Creative Perspectives for Librarians in Changing Context

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper raises certain concerns about shifting role of librarians in changing context. It stresses that an appraisal of where they are heading and how they would be prepared to cope with the challenges of rapid and unexpected changes in building effective libraries is extremely important. It is suggested that librarians must not only equip themselves with latest knowledge and skill but also must engage in generative thinking to explore new ideas and apply creativity and innovation in their work to ensure increased users satisfaction. The paper explores some viable areas such as a thorough understanding of the upcoming information architecture, creating innovative users' services, collaboration, vision building and technological application and initiating entrepreneurial approach through which the librarians can apply creative approach to sustain at present as well as to be in demand in years to come.

**Key Terms:** Creativity, Creative Perspectives, Skills, Collaboration and Entrepreneurship, Role of librarians.

**INTRODUCTION**

There are many factors that provide shape to today's libraries' environment and continue to be instrumental in doing so in future. Over the years, libraries' role and the subsequent skills and working pattern have changed to reciprocate the rapid changes in societal, cultural, economic and technological context. Maintaining quality library services amidst increasing mass of information, escalating cost of print resources, rapid technological innovation and above all shrinking funding is a big challenge that every library has to cope with.

Although technology has brought opportunities to evolve, libraries continue to fight its menaces alongside. At this juncture when relevance of libraries and librarians are being questioned in a 'Googlised environment' libraries have to revisit their core business. Technology as well as increased users demand on libraries has instigated a radical shift in the way information is published, accessed, disseminated and delivered. Thus emerging environment necessitates librarians to step into a new societal role. They have to develop vision for building libraries where the focus will be on the challenges to meet the unmet needs and increased stakeholders' gratification. Librarians need to equip themselves with knowledge, skill and attitude and be creative to cope with the challenges of rapid and unexpected changes. They have to engage in generative thinking to explore new ways, new ideas and adopt creative approach to discharge their societal role amid constraints. The purpose of this paper is to make librarians aware of their role in a changed context, and how they can evolve creative solutions to assume their new roles in time.

**Role of Librarians in Changing Context**

Changes in the environment will always be there and this will in turn affect the librarians; in their role, skills requirement, self-image, motivation and survival too. Thus librarians need to prepare themselves for this make over. An assessment of the happenings around would help them to predict the changes in their role playing and skills requirement in future relocation. Such appraisal would provide an understanding about where we are heading, what forces will affect us and how far we are prepared to face the challenges in creating successful libraries.

The following are some examples of current developments and
the resultant concerns that affect librarians’ role in building effective libraries:

- Increasing use of internet to access information is a fact. It prompts one to be curious about the future of library and information services in light of the dramatic changes in the availability and access of information1.
- Technological advances continue to threaten librarians to adapt. Then do the librarians keep a vigil on the changing trend and has the ability to grasp it aptly?
- Information need of users and uses of information are becoming more and more diversified. Do the librarians possess the latest knowledge and competencies to handle the pressure of delivering information to all?
- Managing customer relationship in libraries is increasingly felt. What libraries do to reach their customers? What efforts are they making to involve users as part of knowledge management process?
- Rapid changes in technology and other environmental factors necessitate libraries to act swiftly. Then do the librarians have proper understanding about the vision, the course of action for tomorrow. Can they create strategies promptly to move ahead?
- Growing emphasis on collaborative work and collaborative learning3. This leads to focus do the librarians engage themselves in teamwork to supplement their knowledge and skills in true sense?
- Latest trend in entrepreneurial librarianship prompts another concern. Do the librarians learn to risk, assess, revise and innovate to justify their very existence in the competitive world?

**Creative Perspectives for Librarians in Current and Future Context**

The concerns raised under the above section call for librarians to reflect how far they are equipped to meet the expectations of present and future libraries. They are and always will be under constant pressure to change the way they manage their work so that they would remain competitive and viable in today’s fast paced library world4. Increased operational uncertainty emerged due to continuous and unmitigated change in technology requires new competencies and creative solutions5. The librarians have to understand the importance of actively engaging the skill, talent and above all creativity to cope with the challenge of increasing stakeholder satisfaction. Since an understanding of current developments not only helps in predicting but also in creating future, they must engage in generative thinking and innovation to find solutions that can be applied in time. Further as ready-to-made keys are not possible to develop for everything, the librarians need to harness the creative talents and energies to explore creative solutions for impounding the challenges. The following are some of the viable areas in which the librarians can apply creative approach to sustain at present as well as to build future libraries.

**Understanding Information Architecture**

Today librarians operate in a complex information world that is increasingly being driven and shaped by political, social, economical, ideological, educational and technological factors. Librarians need to understand the information architecture around them and the role played by professional organisations, educators, publishing companies, software and the database industry that constantly influence it. Further the growing electronic networks and information technology (IT) are increasingly instrumental in shaping the librarians’ world: how they will acquire, process, disseminate or deliver information to the society.

As the networked world has brought mass of information for librarians’ disposal, the future needs creative minds that can make sense of this wealth of information. They should use their skill and creativity to ensure a place in the global platform and find ways to access information for all thus eliminating the digital divide. As we experience a heavy load of information which is often ambiguous and unsolicited and where recall and relevancy is questioned as well, librarians must engage themselves in finding out new ways of resource discovery mechanisms. A thorough understanding of indexing, semantic data and metadata and end user searching only can bail out librarians to serve the society effectively. Subject access to a variety of information types and tailor-made information systems for specific target groups is more needed today than ever before.

**Vision Building**

Building effective libraries for tomorrow requires careful and timely preparation. Fourie points out preparedness are more of a survival skill for librarians although it can include content knowledge and related skills. As per Bell, when the librarians are future focused and are able to look ahead they are believed to be engaged in vision building. Visionary librarians always focus on the kind of course of action that would contribute greatly to effective services for the society in future. They must be capable to see the pattern: how their role will be shifted in the immediate sphere of operation. Carrying out environmental scanning, rapid decision-making, critically analysing the professional domain and understanding where it is heading, managing change and thinking creatively are some of areas librarians must reflect in the process of building vision for their libraries.

**Innovative Customer Services**

Librarians need to learn to be creative; they must find ways to do a lot out of little. Rapid changes in technology, tight budget and increasing cost involved in effective integration of both print and electronic resources challenge librarians to adopt creative solutions in managing customer services. As internet has opened up the world of information to information seekers and owing to the subsequent changes in user behavior, libraries cannot afford to be passive and stuck in their traditional role playing. They ought to be a part of the whole learning experience. Services that respond and evolve as the customer needs grow and change need to be designed for user satisfaction. They must design and create value-added user-oriented services to transform the libraries into a social hub for learning, innovation, and networking. Innovative services for different groups of users, delivery service for all of its customers, technology based services, outreach activities, etc. can be produced to satisfy users of coming years.

**Collaboration**

Since long, library profession is being engaged in collaborative
partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders. Working together with academic colleagues and faculty; seeking input and support from staff and users always helped libraries to benefit. For librarians, possessing a collaborative mindset is very important now than it was earlier. No library can sustain the pressure of societal changes if it works in isolation. For the sharing of both physical and human resources as well as information resources electronically over networks, library leaders need to engage in generative thinking and demonstrate the ability to form radical collaborations with other libraries, publishers, software developers and database designers. Since the librarians alone cannot monitor the new developments taking place in information world there should be more collaborative work with these partners. Such teamwork enables research and support innovation and in turn helps in extending skills to manage information and in understanding users’ needs in the changing environment.

Efforts can be made for collaboration of experts from a wide range of disciplines to prepare new information products by librarians. Further users’ feedback on information use is a great input in this process. A kind of collective intelligence is created out of such effort. Librarians should experiment this kind of collaborative method as it promotes sharing knowledge about users and helps in preparing a unique product blended with shared knowledge, creativity and innovation.

- **Techno Savvy**

Librarians of today and tomorrow are probably one of the most techno savvy groups of people because of the job they do. They are engaged in information work, to which the technology has influenced most. Librarians are key to the information resides in today’s Web 2.0 world. To be successful, librarians must understand the web and how it works, acquire competencies in navigating the web and develop resource discovery mechanisms for better accessing. Not only they ought to adapt to the rapidly changing technological landscape but also think how they can exploit the development into their favor. Further technology has brought the librarians closer to their users. Since librarians have got good opportunity through their Web 2.0 sites they should familiarize themselves with these sites and experiment with new tools to find out innovative ways to reach users, to promote the library and to deliver better services as well. Librarians have to acquire, develop, deploy, use, and maintain the suite of information technologies and systems that support them along with their core job to access, store, manage, and disseminate media such as electronic books and journals, print materials, audiovisual materials, and web sites.

- **Entrepreneurship**

Application of entrepreneurship spirit is a growing trend in librarianship. Libraries, fighting with budget problems and increasingly competing demands, will benefit more from entrepreneurial skills. “With libraries going through rapid and seemingly perpetual cycle of new service developments, a stringent business modeling process will reveal the potentials of a project and help libraries to take calculated risks, to prioritize and budget its activities”. Further librarians also share certain characteristics of business entrepreneurs: creativity, innovation, persistence, and passion in the relentless pursuit of excellence. When the librarians are increasingly asked to justify their services and their very existence in this age of internet, librarians using entrepreneurial principles can innovate, create and implement to solve a problem and can become an important contributor to the societal development. Allison presents the characteristics of entrepreneurial librarians of today. Apart from flourishing in the digital age they advocate social change, respond to patron demands, design new services, and develop exciting fundraising programs. To meet the challenges such as increased patrons’ demands, scarce funding, changing resource formats and others, librarians are adopting entrepreneurial approach and applying new business models to traditional services. Nijboer opines librarians need to be more client-oriented and create such brand loyalty which consumers can experience. When libraries design and deliver experience people appreciate these initiatives that recognize and meet their needs. Entrepreneurial approach will enable librarians to sustain users’ interest and will ensure them to find takers, who can utilize their services in true sense.

**CONCLUSION**

Today libraries are functioning in a turbulent environment characterized with changing users’ behaviors, financial constraints, rapidly evolving technologies and scarce funding. Creativity and innovation is viewed as the only prospect to naturalize in the changing context. Librarians must introduce creativity into their service development to sustain the pressure that changes bring as well as to play their societal role effectively in the changing world.

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