



LIBRARY AUTOMATION PERCEPTION AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Automation is a technique to make a system or process self active. Only the computer is being used in automation hence the main base of automation is the computer. We can say that automation is the application of computer based product and services. Due to information explosion it becomes very difficult to manage the library activity manually. This paper discusses the concept, need and steps in library automation.

INTRODUCTION

As computer-based systems have become more pervasive in all aspects of library and information work, the term library automation has become an umbrella term for the many kinds of applications that are used within the library. The various applications provide the means to input information into databases that provide organized storage, and thus allow access to information. Perhaps the major transformation as heralded in this volume's first edition has been the emergence of the digital library and the hybrid library, resulting in the blurring of the notion of the library collection as seen as located in a physical place. The word "automation" has been derived from Greek word "automose" means something, which has power of spontaneous motion or self-movement.

The term automation was first introduced by D.S. Harder in 1936. He defined it as "The automatic handling of parts between progressive production processes in relation to engineering industries. Since then the term has been applied to a wide variety of automatic machinery and automatic systems and is commonly used to describe any operation in which there has been a substantial substitution of controlled action for human efforts or intelligence. According to Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science "Automation is the technology concerned with the design and development of process and system that minimize the necessity of human intervention in operation" (Kent, 1977)

Objectives of Library Automation

1. To maintain bibliographical records of all the materials, in a computerized form.
2. To provide bibliographical details through a single enumerative access point of holdings of a library.
3. To reduce the repetition in the technical processes of housekeeping operations.
4. To provide access to information at a faster rate
5. To share the resources through library networking
6. To implement new IT processes to provide high quality information.

Need of Library Automation:

1. The needs generated by information explosion
2. Increase in the collection of libraries.
3. Wastage of users/staff time in locating information
4. Provide wide access to resources within the libraries and elsewhere.
5. Inability of users to explore the unlimited literature and information of their interest

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6. Advances in computer and communication technology
7. Quality in services
8. Resource sharing

Steps in Library Automation

The major Steps in Library Automation are as following

Initial Study

The initial study attempts to answer why do you need a computer system? The purpose of the initial study is to identify the reasons why computerization should be undertaken.

Specification of Requirements

This stage of investigation answers the question what must be achieved through computerization. This is done by thorough investigation of all departments of the library, various procedures, forms/registers, persons involved, flow of information, flow of work etc.

System Design

This is the most highly technical area where the system analyst develops several models and decides on the best among the various alternative approaches to tackle the problem.

Development

Carrying out what has been decided in the design stage earlier is development. In the case of library acquisition computerization for example: this will involve writing of the program code, entering it into the computer, compiling, editing etc.

Testing

Once the program are written and checked out for syntax, it is tested. Program is corrected and process repeated until it is totally error free.

Implementation

Implementation of computer based system may be of three types

Parallel

Pilot

Overnight change

Running

When the system is up and there is no much to do except keep-up schedules. You may have to provide for emergencies such as staff on vacation or sudden leave, power shut down, computer down time etc.

Review

Fairly running system needs to be reviewed periodically.

Problems in Library Automation

1. Technological Problems

Technological problems include both the hardware, i.e., the computer as an instrument for information processing and the software, i.e. the methodology which is applied. The major problems faced today in terms of the hardware are due to the variety of computers being used in different types of research and business institutions. The computers, manufactured by various firm are not compatible. Developing countries sometimes receive sophisticated technology like computers as gifts from more developed countries; these often become obsolete from the manufacturer's point of view information processing and the software, i.e. the methodology which is applied. The major problems faced today in terms of the hardware are due to the variety of computers being used in different types of research and business institutions. The computers, manufactured by various firm are not compatible. Developing countries sometimes receive sophisticated technology like computers as gifts from more developed countries; these often become obsolete from the manufacturer's point of view

Such machines are not only unsuitable for most complex work but any technical problems which come up cannot be repaired. Information retrieval work requires machines more sophisticated than those manufactured indigenously and few imported machines are capable of handling information retrieval applications. The random access facility and disks large enough for storage of bibliographic information

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are not readily available.

In most institutions, organizational goal receive priority over the library's requirements, meaning that the librarian must use the computer available rather than what is actually required according to specifications. Library activities in all institutions are done through sharing disk space as well as computer time. Therefore, when the storage capacity is not large enough to accommodate various types of data, bibliographic data are given the lowest priority.

2. Economic Problems

The major obstacle for any innovations in developing countries is the lack of resources. The initial cost of establishing a computer system is beyond the reach of most organizations and institutions. Library and information processing is done either with spare computer capacity made available by the institution itself, or with computer time hired from another institution. The cost of hiring computer time and storage space is very high and often cannot be justified at the management level by cost benefit analysis.

3. Attitudinal Problems

Computers appear very awesome to developing countries. They are powerful machines which can perform many functions and therefore offer a solution to the many types of manual inefficiency which often plague the developing countries. Among librarians there are two groups often give insufficient thought to the real value of the computer to the organization/institution and make uneconomical, haphazard use of the facility. The other group, still the majority in developing countries, lacks knowledge of the potential and consequences of library automation. There is constant tension between this traditional librarian group and the 'new wave' librarians. Professionals of the majority group do not realize that computers cannot replace human intelligence. Due to the accuracy essential for data input in library services, the librarian/information scientist is indispensable.

4. Conclusion

Automation is very important to provide information to the users in time. Do we need library automation now? The answer is yes however, one has to think of the investment, its technical and social aspects. Technically it is feasible to get the required hardware, software and person having complete understanding of the requirements to develop software package. Automation will create new job opportunities higher scales and relieve the existing professional staff from their routine clerical activities to enable them to perform intellectual professional duties. The reorganization of professional staff will lead to job satisfaction.

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