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Re-engineering Library Management Structure in Nigerian University Libraries for Effective Service Delivery

by
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Abstract

The practice of consciously and continually shaping an organisation through the act of directing and controlling a group of people for the purpose of coordinating and harmonising the group towards accomplishing a goal beyond the scope of individual effort describes the term "management". This paper, through combinations of personal experiences, visits to libraries and literature review approaches, examines factors shaping management structure in University libraries, while suggesting ways of re-engineering management structure in libraries for effective service delivery. It advises librarians to endeavour to understand the needs of their customers and strive to respond to these demands through changes in management structure but not to expect to find a single organisation structure to fit all libraries or even to satisfy their own organisation forever.

Introduction

The term management has been described as the practice of consciously and continually shaping an organisation through the act of directing and controlling a group of people for the purpose of coordinating and harmonising the group towards accomplishing a goal beyond the scope of individual effort. It includes executing plans, coordinating activities and resources, fostering cooperation among organisational units, and supervising day-to-day operations. For this to be successfully accomplished, organisations, libraries inclusive require a well thought out organisational management structure.

One notes that as organisation grew in size, a hierarchical structure based on functional units containing specialised operations develops, with management and employees focusing attention and communication almost exclusively within their own organisation segment. These principles of organising work are what still obtain in most Nigerian university libraries and some other libraries. In this setting, Creth (1996) notes, that communication and interaction among staff evolved with a vertical orientation, with lines drawn around working relationships with problem-solving occurring most often in tightly segmented units. Hammer and Champy (1993, p.66 cited in Creth 1996) describe this type of organisation as '*functional silos*'.

Unfortunately, this traditional library organisation, with focus on simplifying work for the staff and not necessarily for the customer, is increasingly becoming a barrier to quality services. Direct customer services require that the library customer (faculty, student, staff) come to the library facility and often to multiple service points to have questions answered, and to secure and circulate materials, and participate in instructional sessions.

All organisations are now particularly in a period of transformation including universities and their libraries with information technology acting as both catalyst and an instrument of change. This suggests according to Creth (1996) the need to address the very bureaucratic, slow moving, often tortuous way in which libraries make decisions and initiate new services and programmes. And with information technology creating new opportunities and requirements and customers becoming more demanding, the traditional organisational management structure that had served so well for so many decades has become increasingly dysfunctional in the turmoil of the technological, economic, competitive, and cultural environments.

Therefore if librarians in academic libraries are going to manage and serve the academy, which is the very reason of their existence, they would do well to re-organise to provide effective services.

The paper examines factors shaping management structure in University libraries, while suggesting ways of re-engineering management structures in libraries for effective service delivery.

Existing organisational management structure in Nigerian University Libraries

Although librarians and library managers have talked a lot about developing teams, empowering staff, and implementing innovative management strategies, the actual organisational framework of academic libraries has remained largely static especially in Nigerian University libraries. University Libraries in Nigeria still operate the traditional hierarchical model of leadership - a situation where only one person is calling the shots, only a single individual making the major decisions for the library (Fig. 1). With this model also comes a distinction between reader/public and technical services creating tensions between these two groups of librarians, which according to McKinzie (2000) had been especially bitter, with some librarians refusing to even talk with librarians in the other professional group.

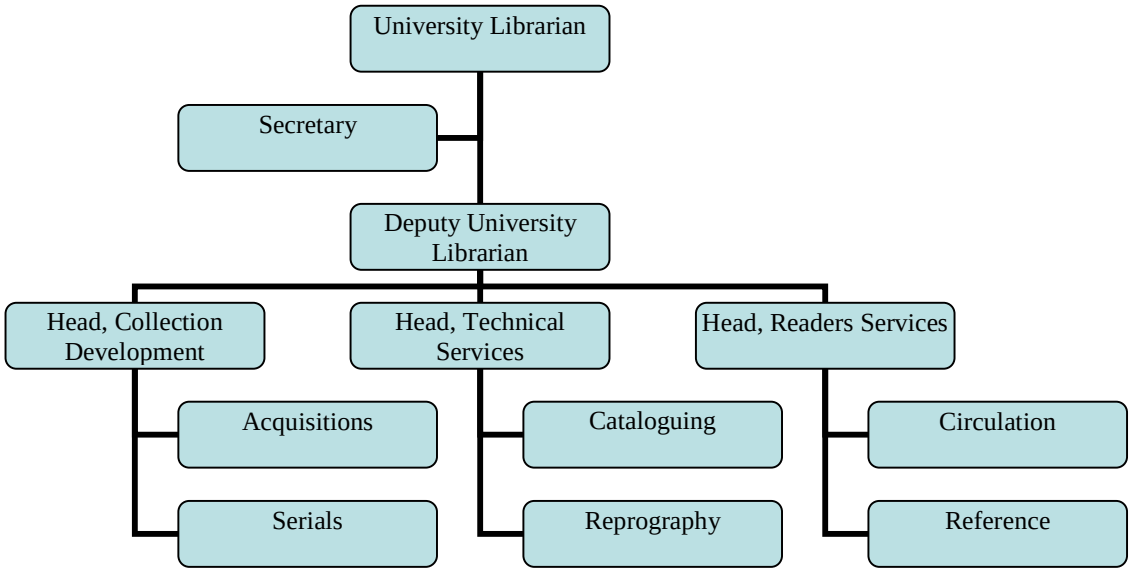

Fig. 1: The traditional hierarchical model

Factors shaping organisational management structure today

One factor that is shaping the structure of organisation in libraries in developed countries is the fact that librarians no longer have a desire for the traditional hierarchical model of leadership (McKinze, 2000). Instead

they wanted something much more democratic - something that would empower librarians, give them something approaching an equal voice in the decision-making process - a system within the framework of a consensus. They wanted a system that is collegial, a group decision making process with shared responsibility. They seek a structure that allows for a greater measure of collegiality i.e. a collegial pattern of management (in which major decisions e.g. collection development policies, decisions involving large equipment purchases or major online subscriptions, customer-service policies, etc. are made by the department, library functioning as an academic department, as a whole) with a rotating chair - drawing candidates from the senior staff.

Another factor is the desire to eradicate what librarians perceived to be the artificial barriers of librarianship - the perennial and pernicious distinction between public/reader and technical services that plagued and continues to plague many academic libraries bringing bitter tensions. Librarians therefore prefer to encourage a holistic vision of the profession. They would rather think of themselves as librarians with both technical, public and reference service responsibilities.

Combined with the holistic notion, librarians also want a system that ensured a greater degree of professionalism in their staff. The argument is that librarians by the very nature of their profession have a variety of responsibilities and a host of functions to perform. Librarians want to eschew the specialisation to which they were prone, commit themselves to substantial personal professional development, willingly serve on institution's committees, develop liaisons and/or partnership with academic departments, share in the management of the library, and even eventually serve as head of the Library department on a rotating basis (McKinze, 2000).

More importantly however, is the customer service factor, which has become the highest priority in libraries today with information technology acting as a catalyst. Libraries are developing a better understanding of the needs of their customers. Providing *just in time service, just for you* has taken on many facets. Elsewhere, Schmidt (nd) reports that library staff are now more actively involved in the planning, design and delivery of the curriculum, particularly as it impacts on flexible delivery. In this capacity, librarians are re-inventing themselves and are actively involved in teaching staff and students alike how to find, use and evaluate information as part of a lifelong learning continuum. Closer partnerships are being formed with

teaching and research staff, to provide targeted services for students. Information skills programmes are being provided in more diverse ways, e.g. via WebCT or Blackboard delivery. The Library is focusing on the creation of self-sufficient, information literate customers. Strategic planning is therefore being re-focused on customer needs, while their organisational structure is being re-aligned to emphasise service delivery, with the flatter organisational structure providing according to Schmidt (nd), a faster response to the customisation and personalisation demanded by a complex marketplace.

Re-engineering the organisation

The reality today suggests that library professionals should be less concerned with an organisation that reflects order and symmetry, comfort, and familiarity than with encouraging action and decision-making, risk, and innovation throughout the organisation. The old values must be replaced with new values such as speed, simplicity, and unparallel customer service, and self-confident, empowered workforce. In accomplishing a change in organisational structure however, it must be noted says Creth that the organisation is a living organism i.e. a society comprising of people, feelings, attitudes, expectations, and needs. It must therefore be expected that the change in the organisational structure may represent a very uncomfortable change for some individuals, particularly as lines blur and responsibilities and authority overlap. The strength of the library is the staff, it is thus essential to recognise that people can be fragile and, therefore, the organisation should exhibit this same fragility. As the change is undertaken, staff should be involved in some manner in the decisions that create major shifts so that they understand the reasons for changes. In this way, they are more likely to develop a commitment to required changes in the organisation and culture and, by extension, their own behaviour.

Teamwork should however be central to library organisation if libraries are to move rapidly and with an entrepreneurial spirit in the delivery of services in the current interactive high-speed communication environment. It is beneficial to explore an organisation design that relies on teams as the primary way that work is accomplished, decision reached, and service delivered. In this intense information environment, organisations should shift from organising by division of labour to organising by division of knowledge (Keen, 1991, p.8 cited in Creth, 1996). The division of

knowledge according to Keen captures an obvious reality of work in an era of rapid change and uncertainty.

However, commitment of all team members to the goals of the team (rather than individual goal) is required for the success of the team approach. This requires willingness on the part of team members to share authority and responsibility, and also for an individual to have respect and trust for one another and their individual talents and abilities. It requires library administrator and manager assuming major responsibility in the training of staff to assist individuals in learning skills and behaviour. Library manager should also shift responsibilities and approach to one that is more consultative and supportive rather than one of authority and control to make the transition into an organisation that is horizontal, rather than vertical, in focus, and one in which people are networked to provide quality service. The role of the manager according to Creth, should therefore focus on: coaching and mentoring; development of staff; developing shared values and vision among staff; providing resources within the framework of cost-benefit assessment; taking pride in the accomplishment of others; and providing incentives to teams work.

Typical examples of library management structure

The management structure for university libraries should not be built on a single model as is largely true to date. It should be expected that there will be great difference among libraries based on individual institutional needs and culture. A typical example of such structure is shown below. Others include those of Curtin and Botswana University Libraries among others.

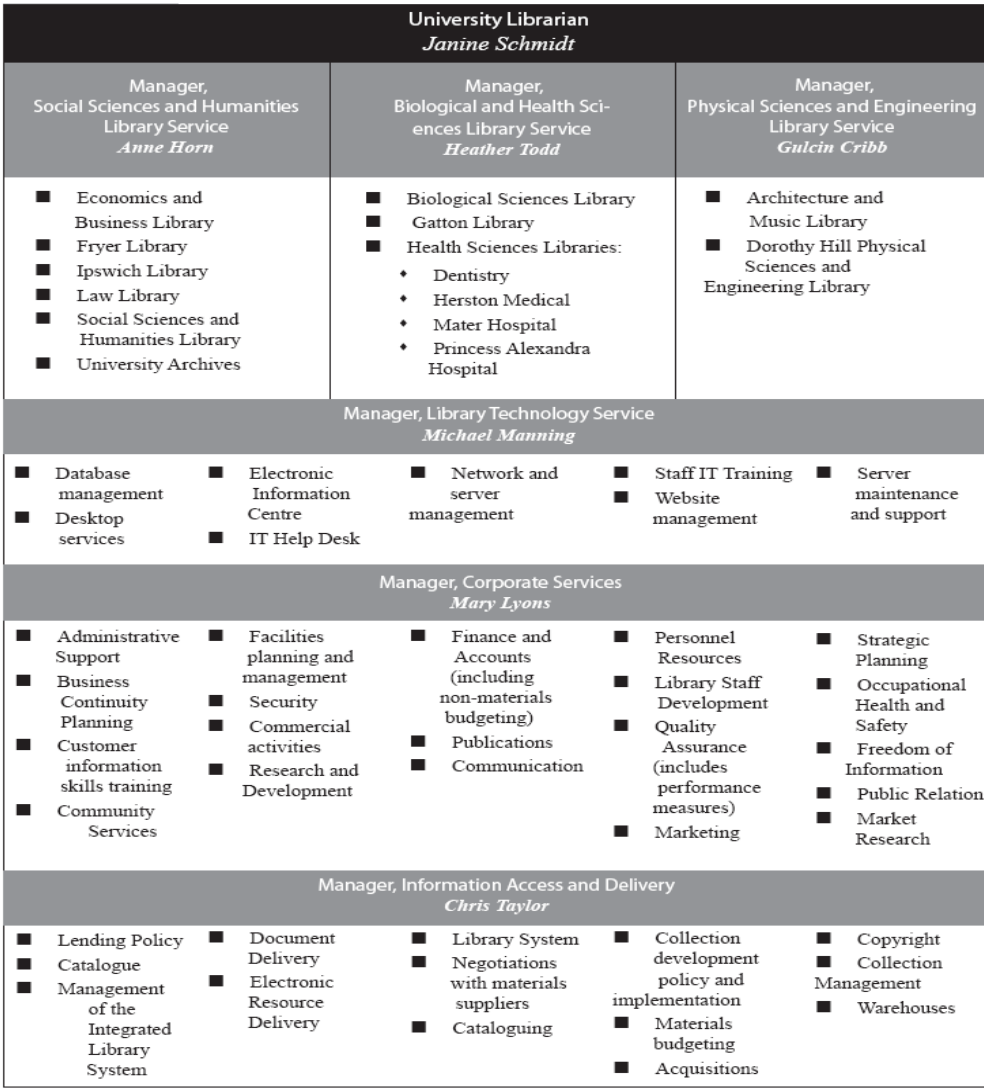

Fig. 2: An example of the new model of management structure in University Libraries today
Source: University of Queensland Library 1999 Annual Report

Conclusion

The roles of libraries are changing as a result of the changing demands of library customers. In order for libraries to remain relevant, libraries should particularly endeavour to understand the needs of their customers and strive to respond to these demands. It is always useful to re-examine the way things are done from time to time with a view to effectively responding to the needs of customers. In order therefore to make the transition from a structure that has been heavily hierarchical and segmented to one that is

fluid and flexible, library professionals need to experiment and explore, to remain open to considering new approaches, and to keep customers as the central focus. They should not expect to find a single organisation structure to fit all libraries or even to satisfy their own organisation forever. The organisation structure needs to continue to evolve and change as the environment in which they provide service changes.

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