lack of exposure to international standards and experience

Since majority of librarians had not generally been able to attend conference outside the region and have limited access to literature, there was sometimes a lack of exposure to international standards and experience. In some cases, the librarians were developing internal standards, unaware of the existence of international standards.

CRITICAL LEADERSHIP ISSUES

Mortenson Centre's description of the state of academic libraries in Nigeria evokes a sense of struggling and survival phase of development.

This phase is usually characterised by survival instincts devoid of standards, ideals, values and ethics. The operators in this environment appear helpless and live in a mentality of justifiable mediocrity. Recognizing the critical and pivotal place of libraries in nurturing and empowering citizens for global competitiveness, the question then arises, can we afford professional stagnation while the rest of the world is experiencing unprecedented cyber space breakthrough through technological changes. It is crucial to note that the attitudinal disposition of organisational leaders towards modern technologies and innovation is a direct predictor of the extent of their adoption (Venkatesh, 2000, and Venkatesh et al, 2003). Positive attitude of leaders and relatively good understanding as well as competencies are tangential to the effective deployment of ICTs in libraries.

As observed earlier, everything rises and falls on leadership. Leaders facilitate change and progress whereas managers only ensure the maintenance of status quo. It behoves leaders to continuously seek to extend the frontiers of knowledge and redefine practices and systems.

The library leadership must be a strategic thinker, an effective communicator, having enough political 'clout' and good tactical sense to persuade the relevant stakeholders on the need for specific technologies in the library. It may be appropriate to develop a phase by phase strategic document detailing roadmap of ICT adoption in the library, noting that the parent institutions have scarce financial resources with alternative uses. Other critical issues leaders must be mindful of in the managing of ICT-driven libraries include:

Returns on Investment

Libraries are constantly expected to demonstrate to their institutional administrators and boards concrete benefits for huge