

Embedded Librarianship in Universities for Fostering Learning, Research and Extension

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Abstract

Recent developments in the field of information technology particularly the emergence of search engines like "Google" and "Yahoo" have created a visible threat to the existence of witty and trained library professionals in this age of information explosion. The traditional practices of acquisition, processing and dissemination as a physical service point has become partially irrelevant in the present age. The present networked environment demands librarians to voluntarily attach or partner themselves in the projects and missions of the university, may it be as a member of the core group involved in curriculum based activities, research work, consultancy or the extension inventiveness. The new molded format of librarianship has been termed as "Embedded Librarianship". This paper introduces the new model of librarianship and discusses characteristic features and the areas where the librarians' services could be integrated in the universities.

Keywords: Embedded Librarianship; Academic Librarian; Modern Librarianship.

Introduction

It is really hard to accept, but the fact is that Librarianship has always been an underestimated profession. It took a long and rigorous time period, even centuries for the library professionals to gain their recognition and position in today's knowledge based society. Traditionally, librarians are considered as the caretakers of the library resources who actually deal with the housekeeping activities of the library such as procurement, organization and distribution of the books and materials to its users. However, recent developments in the field of information technology particularly emergence of search engines like "Google" and "Yahoo" have created a visible threat to the existence of a witty and trained library professional in this age of

information explosion. Thus, few dedicated members of the LIS fraternity have identified this issue and working on its solution. In this process they have realized that in the age of abundant and ubiquitous information their role can be redefined as important as that of a "Knowledge Navigator". As a matter of fact, with a little more effort and innovation they can redefine their strategies and serve the society in a meaningful way. To get rid of the confusion of "what to follow and what to ignore" now the users need their guidance and help even more on the contrary. Being a service provider to almost every knowledge domain a library professional must have gathered more or less knowledge about all the trades. So by focusing a little more on the creativity aspect one can take initiatives to collaborate with the research and development units of a particular discipline and contribute through his/her skills, potential and expertise. This theory has given birth to the emergence of a new form of librarianship. Here a library professional voluntarily attach or partner himself in the projects and missions of the university, may it be as a member of the core group involved in curriculum based activities, research work, consultancy or the extension inventiveness. The new molded format of librarianship has been termed as "Embedded Librarianship".

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Concept of Embedded Librarianship

The term “embedded librarian” was coined by Barbara Dewey in 2004 (Godbey). This concept came to her mind from the practice of the embedding journalist in the military during Iraq war. As the journalists were integrating themselves into military units, the librarians could also integrate themselves into the pedagogical, research and extension activities of the university. The recent changes in the information landscape fostered by the emergence Internet and World Wide Web has forced the embedding nature of librarianship in academic campuses. A large amount of library resources are now available in electronic form over a mouse click with 24/7 access without any geographical barrier. As a result users have isolated themselves from the physical libraries. Now a general perception is emerging that “users do not require libraries but the libraries require users for their survival” (R.C. Gour 2014). This is mainly because traditional libraries have failed in coping up with the latest changes in the library and information environment. These hard core facts lead to the conception, planning and then execution of the very idea of ‘Embedded Librarianship’.

Characteristics of Embedded Librarianship

Embedded librarianship is not a modern theory, but a modern approach when we are considering the libraries not as a parallel facility but as an interactive and collaborative unit in the university. The concept of integrating librarianship is expanding every single day in this 21st century. Therefore, while planning for any collaboration one must adapt few unique and specialized characteristics. The following are some of the observable general features of embedded librarianship.

Service Orientation

Conventional library services are based on some principles and rules but embedded librarianship is governed only by creativity. While in this case there are no limitations on time of service, place of service and amount of service that is being provided to the clients. The only thing that matters is the quality of service should be specialized, highly focused and much more concentrated.

Shifting of physical location

The purpose of embedding can be achieved absolutely when the librarian is available personally to the concerned team whenever his need is felt. That means being virtually available is not enough. The physical presence counts a lot in this analytical approach of librarianship.

Core group-centric

Instead of providing a superficial standard of service to a larger population, it is always beneficial to concentrate on a smaller target group. The queries of the core team should be answered in a top priority basis. This will result in an effective and productive quality of bonding.

Specialists instead of Generalists

When a librarian goes through the process of embedding he has to achieve certain level of specialization in the concerned field to confer his impact because the role he is playing in this regard is not supportive rather collaborative.

Depends on Trusted Guidance

The focus always revolves around the trust and reliability aspect in this context. Being the prime source of information to the team, authentication of the supplied content becomes highly necessary.

Scope for future amalgamation

Completion of the project does not necessarily mean the end of partnership. There is always a second time. Thus, the relationship with each team member should be far broader than just being professionals which leaves a scope for future partnerships in forth coming research activities.

Differentiation from the traditional counterpart

In spite of belonging to the same service providing organization and having a lot of similarities in the intent and nature of service, there are certain obvious differences among these two forms of librarianship. Those points can be listed as follows:

Traditional Librarian	Embedded Librarian
Generally funded from library budget Physically based in the library. General responsibility for all library users	Often funded by sources other than library budget Relocation is the demand of the concept but mostly available virtually Delivers specialized services to specific groups in addition to general library services
Generalist in nature during the service Nature of the service is responsive	Specialist, with high level of 'domain knowledge' acquired on the job Proactive in nature

Types of Embedded Librarians

The responsibilities of an embedded librarian are never predetermined and fixed. One has to go beyond the general expectations and speculations and perform his/her duties whenever the situation demands. Therefore, the level of involvement also varies from person to person and context to context. According to the extent of performance there are various categories of embedded librarianship those are tried and tested from time to time. Few of them are discussed below.

Virtual librarian

A virtual librarian is one who is available 24/7 to his clients through multiple communication medium such as e-mail, telephone, messaging, texting etc. That means he can be contacted at any point of time in his virtual desk in the cyberspace. One basic limitation of the virtual librarianship is that the participation is more or less passive in nature.

Roving librarian

In this case the roving librarian has to move to multiple locations for serving the purpose, for instance to various departments, to student's cafeteria, to common rooms of dormitories etc. There he interacts with the students and faculties. In this conversation process he tries to find their information needs and the required assistance that he could offer them. However in this model a lot of diffused energy is involved and the objective of the service is also not focused.

Personal librarian

The personal librarian model is moreover inspired by the financial organizations where the high net worth customers are supplied with personalized services. Likewise, whenever the user requires any assistance or help the personal librarian has to be there to satisfy his information needs. For instance, as a project fellow, the librarians can support in documentation, developing digital content and repositories, content management and organization, etc. on demand.

Consulting librarian

As the name clarifies the consulting librarians are having unique expertise in a particular domain. Whenever his guidance is solicited he is being contacted by the individual client or the research team. Here, the librarian has a specialized role as he diagnose the real cause and hence the solution accordingly.

Procedural features

As the concept of embedded librarianship comprises of innovations, creativity and commitment a particular methodology is difficult to ascertain. It might vary in each and every context. Today, the librarians can embed their services to all their users via the Internet and World Wide Web. The highly collaborative and personalized social tools of Web 2.0 such as Face book, Blogs, Wiki, Tweeter, etc. have simplified the task to much more practicable and effective practice. One can keep a watch on the happening in and around and again advertise or market the services both at a single point of time on a single web screen. Thus, the following figure shows few steps that can be followed while planning for any collaboration.

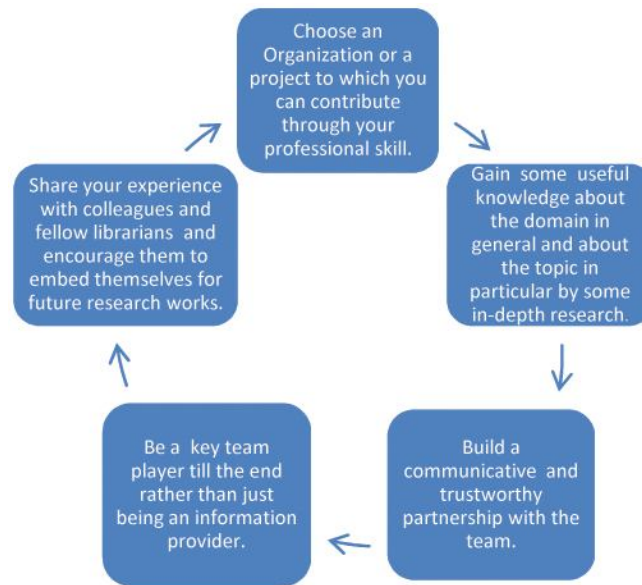
Areas of Embedding in the University Context

Conventionally, the academic librarians of the universities have been following the stereotypes that have fixed the profession for more than a century. Patricia Glass Schuman has very appropriately observed,

"The image we seem to worry about most that of the middle aged spinster librarian is basically irrelevant and unimportant. What is important is the view of the librarian and the library as foreboding, boring, complicated, largely inaccessible, or worse, irrelevant. Our focus should not be on how attractive people think we are or even how smart, but how useful, necessary, and important we are to their education, research, and everyday lives and work." (Schuman; 1990; p. 86).

This statement portrays that, the relevance of a librarian to its clients does not stand only in strict

Fig. 1: Embedded Librarianship Job Cycle



observance of his professional knowledge and skill but in the contextual integration of these skills for problem solving. In accordance with the basic goals of embedded librarianship observed in the above lines, the academic librarians in universities embed their services in the following three important sectors:

- Designing of curriculum
- E-Learning
- Development of open courseware systems and question banks
- Identifying and delivering highly valued information sources

Teaching

An academic librarian always faces a diversification when his work is being compared with that of the teaching faculties. However, the contributions of a sincere librarian cannot be ignored when “pedagogy” is taken into consideration. He can play an important role in educating students to become information literate. Here we are talking about program based information literacy. Librarians should give some thought to their own discourses, and identify entrenched or established ways of thinking that actually involves their own efforts to understand and work with the faculty. Also, librarians should start to identify and listen to the faculty pedagogical discourses on their particular campus. Finally, librarians have an important role to play by supporting faculty in developing and broadening their own information literacy, and by assisting faculty who then feel comfortable incorporating information literacy into their teaching (G. Leckie and A. Fullerton, 1999). The academic librarians in universities could integrate their services in the following manner:

Research

Increasingly, librarians at research-based institutions are applying the embedded librarian model in working directly with the faculty they serve as collaborators on research projects or as an integral part of a research team. But in the academic level especially in the universities this kind of partnerships are very rare to see. As an embedded librarian in the research context, a librarian works with researchers more inclusive manner in the research process rather than just with the products produced at the end of the research lifecycle may it be a book, a journal article or any kind of proceeding.

Unfortunately in the Indian university level there is no such collaborations are being carried out where the librarian gets a chance to contribute wholesomely. But a systematic process can be proposed where the librarians can integrate their services as a nominated member in the Nodal Centers and Research Counseling centers. In this manner, the librarian could collaborate with the following research activities.

- Selection of research projects
- Forming research networks for researchers

- Data collection
- Research disclosure and publication
- Fostering information access for researchers

Extension

The library extension services can be defined as the activities that are being carried out by a university other than the basic responsibilities towards its bona fide clientele. Here, the role of an embedded librarian is probably most vital. Because it involves directly educative or recreational, lead also to publicity as an important secondary product. The key responsibilities of a librarian involved in extension services can be listed as follows:

- Promotion of information literacy drives
- Community information services
- Promoting reading habit of the common people
- Documenting university-society interaction
- Job information services to community

Suggestions for augmenting embedded librarianship

Be a key team member

Being a dedicated professional the embedded librarian need to be an important part of the research team to whom he is collaborating with. This includes a clear understanding of not only his key duties but also that of fellow team members. Because to support and being supported is very vital in such team works.

Seek support from your organization and colleagues

Embedding yourself to some other project does not mean that your basic duties could be ignored. One thing must be kept in mind that these are additional responsibilities on you. Therefore, the daily work schedule has to be followed with the help and support of the administration and colleagues so that the hierarchy would not suffer in your absence.

Have a mindset that of an Entrepreneur

An entrepreneur is a person who advertises, markets and finally sales his product to the targeted customers. In this scenario an embedded librarian must follow the same procedure. You must convince the targeted individual or the team that your presence could be effective and not replaceable.

Be prepared to take risk

Being an entrepreneur does not necessarily mean that it would always be a profitable endeavor. Like in other businesses it involves a lot of risk factors. It might work, it might not. Unfortunately, here the risk is not only for the embedded librarian himself but to the collaborated members as well. The whole undertaken project could be at a threat. However, we must not forget that "Risk is necessary for change".

Build a compatible and trustworthy relationship

As you work in a team it becomes very important to interact and communicate. Here we are not talking about the technical and virtual, rather the verbal mode of communication. The whole team including the librarian himself must build an understanding about each other's strengths and capabilities and trust them too. And this interdependence and reliability can be achieved by showing dedication, commitment and sincerity towards the team.

Move outside of your comfort zone

Whenever a fresh endeavor is initiated it seems hassled and impractical. The person associated feels very uncomfortable in the new platform. An embedded librarian too cannot escape from this fear of being unfamiliar while working with people from entirely different trades and territory. Because for a long time he is used to a particular environment and workflow, confusion is obvious at certain levels. Here he could ask for guidance and help from fellow workers without any hesitation or embarrassment.

Conclusion

From the above subjective study on Embedded Librarianship we can conclude that it is not a new concept rather a very old one. Collaboration has always been an effective tool in any project, so as in the academic level. Contemporarily many university libraries are using latest technologies to provide new services to their user group. Specialized services have existed in academic branch libraries since their inception. But the success of this collaborative activity depends not only on the understanding and dedication of the librarian but also on the support from the faculty members and the organization. Embedded Librarianship in the university context can be a very important endeavor for the future challenges. The proactive initiatives of the librarian along with a handy support from the administration

might ensure continuous and effective partnerships. These initiatives combined with modern socialization opportunities, will encourage librarians to provide specialized programs for their research oriented user groups in the university level.

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