

# Capacity Building and Restructuring of Libraries and Information Centers A Spotlight

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**Abstract** Capacity building involves man-machine interfaces in organizations to enhance operating efficiency, expertise and skills of personnel towards the achievement of organizational excellence and concurrently library capacity is focused on community building. This paper builds a conceptual framework of capacity building & library restructuring and attempts to put focus on some of the basic aspects of library capacity building leading to re-engineering of library and information centers in the wake of changing scenario of informatics.

**Keywords:** Capacity Building, Capacity development, Library restructuring, Digital Libraries, ICT

## **Introduction**

In the parlance of LIS, capacity building promises a great reformation, restructuring and renovation of systems, services, information infrastructures of library and information centers for meeting the topical elevated needs of users' community. In conformity with the cardinal principles of capacity building, library and information professionals need to come out with novel ideas of restructuring and refurbishing their information infrastructure, systems, services, and all sorts of library operations for the fulfillment of comprehensive needs of each and every clientele pin-pointedly just in time. Therefore, it is quite essential for the information professionals to understand as to what constitute library capacity building. We have attempted to put focus on some of the key considerations for capacity building and restructuring of libraries.

## **Capacity Building: Concept**

"Capacity building", sometimes used interchangeably with "institution building", "institutional and organizational development" and "institutional capacity building" (Jones and Blunt, 1999; Tadele and Manyena, 2009). Specifically, capacity building encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, based on an understanding of environment potentials and limits and of needs perceived by the people of the country concerned"(<http://www.gdrc.org/uem/capacity-define.html>). The WCO defines capacity building as "activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals and improve institutional structures and processes such that the organization can effectively meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way. "It is, however, important to put into consideration the principles that govern community capacity building ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capacity\\_building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capacity_building)). Besides, the following web definitions of capacity building are worthy of evaluation:

- A coordinated process of deliberate interventions to: (i) upgrade skills (ii) improve procedures, and (iii) strengthen organizations. Capacity building refers to the investment in people, institutions and practices that will enable countries to achieve their development objectives.
- To increase the operating efficiency of a government or non-government institution, a community based organization, a community per se or an individual through training (increasing knowledge), changed operating procedures, restructuring, etc.
- Training lays foundation to ensure that the interaction of and between actors and services is crucial for the improved organization of agricultural services.
- Capacity-development focuses on improving the expertise and skills of personnel in relation to the responsibilities and tasks which they will carry-out. It is generally considered to be a specific part of institutional strengthening activities (see also: Institutional Strengthening).
- Increasing the potential to gain maximum results/benefits for the community.

The synthesis of all of the above definitions implies that capacity building involves investment in people, organizations and services to enhance operating efficiency, expertise and skills of personnel towards the achievement of organizational excellence.

### **Need for Library restructuring**

Libraries provide key support to economic development through direct job creation, contribution to cultural development of the local area, education, training and skills development, and the development of social capital and social inclusiveness (Ashu and Clandening, 2007). One of the things that can make life interesting for information professionals is the way in which libraries are structured. Structure contributes to the successful implementation of plans by formally allocating people and resources to the tasks which have to be done, and by providing mechanisms for their co-ordination. However, there are about as many ways of organizing or structuring libraries as there are libraries. Organizations should adopt certain characteristics to make them more efficient and effective, (Ibegbulam and Olorunsola, 2001), but it is a matter of consideration that how well the respective organization supports the trend.

In the case of academic libraries, a feasible plan to enhance user services is to organize a library into subject divisions, with professional librarians located at each one of them. This plan is targeted to increase gradually the subject expertise of librarians working in each subject division through their experiences with users. To carry out this new modified organization, the conventional library setting needs to be changed from placing books according to their forms (e.g. monograph publications, periodicals and reference books), to organizing them according to their subjects (e.g. philosophy, economics, law, physics, computer science). The subject librarian will, at the same time, take care of reference services, SDI, DB instruction and book selection on the same subject. Previously existing discord between the book collection, user service librarians and users will, thus, be removed, as the new setting will permit interconnection of work within the same subject. For the users it would mean a one-stop service and also a realization of user-centered services. Taking the transformation a step further would be to allow technical services to be taken care of within each subject library as well (Shin, and Kim, 2002) and this is a stepping stone to capacity building since restructuring and reorganizing can make room for amending the chance of scattering of information by the process of integration and reorganization of the prolific mess of information under the specific subjects for effective and efficient traceability.

## **Library capacity**

Library capacity consists of the people in the library, its culture, attitude, environment and appearance. It requires commitment to training to develop people skills. It requires libraries to identify and take advantage of opportunities and strengths. How does one recognize that capacity is being built? The Community Development Handbook identifies factors that confirm capacity is being built. "People are active, interested and participating in what is going on. People may also be questioning, challenging and debating – but they will be debating what should be done, not complaining that nothing will ever change. More people are getting involved, helping to identify key issues, and taking action. Results are becoming obvious and the abilities, esteem and resources of many communities are growing as capacity grows." These factors may also be used to indicate when library capacity is being built (Ashu and Clandening, 2007).

Library capacity is basically focused on community building since it offers community meeting space, facilitate access to computers and the internet, provide public access to desired set of information needed for community building. Therefore, libraries can bring experience in restructuring and reorganizing information sources for the community's development.

## **Library as capacity building initiator**

Library as a community connector is rightly regarded as the capacity building initiator. Initiation of capacity of any set up can take its fuel from library. It can accommodate community meetings, discussions, forums, and events and activities as a catalyst for community building.

In this digital age, as libraries are making great efforts to deliver information services to users' desktops, they are also facing a serious dilemma: fewer users are physically visiting libraries as a response to the unprecedented development of technological innovations and as the traditional library as a physical space has less to offer today's students. How can libraries continue to justify their occupation of physical space in this climate? (Sidorko and Yang, 2009) as a remedy to this effect, libraries can fill an important role in building the skills needed to use the new technologies and in local access and training to use e-government initiatives. The digital divide isolates people who cannot afford the technologies and lack digital literacy skills or motivation to develop these skills (Ashu and Clandening, 2007) and it is the library which can initiate the process.

## **Digital libraries as capacity building indicator**

Witten, et al.(2002) identify the following **five** key important areas where digital libraries can promote human development as a capacity builder:

- 1. Dissemination of humanitarian information.** Digital libraries, by decoupling production and distribution costs from intellectual property charges, offer a desperately needed lifeline. More broadly, increasing the level of education through knowledge and technology transfer, particularly for doctors, teachers and other professionals.
- 2. Disaster relief.** Natural disasters such as earthquakes or hurricanes, and man-made ones such as terrorist attacks or nuclear accidents, demand immediate and informed response in an environment where the local infrastructure may be unpredictable or severely damaged. To this effect digital library technology allows organized collections of information, graced with comprehensive searching and browsing capabilities, to be created very rapidly. Intelligence specific to the nature of a disaster, the geographical region and the logistic resources available for the relief effort can be gathered into a built-to-order digital

library collection that combines targeted knowledge with general medical and sanitary information.

3. ***Preservation and propagation of indigenous culture.*** Libraries and their close relatives, museums, have always been involved in preserving culture. These institutions collect literature and artifacts, and use them to disseminate knowledge and understanding of different times and cultures. Digital libraries, however, open up the possibility of far more flexible and coherent multimedia collections that are both fully searchable and browsable in multiple dimensions, and permit more active participation by indigenous people in preserving and disseminating their own culture. This strengthens individual cultures, promotes diversity and reduces the dominance of English in the global information infrastructure.
4. ***Locally-produced collections of information.*** Digital library applications in culture preservation have the advantage that the relevant information is, of necessity, readily available locally.
5. ***New opportunities to enter the global marketplace.*** Countries such as India, Romania and the Philippines have long undertaken low-level information-processing tasks like data entry and OCR – indeed. The varied demands of digital library development, such as manual metadata extraction, collection organization, cataloging and information presentation, will greatly expand the range of tasks that the developing world can undertake, creating valuable new export markets.

### **The technological infrastructure**

Proliferation of modern information communication technology has changed the way in which information is delivered and how users want to receive information. Asking for librarians to search databases was no longer necessary as the search process became easy enough for users themselves to conduct. A trend for direct searches of all kinds of information featured in academic publications, graphs and data is growing. Academic libraries need to satisfy these kinds of users in a variety of ways, including such measures as wider utilization of Inter Library Loan and Document Delivery Services (Shin and Kim, 2002). Anticipating the demand of network access; the structure and organization of digital libraries are rearranging their distribution media. Library websites are being regularly updated and free access to users is provided at all time. OPAC features are modified with vivid references and cross references. CDs/DVDs are properly preserved, organized and distributed.

Computers in developing countries tend to be low-end, often with poorly-installed software. The computing environment is quite outside the control of system developers, and may lack network access, CD-ROM drives, browser software, adequate disk storage and main memory (Witten, 2002). Additionally, the online catalog is capable of providing wide-ranging information service since it has potentially infinite linking power that can direct and connect library users to forever growing electronic resources, as well as physical collections. With the globalization of the online catalog, the catalog is no longer just a tool, as it used to be, when it meant stacks of static cards stored in separate little drawers; it has become a dynamic gateway to increasingly expanding information resources through constantly extending networks of hyperlinks. It is still important, as ever before, for us cataloging librarians to adhere to prescribed standards and rules when working on bibliographic records, but we also have to adopt a user-centered and user-friendly approach to assembling, maintaining, and enhancing the online catalog according to library users' needs (Huang and Wong, 2006).

## **Constituent elements of costing provision of library services**

Provision of efficient and effective library services depends on both materials and human resources. Costing elements should thus be based on a thorough analysis of what is provided, what should be provided, how it should be provided and by whom, with clear indication of quality (qualitative and quantitative) assessment indicators and the cost involved in each case. As library capacity building is a continuous process, elements of this continuity should also be built in and clearly reflected in the costing exercise by allowing a certain percentage in the budget. Thus, in order to be comprehensive, costing should be divided into thematic themes, related to major components of a library: staff and staff development, collections and buildings, general operational costs, or along any budget lines that cover all activities undertaken by a particular library, both capital and operation based (Nawe, 2004). The budgeting estimation should be clear cut and goal oriented.

## **Strategies for enhancing provision of services through external support**

Strategies for enhancing provision of services through external support fall under two categories. The first category is that of colleagues elsewhere in the library profession. Libraries all over the world depend on each other as no single library can meet all the needs of its users at any given time. Through forming links, consortia and other forms of cooperative relationships, libraries can cut a lot on individual spending through sharing of resources. However, a precaution is needed when considering cutting on costs and meeting strategic needs of core users, although this element in this era of ICT may be irrelevant when the connectivity problem is resolved. Nonetheless, copyright issues will need reconciliation. Apart from building capacity in the area of information provision, cooperation can also contribute significantly in human capacity building through exchange of staff or exchanging experiences and publishing through the Web (Nawe, 2004) and this in turn can be instrumental in strengthening the organizational efficiency.

## **Conclusion**

Capacity building considerably depends on successful innovation within an existing set up that is operated through procedural and systematic desertion of old practices and services. Library capacity building though constitute restructuring and reorganizing, however, it is not an easy enterprise since there are infinite methods of revamping and re-engineering of systems and services of libraries that come to the forefront as issues. Whatever may be the case, in order to keep pace with the progressive trends of ICT and information highway, the urge of the hour is to opt for library capacity building for expanding the horizon of information preservation, processing, and subsequent utilization.

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