Leadership Qualities: Librarianship in Digital Era

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Abstract:
This paper finds out the ways of traditional leadership in the LIS field. It also attempts to cover the new challenges that are cropping up in the recent years. In due course it tried to find out the qualities of leadership that helps to suit the need of digital librarianship. It attempts to present a framework to achieve goal and mission i.e. the ultimate user centered LIS universe under the dynamic leadership of the digital librarian.

Key words: Librarianship, Digital Era, Leadership skills, Digital Libraries

1. Introduction

Leadership is an important issue in all sectors wherever there is a team working together to achieve a common goal. The Library is also an organization where a team of professional, semi-professional and non-professional employees strive to serve a common purpose, namely, to cater to their clientele in the best possible way. So, the leadership issue continues to hold an important position in the management thoughts related to librarianship.

With the passing of decades and centuries many things changed shape in the arena of the Librarianship. The shift from micro to macro information, the changes in format of resources, the entrance of upcoming technologies to cause a radical shift in dimensions of information storage and retrieval; and many other factors have contributed to the growth of Digital Librarianship. There seems to be a need of thinking proactively about the ways to combat this challenge.

2. Traditional Libraries

In the initial days, books were few and far between; copied by scribes, almost always backed by the royal patronage. Users were the royalty and the topmost rung of the social Manpower Management and Development layers; whereas a few very scholarly people, favored by the affluent class might have allowed sniffing perfumes of the knowledge fragrance. With printing, there came a fresh bridge of hope in the knowledge field with books printed in multiplied numbers and more and more people came into contact of books. Gradually the Public Library Movement in different countries brought in the concept of "People's University" and the commoners were included in the privileges of enjoyment of knowledge embodied in books.

3. Traditional Librarianship

With the flourishing of the libraries as a centre of knowledge, it became evident that a librarian and his team were needed for preserving the books and later the periodicals. The establishment had become vast and the basic service of preserving books along with occasional readership had multiplied into acquisition processing, storage, dissemination, preservation conservation. Gradually all of those blossomed into intricate branches with many library scientists offer theoretical and practical treatises on different aspects of librarianship. All of that literature was of the same opinion on one count: all were preaching custodianship.

4. New Age Libraries

The new age librarianship brought out several changes the most important being the shift from possession cum custodianship to access. There were several dramatic changes in the dominion of LIS. The formats were diversified from print to digital via other non-print mediums. Some such changes are

- From possession to access
- From custodianship to facilitator
- From guardian to friend (of users)
- From reader to user
- From time-bound access to any-time-access
- From space-bound access to anywhere-access
- From librarian (or library-centred) to user-centred
- From rigidity to flexibility
- From ascetic environment to informal environment
- From specified/strict norms to the Information Commons
- From strict disciplined library to relaxed pursuit of knowledge
- From direction (from library staff) to participation (in the decisions)

5. Copybook Leadership to Heuristics

Leadership is a quality to lead the team of workers. This is one of the most important qualities in the managerial capabilities. As is always said the strength of a chain is at the point of its weakest link, the librarian as a team- leader has always the role of motivator in such a way that all his team members become capable to work (at least) adequately as per the requirements of the job in hand. In the traditional era, all the roles of staff employed at Challenges in Library Management System (CLMS2012) different sections were well defined. The main consideration was monitoring the routine work and to supervise the exigencies. In the digital era- as we have seen above- many changes occurred to change this status quo. In fact, it is a time of constant change. During this transition period of being a dynamic leader, the librarian needs to consider several aspects:

- Leading from the front
- Practice before preaching
- Better among equals
- Friendly- not bossy- attitude
- The depth of subject knowledge in the area of the job-at hand
- Awareness of the personal as well as social limitations of the staff (as well as himself)
- Assigning a right person to right work
- Understanding the special aptitudes of staff
- Keeping in mind likings and disliking of staff while allocating jobs
- Remembering the invisible presence of the users
- While designing services and passing this attitude to co-staff
- Instituting proper orientation training for the new recruits
- Organizing regular refresher courses for the staff
- Regular ICT workshops for staff
- Giving extra privileges to staff as a reward and recognition of good work
- Arranging invited lectures by eminent Library & Information professionals
- Allocating suitable infrastructure for every service points
- Providing ergonomic as well as aesthetic furniture for the staff

6. Custodian to Facilitator

Librarianship has passed through a long journey and we have to weed out some of our older concepts while adopting quite a few new ones to suit our changing needs. The role of library leaders is now to nurture a breed of techno savvy, skilled manpower, equipped to serve a new brand of techno-savvy users. Users of digital era know a lot of things beforehand. So the library team has to go a step forward and to be aware of the quality resources available in the digital (as well as print) scenario.

7. Challenges of Digital Era

Due to its radically diverse nature of the traditional era, digital era provides miscellaneous benefits but it also offers various challenges. So the leadership in today's environment needs many skills and capabilities in today's rnulti-user, multitasking online learning environment. They should have adequate technical knowledge of Operating System Software, Word Processing Software, Power Point Presentation Software, Spreadsheet, Graphics, Database Management Systems, Webpage Development and Content Management. Software, CD ROM Database Searching, Networking Concepts, Digital Library Management Software, etc. Free and Open Source Software are to be used as much as possible. They should have a thorough understanding of knowledge resources (both in traditional and digital form), very adoptive towards change, pro-active, strategy-planner, flexible.

8. Towards Knowledge Economy

Physical as well as virtual space has now been utilized for library and information activities. In this changed and challenged environment, copybook leadership is no help. So, a library leader in the digital era has to be innovative, enthusiastic, and pro-active. With clarity of vision and the judicious use of the web 2.0 tools as well as empirical knowledge, his mission is to create a user-centred library. The journey towards 'Knowledge Economy' will only be fulfilled if all stakeholders in the knowledge chain (from inception to dissemination to feedback to further creation of new/modified knowledge) take active and interactive participation in the whole process.

9. Conclusion

Whatever changes and challenges happened over the time, Creth (1996) has said that the "values that are the foundation of the library profession should remain the same into the next century ... values of service, quality, universal access, and co-operation".

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