

Repositioning the information profession: why and how

M S Sridhar

Head, Library & Documentation
ISRO Satellite Centre
Bangalore 560017

E-mail: sridhar@isac.gov.in
sridharmirle@yahoo.com

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Dept. of Library & Information Science
University of Mysore
Mysore

Introduction

1. Repositioning assumes that already positioned based on the market and implies that there is a need for repositioning as per changes in the market

2. Market is ever expanding and affected by several factors

Is our education and training sensitive to market?

If so, do we have systematic evaluation of our products?

3. Roles and functions of both librarians and end-users are in transition leading to confusion and conflict (eg. database searching)

Does expanding and/or repositioning cause identity crises?

Librarianship is extension of common sense & libraries are not so esoteric to common man

Wide gap between theory and practice – not meeting what is required & lopsided emphasis or obsession with not so essential requirements

Is reposition aiming to fill the gap or further widening the gap?

Introduction (contd.)

4. Repositioning is largely in relation to developments in ICT

Average working librarian has very little extra time and energy to acquire additional skills and keep pace with the fast growing ICT

The more ICT specialised a working librarian the less he is interested in other library tasks

5. Automation saved manpower

Technology enabled improved services and new innovative services

How much of which we capture depend on competencies of professionals

The Trend

Rapid technological, content and workplace changes

- **increase in digitised and free information**
- **wider sphere of operation for librarianship**
- **publishers targeting services directly to customers**
- **managing information for business/ corporate benefits**
- **varied working styles - contract, consultancy, self-employment, tele-working**
- **computer-trained librarians rather than library-trained computer experts**

The threat

The trend looks like reduction in demand on LIS

Threat to intermediaries causing disenfranchising (bypassing formal information systems)

But in reality, demand has not reduced, but the nature of demand has changed

The threat is true for other service sectors also.

**A trained information professional can find the right information 8 times faster than an average user
(American Management Systems Survey)**

Some new roles and functions

- **Ability to add value**
- **Empowerment of end-user (Internet has largely snatched this opportunity)**
- **Improving the information literacy of end users (teaching, training & learner support)**
- **Re-branding as experts, in-depth researchers, facilitators & trainers (attitude of engineers, scientists & other specialists)**
- **In-house consultancy, sharing knowledge and experience**

Consequent skills desired

- **Listening, communication, diplomacy, negotiation and interpersonal skills**
- **Leadership, mentoring, etc.**
- **Marketing**
- **Competitive intelligence**
- **Ability to play diverse contingent roles**
- **Ability for proactive roles (not waiting for user to come to us)**

Few examples

1. **Helping end user to cope up with information overload**
2. **Cross referencing external and internal information sources**
3. **Corporate-wide information strategy**
4. **Webometrics**

Do's and Don'ts

➤ **Change is the keyword; free information, internet search tools & end-user friendly interfaces greatly affected the roles, responsibilities and positions. There is need to build confidence, alleviate complexity & prepare them for change**

For Organisations: change imposed is change opposed

people are more important than technology

organic change is slower than technological change

avoid jargon scare

For Individuals: No one can make you feel inferior without your consent

People who feel good about themselves produce good results

When you change what you believe, you change what you do – nothing gets better until you change

➤ **don't attempt to make them specialists in ICT**

➤ **don't train in the areas where they are not ready for implementation**

what all ICT can do is less important than what for and how far libraries can use it

➤ **don't prepare them for quiz or interviews or for some academic work**

TV (Anthakshari and Quiz culture) separate viewers from their brains, provide canned experience like a chewing gum and kill analytical skill

Only knowledge and memory are evaluated in examinations and quiz

Do's and Don'ts (continued)

➤ also emphasise what ICT cannot do & explode the myths like

what comes out of computer must be true

computerisation can improve even defective, irrelevant and unsatisfactory manual system/ service

➤ don't overexcite & impart excessive awareness and theoretical knowledge without matching levels of skills

'skill' is acquired ability (+ some knowledge) to perform a task efficiently and effectively (generally not acquired by self-study or listening to lectures)

➤ don't create wide gap between academic/ theoretical possibilities/ fantasies/ experiments on one hand and practical implementation on the other

narrow dreams/ fantasies of digital libraries are consuming 20- 40% budget of otherwise starving libraries

➤ avoid hugely exaggerated hypes/ slogans like

greatest change since the Industrial revolution

has greater effect on productivity & management than electricity & the telephone (of early 20th century)

'E-business or out of business', 'delete or insert' and'

What? - the content

- **areas required depends on level/ depth of skill needed for functional competence and responsibilities, I.e., worker/ operator level, managerial/ decision maker level & Specialisation in ICT application to LIS**
- **computer literacy - skill needed to use computer effectively**
- **interacting with IT specialists**
- **enlisting IT requirements (specifications) of library**
- **exploring (comparing, assessing) available options & recommendations of specialists**
- **database design and development**
- **application to service management**
- **selection and evaluation of sources**
- **IR skills, post-search activities like processing, ranking, PIS**
- **e-publishing, e-commerce, e-marketing**
- **DMS and data archives**

What? - the content (continued)

- **areas clearly not required**
system administration
programming skills
hardware & software: their maintenance, trouble shooting
networking
system migration
- **use LIS equivalents already exposed/ trained and well researched like**
metadata, push technology, intelligent agents for news (CAS), display of hyperlinks & URL, subject directories, ontology, linkage relationship & site visit ranking studies
- **In the past we had lopsided emphasis on specific schemes, systems, soft wares and languages**

Most talked areas

- **Digital Libraries**
- **Multimedia**
- **Autohypertext links**
- **VRML**
- **Bibliographic web publishing software**
- **Electronic Interface & e-mail Support**
- **Probabilistic Retrieval, Searching multiple databases**
- **Nontextual Objects & Attributes**
- **AI, Intelligent Software Agents**
- **DMS software, Filtering software**

Reasons for delay in implementation of ICT in libraries

- **More interested academically than practical implementation**
- **Initial over-excitement**
- **Perpetual/ prolonged experimental mode**
- **Avoided turn key projects or total solutions**
- **Debated more on**

Format

Retrospective conversion

Data Capturing Methods

- **Prevention of healthy open competition for software**
- **No systematic & complete exploration of available options**
- **Unnecessary emphasis on uniqueness & diversity in functionalities**
- **Either fully integrated or none**
- **Not treating as time bound projects**
- **Cooperation of ICT specialists**
- **Human aspects**

How?

- **less theoretical lectures**
- **plenty of practical exercises and interactions**
- **only through workshops/ tutorials with hands-on**
- **high instructor to student ratio**

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care

Coaching is a profession of love. You can't coach people unless you like/ love them

Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated

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About the Author

Dr. M.S.Sridhar is a post graduate in mathematics and business management and a doctorate in library and information science. He is in the profession for last 35 years. Since 1978 he is heading the Library and Documentation Division of ISRO Satellite Centre, Bangalore. Earlier he has worked in the libraries of National Aeronautical Laboratory (Bangalore), Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) and University of Mysore. Dr. Sridhar has published four books ('User research: a review of information-behaviour studies in science and technology', 'Problems of collection development in special libraries', 'Information behaviour of scientists and engineers' and 'Use and user research with twenty case studies') and 74 research papers, written 19 course material for BLIS and MLIS, presented over 22 papers in conferences and seminars, and contributed 5 chapters to books. **E-mail:** sridharmirle@yahoo.com, mirlesridhar@gmail.com, sridhar@isac.gov.in ; **Phone:** 91-80-25084451; **Fax:** 91-80-25084475.

