

Effective information management in academic libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract

The problem facing most establishments including libraries in developing countries like Nigeria is the collection and management of information. Information management aims at improving the effectiveness of organizations by managing information as a resource-providing access to relevant information in a timely and cost-effective manner. Good information management enables establishment to have meaningful, reliable and usable information when needed and providing mechanism for ensuring accountability and managing risk. There has been concern for educational institutions in Nigeria to solve the problem arising from inadequate storage, flow and use of information. Inadequate access to/or possession of relevant information has negative impact on the effectiveness of decision-making of administrators. Librarians/information managers must identify the user community and their information requirement, engage qualified staff to man the management information systems, train the informational professionals, automate the library and adopt proper information management strategies to improve the efficiency of information in tertiary education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Information, Information management, Information professionals, Information management strategies

Introduction

The application of the principles of management to the acquisition, organization, control, dissemination and use of information relevant to the operations of organization of all types allows information assets to be governed, protected and

prioritized. Information professionals are becoming more concerned about the means of ensuring effective and efficient control and in-flow of information to the people. This concern arose as a result of the negative implication of information that is not properly controlled and packaged. It is

believed that any society that does not ensure that the right information is passed to the right person at the right time using the appropriate medium runs the risk of having a social disorder (Uhegbu, 2007). He further stated that the type of information that can appeal to the senses of adults, may be offensive to the sensibility of youths, that information which may not be of use today, may be useful in future and that information resources such as books, newspapers, audio-visuals, etc must be properly organized and preserved in order not to be damaged, thus, the imperative of information management.

Information management is concerned with how the organization controls and utilizes the information assets which are all the various records and information resources available in the organization. Information assets consist of written records, data, images, and recordings and information held in forms

such as paper, electronic, and other media, as well as staff knowledge relating to their employment within the organization.

Information management emphasizes on the provision and distribution of the right information to the appropriate users who differ in age, gender, occupation, location, etc. It concerns the circle of organizational activities namely the acquisition of information from one or more sources, the custodianship and the distribution of that information to those who need it and its ultimate disposition, archiving or deletion. Wilson (2002) defines information management as the task of managing the relationship between objectives, management processes and information needed in the development of an information strategy.

The cycle of organizational involvement with information involves a variety of stakeholders, for instance, those who are responsible for assuring the

quality, accessibility and utility of acquired information, those who are responsible for its safe storage and disposal and those who need it for decision making. It is worthy of note that stakeholders might have the right to originate, change and distribute or delete information depending on the information management policies of an organization. If the information resources are not properly organized and managed, it may lead to loss or damage which will deny the society of vital information and data for development.

Information management entails the treatment of information or message in order to ensure easy handling and that the right users receive and understand the content. It also involves appropriate targeting, packaging and dissemination of information or information resources. Information management is the act of planning, budgeting, controlling and exploitation of information resources. Langemo (1982) describe information

management in the context of organization as involving a wide capability of creating, maintaining, retrieving, and immediately making available the right information in the right place at the right time in the hands of the right user at the lowest cost in the best medium for use in decision making.

From the foregoing, we can deduce that information management deals with proper and timely creation, organization, coordination and dissemination of information to the benefit of the user.

Aims and benefits of information management

Information management aims at improving the effectiveness of an organization by managing information as a resource-providing access to relevant information in a timely and cost-effective manner. Good information management enables an establishment to have meaningful, reliable and usable information when needed and providing mechanism for

ensuring accountability and managing risk.

The efficacy of information management for users is to bridge a gap or to act as an interface between available information and information resources and the user.

An establishment such as the library benefits immensely when it implements effective information management.

According to Information Management Records Society, (n.d.), the benefits of an effective information management include:

- direct cash savings from reduced storage costs (for both paper and electronic),
- staff time efficiency gains through improved working practices and a reduction of the time being taken to find required information,
- improved knowledge of information assets (including the capture of staff knowledge relating to their employment within the organization)
- improved control of information assets,
- improved ability to make use of these assets,
- improved ability to utilize opportunities offered by new technologies
- reduced exposure of prosecution from non-compliance with information legislation and related risk to organizational reputation,

- reduced exposure to risk from important information (be this from fire, flooding, etc, malicious damage or simply through records misled), and
- reduced exposure to risk in the area of staff health and safety

State of information management in Nigeria

Information management provides excellent means whereby administrators and customers have access to information for decision making in an establishment. Poor management of information makes administrators handicapped, especially in Nigeria which has contributed to the current distressed syndrome that university in Nigeria face. There has been a lot of concern for Nigeria and especially educational organization in the country, to solve problems arising from inadequate storage, flow and use of information. The inadequate access to, or possession of, relevant information has negative impact on the effectiveness of administrators' decision-making process (Ocheni, 2015).

Educational institutions experience administrative problems which are information related such as inability to find information needed to take a decision or respond to inquiry, improperly registered students in school registers and records, inaccurate demographic figures resulting in either lack of places/spaces for students or wastage of spaces/places available (Ocheni, 2015).

The problem facing most organizations, including libraries in Nigeria is the collection and storage of information. Ocheni (2015) studied the impact evaluation of the information management on the decision-making effectiveness of administrators in Nigerian universities and found out that information acquisition and information management capacities whether taking separately or jointly make significant contributions to both effective and efficient administration in Nigerian Universities. Similarly, Momoh and

Abdulsalam (2014) assessed the information management efficiency in universities in northern Nigeria and found out that information resources are not efficiently managed, because universities were found deficient in terms of generating timely information, poor utilization of MIS capacity and high cost of generating piece of information. These scholars recommended modernization of information systems in these universities with a view to improving information acquisition and information management capacities of the administrators to engage qualified staff to man the MIS Units in the universities, full automation of MIS Units and adoption of multiple information management strategies to improve information management efficiency in the universities. Atulomah (2011) observed that universities in Nigeria generate large quantity and quality records in their day-to-day activities, but a lot of files are

duplicated in numbers within and across units without control over their creation, causing data redundancy and wasteful spending. Poppola and Oluwole (2007) stated that university administrators in Nigeria lament about the misplacement or loss of vital records and the slow speed at which needed records are retrieved from storage. This also happens in academic libraries in Nigeria.

Strategies for improving information management

An efficient information management system creates, processes and disseminates information that is critical to the performance of an establishment and ensures that information is available to the administrators and other users in the form they need it and at the appropriate time. Information is a valuable corporate asset and getting the right information to the persons at the right time is a key management objective. To achieve this

objective requires a good strategic plan, a solid management framework, the adoption of industry best practices, process and methodology and on-going management oversight (Bowman, n.d)

Strategic planning

Strategy is a plan of action or policy in business aimed at achieving a major goal. Establishing an information management society, as Bowman puts it, follows some process, namely: we need to understand:

- (1) What is creating the need for change, sometimes called business drivers, e.g. if the need is to improve productivity, then perhaps the emphasis will be more on management oriented with less emphasis on technology;
- (2) The current situation in terms of technology and architecture, process

and methodology and organizational readiness for change; and

- (3) What resources are available, and time line required, to change the current situation to achieve the desired objectives.

There is need to put in place information management strategy at all levels from the purely directive to any position of responsibility that in any way involves the daily handling of dynamic information.

Competencies to manage information well: The Information Management Body of Knowledge (IMBOK) stipulated that some complex, multi-layered management competencies are required to derive real benefits from an investment in information. These competencies comprise of six (6) “knowledge” areas and four (4) “process” areas:

- (a) **Information management knowledge areas:**

- **Information technology:** The pace of change of technology and the pressure to constantly acquire the newest technological product can undermine the stability of the infrastructure that supports systems, and thereby optimizes business process and delivers benefits. We have to manage the “supply side” and recognize that technology is increasingly becoming a commodity
- **Information system:** It has become possible over the years to acquire most of the software systems that are needed in an establishment from the software industry. However, there is still the competitive advantage from the implementation of new systems ideas that deliver to the strategic intentions of organization (Ward, 2004).
- **Business processes and business information:** Information systems

are applied to business in order to improve them, and they bring data to the business that becomes useful as business information. Business process management is still seen as a relatively new idea because it is not universally adopted, and it has been difficult in many cases, business information management is even more challenging.

- **Business benefit:** One may ask: what are the benefits that we are seeking? It is necessary to ensure the active management and assessment of benefit delivery and not just what can be achieved. It is equally important to show interest in business performance management and to relate it to the benefits of information technology investment and the introduction of new information system.

- **Business strategy:** Strategy in most organization has to be in form of opportunities of information technology and information systems available, whether to address poor performance or to improve differentiation and competitiveness. As Ward (2014) puts it, strategic analysis tools such as the value chain and critical success factor analysis are directly dependent on proper attention to the information that is (could be) managed.

The information management processes

It is argued that even with the full capability and competence with the six knowledge areas, proper information management may not be achieved. This is because of the migration of ideas and information management value from one area of competency to another.

Bytheway (2015) summarizes thus:

- **Projects:** Information technology is without value until it is engineered into information systems that meet the needs of the business by means of good project management;
- **Business change:** The best information systems succeed in delivering benefits through the achievement of change within the business systems. Unfortunately, people do not appreciate change that makes new demands upon their skills in a way that new information systems often do.
- **Business operations:** When new systems are put in place, with business processes and business information improved and with staff ready and able to work with new processes, then the business can get to work, even when new systems extend beyond the boundaries of a single business.

- **Performance management:** It is a known fact that financial success must be balanced with internal efficiency, customer satisfaction, and organizational learning and development, rather than investment being solely on financial result.

Identifying the information community

- (a) It is important to identify the information user community because it is part of the process of diagnosing/analyzing their information needs without which the library and information services provided cannot be customized. All aspects of information management must be understood in consideration of the information needs of the clients or customers or users of the information system. It is necessary to understand the kinds of information/query a clientele poses and the report he needs from the

system and where possible, ascertain how he intends to use the report. Equipped with this information, the staff will try to ensure that the system delivers the information needed at the appropriate time.

- (b) It is also necessary that those who analyze information for entire sources or provide organization of competitive intelligence should know the information requirements of customers to enhance the cost effectiveness of the work in satisfying the needs.

Library and information services to be provided must be founded upon a diagnosis of the needs of the target community and evaluation of the existing library and information services, for individuals and for a group of information users, the corresponding terms are analysis,

recommendation, implementation and evaluation (Agada, 1999).

Diagnosis/analysis involves identifying different variations which include:

- Knowledge of actual and potential information users;
- Users' demographic characteristics, e.g. age, gender, marital status, religion.
- Cultural, economic and political activities
- Business
- Education
- Settlement patterns (Gwang, 2011)

When the information requirements of the user(s) have been diagnosed/analyzed, the information sources have to be customized.

This involves:

- Providing the resources that will meet the needs diagnosed in the preferred packages, e.g. in book form, electronic form, etc.

- Assessing the services provided in order to enable the information provider and funding agency to ascertain the extent to which the services rendered meet the needs of the information user(s).

Role of libraries in information management

Information management places emphasis on the efficient dissemination of information to the appropriate user at the right time. To achieve good information management in libraries with special reference to academic libraries, qualified librarians and other information professionals must perform their responsibilities not only of collecting, preserving and encouraging national information and library resources, but also to ensure that global information resources are placed quickly, appropriately and efficiently in front of segments of the society (Harrison, cited in Uhegbu, 2007).

Information professionals must possess professional knowledge and be able to apply it effectively in the planning and implementation of library and information services and information management. The professional knowledge required of information professionals includes: Information psychology, sociology of information, information organization and management, information engineering (Greer, Grover & Fowler, 2007 cited in Gwana, 2011). This implies that the librarian should know how individuals seek, acquire, process, utilize and store information, how the society and groups within the society, create, produce, organize, disseminate, diffuse, preserve and discard information, how to create and manage an establishment designed to support and enhance the information process; and how to design databases of library collections, and other information

systems customized to meet the needs of every information seeker..

Conclusion and recommendations

Administrators and customers need continuous flow of information in order to make appropriate decision. Decision making efficiency of users therefore greatly depends on the quality of information they are able to get. Good information management is complex. The volume of information generated is challenging, attempting to manage all the information of an institution with the same tools and processes is not usually an effective approach. Librarians/information managers should collaborate with their colleagues in other information centres and ICT staff to define how information should be created, managed and used and reused in the organization. Information management skills play an important role in managing library and information sources effectively

and ensuring that the services continue to meet the present and anticipated needs of the patron all the time.

Efficient information management helps library and information centres to cope with challenges because it guarantees the capacity to produce information that is timely, accurate, and reliable. It is therefore the bedrock of an institutional performance. Information reduces uncertainties and facilitates decision making by both the administrator and customers and needs to be improved by employing various strategies such as:

- (1) **Training and education of library and information science professionals:** The availability of requisite staff is necessary to provide and manage available library and information services to meet the information requirements of the academic community. This makes it imperative for the library

schools in Nigeria universities to train information professionals who would tackle the challenges of effective information provision and management in Nigeria in this information age. They also have to produce sufficient quantities of information professional that would be proactive and rise to the current challenges of providing information services in Nigeria. Qualified library and information professionals should be recruited and trained on continuous basis in order to update and improve their information management and computing skills.

(2) Planning of information management strategy: Planning involves the determination of goals and strategies for their attainment. The goals of providing and managing library and information services in academic libraries in

Nigeria must consider the nature of the largest clients – the students, the acquisition, organization and dissemination of appropriate information to the different user groups, different services, different customers, library and information professionals and other staff required to execute the service provision as well as types of sources and anticipated funding.

(3) It is important for the library to identify the user community to ascertain their actual and potential users and their information needs, occupation, education and other features. This will involve diagnosis and customization which will help to enhance the effectiveness of the library in providing and managing information services to the community. This will also eliminate waste associated with library

provision since irrelevant collections will be discarded. Librarians must make the identification of information requirements a continuous activity within the library seeking feedback on the information provided, maintaining the changing priority of the library and always seeking to understand how the client function in the library.

- (4) A good information management uses information technology (IT) to automate information management processes. Automation of academic library activities will improve economies of scale, make proper utilization of MIS capacity and reduce overall cost of academic activities and other service deliveries. Technological changes have a great impact on the existence and sustainability of the libraries

and provide opportunities and venues to manage the library and information services sustainably.

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