Article

CAPACITY BUILDING: STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING THE COMPETENCIES OF LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Librarians in public libraries in the recent past do not see the need to develop their capacities and competencies. This is because unlike their counterparts in academic libraries who get their promotion based on certificates acquired, papers written, seminars, workshops or conferences attended and other such exercises, their's come through annual evaluation reports and number of years put up in service. However, the present society is one in which development of information technology and telecommunication networks is accompanied by a corresponding increase in information flow and which require new skills in seeking, processing and using information. The study identified the following as ways to build the capacity and competency of librarians: training, seminars/conference sponsorships, career planning workshops, career self management training, incentives and rewards. The challenges to competency development were equally identified with special emphasis on lack of current public laws, limited access to information technology and poor remuneration. It is imperative that librarians in public libraries make positive efforts, in spite of these challenges, towards building their capacity and developing their competencies so as to remain functional in this age.

Keywords: Capacity building, Competency development, Librarians, Public Libraries, Information age.

Introduction

The concept of capacity building is a popular phrase in development discourse and is one of the most urgent challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa today (Ogunsola, 2011). It has been associated with technical assistance, civil service reform, private sector

development, skills enhancement, macro-economic management, policy analysis, and institutional development (Magara, 2010). Man is a product of the society and his activities cannot be divorced from the happenings in the society. Removing oneself from the societal norms and not moving with the society results in obsolesce and irrelevance. The 21st Century is an information age with its own peculiar challenges which requires special and particular knowledge, skills and abilities. Information has become ubiquitous and is available in many different and varied formats and as opined by Ferreira et al (2007), information and knowledge has become an input in the provision of any product or service. The term information profession has become fashionable thus embracing other professions outside librarianship. However, librarianship is arguable the only profession that has been traditionally trained to acquire, create, organize, and disseminate information. Capacity building for librarians is important so as to adapt in the new information society where emphasis is being placed on information repackaging and access over ownership. There is an urgent need for building the capacity of librarians to meet the peculiar challenges of the information age. This is more important among librarians in the public libraries. The emphasis is because they serve the public in its entirety as their clientele unlike their colleagues who serve specific users. Building the capacity of public librarians is very important because, while people have always been central to organizations, today they have taken on an even more central role in building a firm's competitive advantage. Particularly in knowledge based industries such as software and information services, success increasingly depends on 'people-embodied know-how' (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001).

The phrase 'people embodied know how' here includes the knowledge, skills and abilities imbedded in the organization's members, in this instance, the librarians. Ogunsola (2011) gave the UNDP's perspective on the concept of capacity as "the ability to individuals and organizations or units to perform functions effectively, efficiently, or sustainably". A broader definition was given by Bolger (2000) as abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, value, relationships, behaviour, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, network/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time. According to Wubneh (2003), capacity building is a process of transforming a nation's (organization's) ability to effectively implement policies and programs for sustainable development. Ahmed (2000) quoting Ake (1996) defined capacity building as the "incremental acquisition of capabilities which entails the inculcation of knowledge skills

and effectiveness to pursue and realize set goals efficiently". He argued that this definition implies that:

- The task of capacity building is never terminal, it is continuous.
- It is a relational term. It relates the subject whose capacity is at issue and the task to be done or goals to be achieved.
- Those whose values and goals are to be capacitated determine the need for capacity building.

The second implication shows that capacity building is equally a task before the management of public libraries. Here the skills needed for knowledge creation and advancement is transmitted to librarians in public libraries, thereby ensuring development of adequate competencies.

Librarianship in general can boast of educated and skilled personnel but there is a dearth of such in public libraries especially due to the mass exodus of qualified personnel in search of the "golden fleece". The resultant effect is shortage in quite noticeable number of skills which have constituted severe constraints in public library services. The objectives of this paper is to;

1. Highlight the need for capacity building in public libraries in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the particular skills that need to be sharpened to make the public libraries more visible and relevant to the public and society.
3. Explore some of the ways through which the library management can develop the capacities and competencies of librarians in public libraries.

Competencies and skills development for librarians
Competencies are the skills, knowledge, and other underlying characteristics that lead to superior performance (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003).

Competencies have been defined as the interplay of knowledge, understanding skills and attitudes required to do a job effectively from the point of view of both the performer and the observer. The unique competencies of the librarian include in-depth knowledge of print and electronic information resources in the management of information services that meet the strategic information needs of the individuals or groups being served (Gulati & Raina, 2000).

Core competencies are understood as: a proper attitude and capacity to exercise a wide number of functions or occupy various positions, even simultaneously, which requires flexibility. Additionally, a proper attitude to handle constant change in the environment is expected and this also requires constant learning. In this way, the workers' qualities,

such as discipline, punctuality and creativity come to be considered as their core competencies. Knowledge, team work, communication skills, the ability to work with information and technology, systematic thought, the ability to work with information and technology, systematic thought, the ability to generate creative solutions to problems, self-esteem, self-confidence and tolerance for frustration are some of the elements of core competencies (Ferreira et al, 2007). Core competencies in the case of library and information professionals are: (i) Personal; and (ii) Professional. (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). Core competencies therefore anchors the professional and personal competencies and they are as noted by (Abels et al, 2003) absolutely essential for every information professional.

Professional competencies relate to a librarian's knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research including the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services (Hashim & Mokhtar, 2011). Abels et al, (2003) recognized four major professional competencies, each augmented with specific skills. They include:
- Managing information organizations: The skills needed here could be summarized as the Library Management skills.
- Managing information resources: The skills needed here are the Resource building and Technical skills.
- Managing information services: The skills needed are the Reference skills.
- Applying information tools and technologies: Here, the information Technology skills are needed.

Personal competencies on the other hand represent a set of skills, attitudes and value that enable librarians to work efficiently, be good communicators, focus on continuing learning throughout their careers, demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions, and survive in the new world of work (Hashim & Mokhtar, 2011). Some of these personal competencies include the ability to:
- Seek out challenges and capitalize on new opportunities
- Communicate effectively
- Present ideas clearly, negotiate confidently and persuasively
- Create partnerships and all alliances
- Take calculated risks, show courage and tenacity when faced with opposition.
- Demonstrate personal career planning
- Think creatively and innovatively, seeking new or 'reinventing' opportunities
- Remain flexible and positive in a time of continuing change.

Specifically, the skills needed by the librarians as listed by Perry in (Rapple, 1997) include:
- Excellent listening and problem clarifying skills

- Deep knowledge of what constitutes quality information
- A general overview of all types of information
- Vast experience in selecting appropriate information
- Ability to teach complex tasks in understandable and non-threatening steps
- An understanding of information organization for easy retrieval
- Ability to build stable and positive working relationship with colleagues and collaborating organizations
- An ability to organize groups to get work done.

Need for Capacity Building in Nigerian Public Libraries
Public libraries are more or less universal libraries and generally known as the people's university as they are not restricted to any group of users quite unlike other types of libraries. They are however plagued with lots of problems such that even among fellow professionals, librarians in public libraries are erroneously viewed as sub-standard. This could be the reason why Aina (2004) remarked that the quality of staff in public libraries in Africa is low. It is imperative that their abilities and skills are developed to ensure that they function effectively even in this information age especially as it has access to more users unlike its counterparts. Visibility and social recognition is possible when competencies are developed.

Saliu (1999), wrote that public libraries play important roles in the economic well-being of the society as they provide information about goods and services, thereby making it contribution to the economic development of the modern society. He postulated that public libraries could also develop local economic capabilities by making available necessary information on income generating projects, self employment activities, credit facilities, state assistant schemes, and so on. The extent to which this can happen depends on the developed capacity and competency of the librarians.

Various changes in technology, environment and social attitudes have emerged that dictate substantial modifications in job knowledge and functions. Kolawole & Abdulwahab (2011) explained that library activities are becoming more and more sophisticated as the sources of knowledge proliferate and the devices for the retrieval of specific item of knowledge become increasingly complex. Ms Copes who is a librarian, while reacting to an interview enthused "people ask the most amazing questions now that the internet is popular". She explained that they expect more answers because so much information is available (Crosby, 2000).

The development of ICT has opened up new horizons for the creation, storage, access, distributions and presentation that has significantly imparted and dramatically changed the fabric of the library user habits. It thus remains a challenge to most of the libraries regarding capacity building strategies to ensure that patrons acquire the skills and

techniques in ensuring effective use of information resources (Magara, 2010). Fishel, a reference librarian reacting to an interview disclosed that one of the tasks that come with technology is training people to use it (Crosby, 2000).

The growing pace of innovation and technological change, have made business and public sector activity far more complex than in past years and the profession is no exception. Crosby (2000) reported that Sibley, a schools librarian emphatically remarked in an interview thus "we used to be book driven, but now we are driven by technology. The complexity of my job has more than double in the past 10 years". Ogunsola (2011) pointed out that changes in the profession are happening both in magnitude and diversity. The technology driven environment has enveloped the library and is taking it to precedented heights in knowledge acquisition, management and communication. Even the vocabulary of librarianship is changing: "dissemination" is being replaced by "communication", "repository" by "database", "literature" with "navigation", etc. It is imperative therefore that a professional must keep pace with the latest development in the profession.

The three major paradigm shifts experienced by Library and Information Professionals make capacity building a must in public libraries. These major paradigm shifts according to Gulati & Raina (2000) are:

- The transition from paper to electronic media as the dominant form of information dissemination, storage and retrieval, is the first shift. Convergence different media, such as text, graphics, and sound, into multimedia resources, has direct impact on this transition.
- Increasing demand for accountability, with focus on quality customer services, performance measurement, bench marking and continuous improvement, make up the second shift. Shrinking financial resources for providing quality library and information support services have direct bearing on this shift.
- New forms of work organization such as end-user computing, work-teams, downsizing, re-engineering, outsourcing etc, is the result of the third shift.

Building the Capacity of Librarians in Public Libraries issues for library managers
According to Ogunsola (2011), capacity as a concept has both human and institutional dimensions with the following components:

- Skilled human resources
- Leadership and vision
- Viable institutions
- Financial and material resources and

- Effective work practices, including systems, procedures and appropriate incentives.

Library administrators can facilitate the actualization of these components through:

Training: It is clear the improved education and training are necessary to assist individuals in developing the competencies they will need on the job. The concept of core competencies involves knowledge, which should be acquired through formal education and training; skills or abilities, which are acquired through practice; and attitudes, which involve emotional and social aspects (Ferreira et al, 2007). Training has become increasingly vital to the success of modern organizations. It plays a central role in nurturing and strengthening these core competencies. In addition, rapidly changing technologies require that employees continuously hone their knowledge skills and abilities to cope with new processes and schemes (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001). Training provides employees with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt to current or future jobs. As posited by McShone & Glinow (2003), training is therefore not something that is done once for new employees. Beyond orientation training, an organization needs to engage in continuous training process to enhance development so that all organization members are able to perform their current jobs effectively and efficiently.

On the job training is one of the most commonly used methods because it provides the advantage of hands-on experience and an opportunity to build a relationship between supervisor and employee (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001). Through on-the-job-training, the gap between what the worker is expected to know on the job and his/her actual performance, which indicates training need, is bridged (Ahmed, 2000). Other methods of providing on-the-job training experiences include: Coaching, Understudy assignments, Job rotation, Lateral transfer, Action learning etc.

Seminars/Conference Sponsorships: Seminars and conferences are useful for bringing groups of people together for training and development. They can be used to communicate ideas, policies, or procedures and also serve as good avenues for raising points of debate or discussing issues (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001). Library management can sponsor staff to conferences and seminars organized by professional groups especially those pertaining to the new communication technologies. Interaction with fellow professionals in other types of libraries may pose different challenges thus making them sit up as they encounter and seek to master new developments in the field.

Career planning workshops: A workshop involves a group of people working together on a creative project, discussing a topic, or studying a subject (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Workshops provide a chance to compare and discuss attitudes, concerns and plans with others in similar situations. A career workshop can help employees assume responsibility for their own careers. It can also help them learn how to make career decisions, set career goals, create career options, seek career planning information and at the same time build confidence and self esteem (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001).

Career Self-Management Training: Outside workshops, self management training can equally help librarians in public libraries assume greater responsibility for their own career management. Self management training is geared towards their long-term personal effectiveness. They are made to undertake self assessments to increase awareness of their own career attitudes and values. In addition, they could be encouraged to widen their viewpoint beyond promotions within the office to broader opportunities in the marketplace (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001).

Incentives and Rewards: A number of persons have tried to specify what employees find motivating in the work environment. Historically, the issue has been approached from the point of view of the individual, hence the proposing of different models such as Maslow's Need Hierarchy and Herzberg's two factor theory which recognized the issue of rewards. Knowledge, Skills and Ability (Competency) development can be encouraged with the use of incentives and rewards. Rewards offered by a job (such as pay, benefits, challenge, opportunities for promotion, etc) can motivate workers to individual efforts at capacity building. Each reward has the potential to both influence motivation and satisfy employee needs (Heneman, Schwab, Fossum and Dyer, 1983, Cascio, 1987). Incentives are variable rewards, granted to individuals or groups that recognize differences in achieving results. Financial incentives linked to valued behaviour will encourage others to go for it. For instance, granting study leave with pay for those going for further studies. Correct application will yield strongly positive effects on productivity. Conversely, they could have negative effects if applied indiscriminately.

Hindrances to competency development in public libraries
A number of existing factors can constitute hindrances to developing the competencies of librarians in public libraries in Nigeria.
Poor government support: Public libraries are expected to be funded by the government using the people's taxes. The public libraries in Nigeria have however suffered gross neglect just like a saying that a goat owned by the entire community

usually dies of hunger. This neglect according to Opara (2006) could be attributed to poor or wrong perception of the role of the library.

Lack of current public library laws: A greater percentage of Nigerian public library laws across the states are in serious need of revision. The statistics as given by Ogbonna (2010) gave the public library laws in Nigeria according to the geo-political zones and this revealed the following:

South East: Anambra 1976 and Imo 1982.

South South: Bayelsa and Rivers 1971,

Cross River 1973, Delta 1976 and Edo 1970

South West: Lagos 1980, Ekiti and

Ondo 1985, while Oyo is 1988

North Central: Benue 1982

North West: Katsina 1976

North East: Bauchi 1988.

Even the national library had its amendment decree since 1987. A library decree that is up to three is expected to have undergone a title amendment at the very least, so that current trends will be incorporated.

Limited access to Information
Technology: Literature is replete with efforts of academic libraries on Digitization efforts of academic libraries on Digitization efforts. This is hardly the case in public libraries. Most still have limited access to computers and some that have are using it for just word processing (Mamman, 2004).

Poor remuneration: Public libraries in Nigeria have the highest levels of staff turnover compared to other libraries Opara (2006). This he noted is due to poor conditions of service, and opined that enhanced conditions of service will be achieved if they are accorded academic status and the consolidated salary structure (CONTISS) is granted to them.

Escalating cost of further education:
Research is expensive as is also the cost of pursuing higher degrees which is constantly on the increase. The poor take home pay of the average public Librarian in Nigeria is such that those going for higher studies will have to deny themselves of some basic necessities. This serves as a discouraging factor to the others.

Conclusion

To ensure that our job is not taken over by other information professionals outside of librarianship, it is important that every librarian no matter where they are working is carried along. For the librarian to function successfully, he must be flexible enough to update his skills with the ever changing technology. The basic skills of the profession have not really changed per se other than the environment and method. This has created a gap that needs to be filled through capacity building. The emphasis on librarians in public libraries is because they serve more clientele and so need more skills as each group has its own peculiarities. Furthermore, they bear the brunt of neglect unlike the other types of libraries that have parent bodies that cater for them.

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