

Chapter 11

Innovative Thinking Skills for 21st Century Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Librarians in the 21st centuries need knowledge of innovative thinking to be able to be relevant in their profession. Can they compete, survive, and thrive successfully in the midst of 21st century technological advances? All over the world, libraries are facing challenges. Already, there are reports of closures of public libraries. Many libraries are becoming underutilized while quite a number have to deal with stagnant or dwindling budgets. In order to adequately formulate workable solutions to these challenges, librarians need to consider new perspectives of offering services to their user communities. Also, libraries as living agencies are not to be stagnant but change and grow with the trends and their user communities. Innovations need to be introduced in the design and service delivery of libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is known as the “Technology Era” where technological gadgets are seemingly competing with libraries in information storage, processing and dissemination. Easy access to computers and information via World Wide Web changed the library landscape, patrons now have options of accessing information at a click on their desktops, laptops or mobile devices and it appears that libraries and all that they offer might no more be the first port of call for information seekers. Search engines such as Google continue to expand their services in information retrieval with Google Assistant, Map and other features that link data sets, making

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access to information very fast and inexpensive. The Internet became one of the fastest and inexpensive ways to obtain information about almost everything. Search engines are very popular and useful. Competitive production and marketing of laptops, smart phones and other devices soared as they became more affordable. Information became an economic commodity, a resource which could be bought and sold for profit.

Organizations that search, analyze and package information for consumption by particular clienteles in different subject areas sprang up. Furthermore, publishing of books, journal, magazine and newspaper articles which used to take time became easily available. Mobile telephony, social media sites and desktop publishing have made it easy for one to write a post on an online site, publish it immediately and within seconds, anyone from the other side of the globe subscribed to that site can see the post. The skill set of librarians had to expand to include computer appreciation, digital skills and how to search databases and online sites for information. Eze and Uzoigwe (2013), were of the opinion that “any library that does not develop services beyond materials delivery is in danger of losing its relevance to the community.” Therefore, libraries are expected to be current with man and his varying demands for information to be able to attain effective service delivery. In addition to advancement in technology, other innovative areas for libraries which include areas like entrepreneurship, research, getting to the grassroots, marketing of the library services and other related area that will further bring out the relevance of librarians in the society, sprang up. How can libraries cope with the present information provision scenario and challenges? According to Nicholson (2017), as the world continues to witness changes, libraries need to experiment, test new ideas and be innovative in offering responsive and contemporary services in order to remain relevant and even redefine their roles in serving users. It was wrongly assumed by many that the coming on stream of digital media and decreasing finances that libraries will just go under and maybe disappear. Libraries are evolving into spaces of possibilities and offering of innovative services (Martin, 2015). Innovative services appear to be the way out.

The temptation is to brand anything new as innovative. However, Anthony (2014) has pointed out that innovative is something new that solves a problem, is useful, creates value by answering directly to the needs of the customers while addressing 21st century changing lifestyles and patterns of the user communities. Tiwari (2016), opines that innovations in libraries can be birthed through Web 2.0 technologies to remove physical barriers of accessing information and bring library services close through the click of a button on mobile devices. Innovative library services do not fall from the sky. They come into being when librarians begin to think outside of the mental constraints of ‘routines’, mediocrity, conformity and limitations of offering services from only the resources on the shelves to only those who come into the

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