

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT : ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract :**

The issue that has been plaguing library managers is one of lack of credibility --- of not being able to demonstrate their relevance to their organisations, of not being able to convince their organisations that their libraries are integral to the achievement of organisational goals. Playing a peripheral role has relegated librarians to being second-class citizens in their own organisations. Against such odds, how do librarians cope with the changes and challenges, brought by the 21<sup>st</sup> century – changes and challenges in the form of ICT, globalisation, lifelong education, knowledge management, etc.

The authors are of the opinion that in order to cope with the changes and challenges posed by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the onus is on library managers to devise strategies that would provide libraries with the competitive edge in the information delivery business despite the competition posed by computer companies, knowledge management companies and other professionals who have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by ICT and the world-wide demand for knowledge workers. Library managers must be held accountable for their libraries' performance just as they must be held accountable for the non-performance or non-delivery of their libraries.

In order to be accountable library managers would have to strategise by having in place well-designed strategic plans, efficient organisation, capable leadership and effective control measures. Accountability therefore should be the cornerstone of library management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Abstrak :**

Isu yang melanda pengurus perpustakaan ialah kurangnya kredibiliti --- tidak dapat menunjukkan betapa relevan peranan mereka di dalam organisasi dan tidak mampu meyakinkan organisasi mereka bahawa perpustakaan memainkan peranan yang amat penting dalam mencapai matlamat organisasi. Peranan kecil yang dimainkan oleh pustakawan telah merendahkan kedudukan mereka di dalam organisasi sendiri. Dengan arus yang melanda, bagaimanakah pustakawan boleh menangani perubahan dan cabaran abad 21 – perubahan dan cabaran dalam bentuk ICT, globalisasi, pembelajaran sepanjang hayat, pengurusan ilmu dan sebagainya.

Pengarang berpendapat untuk menghadapi perubahan dan cabaran yang didapati dalam abad 21 adalah menjadi kewajipan pengurus perpustakaan untuk mengatur strategi di mana mereka patut menyediakan perpustakaan yang berdaya saing dalam penyampaian maklumat walaupun terdapat persaingan daripada syarikat komputer, syarikat pengurusan ilmu dan badan profesional lain yang telah merebut peluang dan mengambil kesempatan yang disediakan oleh ICT dan keperluan dunia untuk pekerja berilmu. Pengurus perpustakaan mesti bertanggungjawab terhadap prestasi dan ketidakcemerlangan perpustakaan masing-masing.

Bagi memenuhi tanggungjawab tersebut, pengurus perpustakaan sepatutnya merangka dan merancang pelan strategik, organisasi cekap, pemimpin berwibawa dan kawalan efektif. Dengan itu, kebertanggungjawapan sepatutnya menjadi asas pengurusan perpustakaan dalam abad 21.

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<sup>1</sup> Zaiton Osman & Sharipah Hanon Bidin. (March, 2004). *Accountability in Library Management : Issues and Strategies for the 21st Century*. Paper presented at the International Seminar on Challenges for Libraries in the 21st century, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.

## 1.0 STATING THE ISSUE

If libraries are judged on their own merit, in isolation from their parent organisations and using only collections and services as benchmarks, the majority of libraries in the ASEAN countries can be said to be excellent – well-funded, well-stocked and adequately staffed – even when compared with many of those in the more developed countries. However, when the same libraries are judged on the basis of their **relevance** to their parent organisations, their contribution is often seen as peripheral rather than integral to organisational goals. Issues of non-involvement, lack of recognition of contribution or underestimation of their ability to play an integral role in the core business of their parent organisations, have been highlighted again and again in the literature, at seminars and conferences, locally and internationally. Even with the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the era of the digital library, the same issues are still being discussed. For example, in the case of university libraries, issues such as “How involved are libraries in the actual teaching-learning process?”, “Is acquiring books the only role they play?”, “Is there a correlation between academic achievement and use of library information resources?”, “Is there evidence that using information resources help undergraduates obtain good marks in their assignments or contribute towards good degrees?”, are still being debated. In short, how does one apply the principle of “The proof of the pudding lies in the eating” to university libraries? The same could be asked of other types of libraries--- public libraries, special libraries and school libraries.

The real problem as can be gleaned from above is one of lack of credibility --- of librarians who have not been able to demonstrate their ability to “perform” and “deliver” in a manner that will convince their organisations that their libraries are indispensable and integral to the achievement of organisational goals.

The onus is therefore on librarians, particularly library managers, to prove that they have an important role to play in the organisation and this can be done by

injecting the element of **accountability** in their library management. Unless library managers are made to be accountable to the organisation by ensuring that libraries provide input in the achievement of organisational goals, libraries will always be peripheral – sidelined and overlooked.

At whatever level therefore, operational, middle-management or top-management --- accountability should be the cornerstone of their library management. It is important that library managers understand this because there are already indicators that libraries are losing their competitive edge in the information delivery ‘business’ - indicators such as :

- i. Librarians disassociating themselves from the traditional concept of librarianship, giving rise to the changes in nomenclature used such as from “librarians” to “information professionals/specialists”; “librarianship” to “information science”, “libraries” to “knowledge management centres”, “information dissemination” to “information delivery”, etc. as if prior to the advent of ICT, libraries have not been involved in information dissemination.
- ii. Librarians not awarded the same recognition vis-à-vis other professions in similar schemes of service and salary scales despite the fact that librarians possess both academic and professional qualifications at entry point.
- iii. The proliferation of members of other professions (engineers, computer scientists, academics, economists; etc.) taking the lead role in information provision and dissemination.
- iv. The proliferation of “knowledge management” companies that develop access and delivery systems using complex innovative technology with the ability to organise, manage and disseminate structured and unstructured information.

Against these odds, how do libraries cope with the changes and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## 2.0 CHANGES AND CHALLENGES OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

To fight the war, one has to recognise the enemy – so it is with libraries. Unless library managers can fully understand the demands and challenges posed by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it would be difficult for them to ascertain whether or not they are capable of coping with these demands and challenges. Once they understand what is required of them, they can then assess their capability by analysing their strengths and weaknesses as well as to interpret the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as either “opportunities” or “threats”. Undertaking a SWOT analysis of libraries is important because it provides libraries with a ‘clinical’ approach to library development, minimising trial and error in the process.

The SWOT analysis below is not based on any specific research data of any specific library but based on general findings from libraries in Malaysia. It is used as an example to illustrate the need for librarians to be introspective and understand their capabilities as well as to be aware of developments taking place in their surrounding internal and external environments (see Fig.1).

### 2.1 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

#### 2.1.1 STRENGTH

It is the authors’ opinion that any assessment of libraries’ strengths and weaknesses must be based on user feedbacks in the form of complaints, user studies or benchmarking. In the absence of

such feedback, the authors feel that only three areas can be the strength of libraries:

1. Collections
2. Reputation
3. User Education

#### (1) Collections

Collections are the library’s greatest strength because without collections, there can be no library. The strength of the collections however depends on its size and uniqueness. In the 1950’s & 1960’s, the size of the collection is the measure of the library’s worth. As such, weeding exercises were seldom undertaken for fear that large libraries (by virtue of their collections) will lose their competitive edge. Today, the issue of size is not the main criteria to assess the library’s stature because with the advent of digital libraries, the world’s collections are easily accessible literally at one’s fingertips. The uniqueness of collections however has become a more important criteria for assessing the library’s strength because of their heritage value and their potential as an asset for national development. In the case of Malaysia, the various Malaysiana collections at the National Library of Malaysia, at the seventeen public university libraries (in the form of theses and research collections), at government research agencies in the form of research collections, at the State Public Libraries in the form of the state collections, are examples of unique collections that are found in the country.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	<b>STRENGTH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Collection</li> <li>◆ Reputation</li> <li>◆ User education</li> </ul>	<b>WEAKNESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Collection</li> <li>◆ Staff</li> <li>◆ Funds</li> <li>◆ Usage</li> <li>◆ Peripheral role</li> <li>◆ Non-integrated strategic plan</li> </ul>
	<b>EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Innovative Technology</li> <li>◆ Globalisation</li> <li>◆ Lifelong learning</li> <li>◆ Knowledge management</li> <li>◆ National policies &amp; objectives</li> </ul>	<b>THREAT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Proliferation of information providers</li> <li>◆ Globalisation</li> <li>◆ National policies &amp; objectives</li> </ul>

Fig. 1 : SWOT Analysis

Collectively, the collections found in all types of libraries in any country can be deemed to be the country's national asset. The fact that they are professionally organised for easy retrieval makes library collections indispensable for national development.

However, while the monetary value of these collections may be easy to quantify by totalling the annual budgets of each library, their academic and cultural value are priceless. Notwithstanding the fact that collections are the libraries' strength, the issue in question is: Are the collections **used** in support of the library's objectives?

(2) Reputation

Libraries exist today because the traditional concept of the libraries as being at the heart of learning still prevail. In most countries, education is regarded as a priority area in national development. They believe that a literate population is the country's foremost asset and a catalyst critical for national advancement. This belief has prevailed till today but it is a perception that has not been substantiated by library usage. It is obvious that while libraries are still regarded as an important tool for education and a mechanism for development of manpower for the country, reputation alone is not sufficient. The perception that libraries are important must be replaced by a more realistic view of the library's worth.

3) User Education

Teaching users how to retrieve materials via the library systems, whether manual or

electronic has long been undertaken by libraries. User education programmes have become more urgent in recent years when library systems became ICT-driven. The underlying premise of all user education programmes is that, however excellent the library's collections and systems are, if not used, they serve no purpose (see Fig. 2), especially in the case of digital libraries which require users to first master the ICT skills before being able to apply information retrieval skills. The digital library comprises three elements :

- (1) Technical Infrastructure
- (2) Knowledge Database
- (3) User Education

User education programmes are now offered by most libraries in Malaysia, both formally or informally. It is the best way to promote libraries and library use because not only do these programmes enable librarians to come into direct contact with the clients, demonstrate to clients the proficiency of librarians both in the academic aspect of library work (information retrieval) as well as the technical aspect (ICT), but it also provides libraries with the opportunity to be integrated into the teaching and learning process in the case of university libraries or reaching out to the greater majority of society in the case of public libraries.

2.1.2 WEAKNESS

Unfortunately, there are more weaknesses than strengths in our analysis of the internal environment. They are:

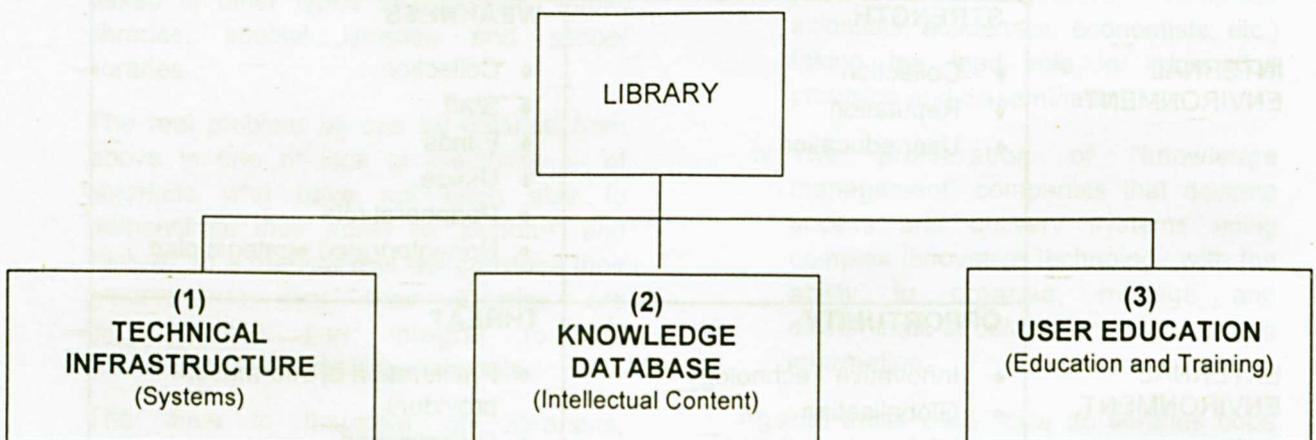


Fig 2 : Components of digital library

### (1) Collections

Generally, notwithstanding the size of their collection, libraries have in their collection, materials that contain data which is more archival than current. They are excellent for scholars and researchers from the academia but users of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are weaned on ICT and expect information at the press of a button.

Library collections are passive collections, sitting on library shelves for years, unused. Consisting mainly of printed secondary and tertiary sources, they stand the risk of being replaced by e-books, e-journals and internet. It has become very common for libraries to have e-books, e-journals and internet for content provided by commercial vendors at a very high cost. It would not be a surprise however that later in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, access to Internet and electronic databases will themselves become passé and by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we probably would have materials which are more readily available in palmtops and accessible while showering in the bathroom or driving in cars. Will libraries have the funds to update and upgrade their collections will be the main issue facing libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unless libraries have collections that are relevant and can meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, library collections comprising of secondary and tertiary data, will be rendered obsolete.

The main weakness of library collections however lies in the fact that they are not used to the optimum, giving rise to management debates on whether or not it is cost-beneficial to maintain libraries when library collections are not used to the maximum. More damaging would be libraries being relegated to functioning as archives while internet becomes the more popular alternative.

### (2) Staff

In order for libraries to be dynamic, library staff must have the right qualifications and competencies for the job in hand, as well as the right attitude towards service. In the current situation, the majority of library staff can be said to be generally passive and not proactive. This is where library education plays a part. Librarians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be multi-skilled, have

sound subject knowledge and good leadership.

Library schools would have to be more responsive to these needs and take into account that librarians of the future will not be sitting at a desk in a library but will work in a virtual environment with PC(s) as colleagues. Multi-skilled, the librarian will need to communicate well, be customer-friendly, knowledgeable in several subject areas, innovative in the use of ICT, academic and independent.

### (3) Funds

Lack of funds is a perpetual problem in all libraries. Notwithstanding the fact that there are libraries that are well-endowed (in Malaysia, the National Library and university libraries), funds are never adequate to fulfill all objectives. This has resulted in libraries undertaking resource-sharing of collections and services to reduce expenditure and optimise usage. In some countries, libraries have embraced the concept of 'corporatisation' through which libraries have imposed membership fees and service charges. Some, too, have increased efforts to attract sponsors and donors to obtain funds. There will come a time when libraries will have to be self-funding.

### (4) Usage

The most important issue in library usage is the need to provide evidence of usage. Much of the professional literature has alluded to the fact that despite their importance, libraries are not used to the optimum. Also, with the establishment of digital libraries, which makes remote access easy, library visits will soon be more for pleasure (for the peace, quiet and air-conditioning comfort) than for getting information. In a recent survey<sup>2</sup> of undergraduates (2003) at the University of Malaya Library, only a small percentage visit the library every day (17.2%), with the majority (54 %) visiting a few times a week. The survey also shows that the majority of students do not use the electronic databases (eg. e-books: undergraduates 6.4%, postgraduates 16.41%) preferring the printed books instead (undergraduates 84.6%, postgraduates 87.5%). There is a

need to market library services to increase usage, whether on-site or remote. At the OUM<sup>3</sup> Library, statistics obtained from log-ins of e-books and e-journals show that:

- i. remote access is greater than on-site access and
- ii. usage of e-books is higher than e-journals

(5) Peripheral role of libraries

Is the role of library passive or proactive?

There is no real evidence to show that libraries are integrated into the core business of their institutions, especially academic libraries and special libraries. In the case of university libraries for example, is there evidence of integration?

In the case of university libraries, there is no evidence to show that there is a correlation between usage of library resources and academic achievement.

However, in a survey undertaken at the University of Malaya, to determine whether the user education programme (Information Skills Course GXEX1401) is useful for their learning, the majority of students surveyed replied in the affirmative.<sup>4</sup>

**Teaching**

Is there resource-based teaching?  
Are library resources integrated into teaching activities?

**Learning**

Is there resource-based learning?  
Are library resources integrated into learning activities?

**Research**

Is there evidence that the more specialised the research, the less need there is for library resources?

(6) Non-integrated strategic plans

The 'isolationist' approach to strategic planning where the libraries have their own short-term and long-term plans (separate from the strategic plan of the organization) is often the cause why libraries remain on the periphery of organisational activities. It also reflects the status of libraries within the organisation.

**2.2 EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

In order to be prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, libraries would have to be aware of developments taking place in the world outside the library walls and interpret these into either opportunities or threats. Those that can be considered as opportunities must be taken advantage of, while steps should be taken to counter the threats. These opportunities and threats found beyond library walls must however be seen in the right perspective, against the background of the library's capabilities or its "strengths" and "weaknesses".

**2.2.1 OPPORTUNITY**

What can be interpreted as 'opportunities' can be subjective, depending on how the librarians perceive them to be. For the purpose of this paper, the authors have identified five (5) opportunities:

- (1) Innovative Technology
- (2) Globalisation
- (3) Lifelong Learning
- (4) Knowledge Management
- (5) National Policies & Objectives

(1) Innovative Technology

The phrase "innovative technology" is deliberately used here to denote the innovative aspects of technology because ever since the wheel there has been no development so global that it has not

<sup>2</sup> Zaiton Osman, Kiran Kaur & Zanaria Saupi Udin. (2003). A survey of student satisfaction at the University of Malaya Library, *Kekal Abadi*, 22(1), p. 1-17.

<sup>3</sup> Sharipah Hanon Bidin's monthly statistical reports for the online use of the OUM Digital Collections for the year 2003.

<sup>4</sup> The information was obtained from Chan Sai Noi, Head of the Research & Academic Services Division, University of Malaya Library, in March 2004. This division is responsible for the management and implementation of the compulsory one-unit Information Skills Course GXEX 1401 conducted for all 6,000 first year undergraduate students every year since 1997/1998 session.

touched every aspect of life and every level of society – e.g. e-learning, e-government, e-business. From the Parliament to shopping, technology has become part of life, reaching the moon has become a reality – everything else seems possible.

The advantages provided by innovative technology can be summarised as:

- a. More efficient work processes, with less mistakes and greater output
- b. Provides global access to information
- c. Encourages independent learning

However, the issue that confronts libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is: To what level should librarians be trained in technology?

In the case of libraries, innovative technology has been identified to facilitate:

- a. Day-to-day tasks such as acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, information service etc.
- b. Interaction with users via the use of portals.

The development of information gateways or portals offers great opportunities for library and information professionals to give their services to users a real push. Information portal can offer users one-stop work stations where they can search across a multitude of resources and retrieve electronic and book resources within one station. Information portals can provide integration of sources for searching and for location and delivery of materials – in whatever format they exist. Portal brings the opportunity to develop e-library services – to meet the growing expectations of the student population.

- c. Enables user education programmes to be conducted in large groups with hands-on sessions. Undertaking user education programmes provides libraries with the opportunity to optimise usage because users are taught lifelong learning skills such as

information retrieval skills and ICT skills.

“Implementing a portal can change the environment in which users discover information and get better access to the wealth of contents”. (Murray, 2003)<sup>5</sup>

## (2) Globalisation

The term “globalisation” is associated mainly with business – giving rise to concepts such as ‘global economy’, ‘global markets’, ‘global competition’ or ‘hyper competition’, etc. As described by Hitt, “a global economy is one in which goods, services, people, skills and ideas move freely across geographic borders. Relatively unfettered by artificial constraints, such as tariffs, the global economy significantly expands and complicates a firm’s competitive environment”.<sup>6</sup>

Is globalisation relevant for libraries? The authors are of the opinion that since ‘information delivery’ is a business and globalisation is basically a business concept, than globalisation will have an impact on libraries.

Innovative technology has made it possible for business to be conducted in a global environment but how does globalisation affect librarians?

### i) Self efficiency vs. Outsourcing

Concept of self-sufficiency has given way to global outsourcing by cutting out the role of the middle man, including the librarian. This has implications for the library in matters relating to human resource and organisational structure.

Examples:

- a. Acquisitions: librarians do not need to go through local agents. There are many more companies on Internet who can acquire anything for libraries, ranging from equipment to books.

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<sup>5</sup> Murray, R. (2003). Information portals: casting a new light on learning for universities, *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 20(4), p146-151.

<sup>6</sup> Hitt, M. A. et. Al (2003). *Strategic management: competitiveness and globalization*. (5th ed). Mason, Ohio :Thompson South Western.

- b. Cataloging: OCLC is a case in point although it does not contain records for non-English items.
- c. Information Services: It is a matter of time before information services are conducted on a global basis replacing libraries and librarians except for the provision of local information which however may be taken over by local companies with enough entrepreneurial acumen to take over the information market.

ii) Demand for wide-ranging information

Imagine providing information services for the whole world, when most libraries cannot even satisfy the information needs of their own clientele. Theoretically, however, this is what globalisation could generate. Do librarians have the potential for it? In reality, no. Working on the premise that no one person can provide all information on everything, it will be a massive task but if libraries do not do it, other more enterprising professionals would. It is worth a thought.

For example, libraries in Malaysia need not confine themselves to providing information merely about Malaysia but through databases subscribed and information networks established via the universities and ministries, librarians can play a role. This will have implications for the library in terms of collections, human resource (must be proficient in English and other languages, have working knowledge of subject areas, etc.) and job expertise and skills (indexing, desktop publishing, web-design, etc.).

The question that begs to be asked at this juncture is: Do we still need libraries and librarians in the face of globalisation?

(3) Lifelong Learning <sup>7</sup>

The move towards a more democratic form of education in the 1960's and 1970's resulted in a shift in the concept of education from one that was

authoritarian and elitist to one that advocated 'equal opportunity in education'. 'Equal opportunity in education' was seen as the democratic right of all individuals ---- irrespective of race, status, age or ability but at the same time 'equal opportunity' does not mean the same treatment for everyone.

For equal opportunity to be meaningful, however, education must be extended on a continuous lifelong basis with opportunities for success provided at every stage of the continuum. Any attempt at early elimination would render the democratisation process ineffective and make a mockery of the principle of 'equal opportunity'.

Conceptualising education as a lifelong process was an effort at translating democratic principles into educational practice. Democratising education on the principles of equal opportunity meant a reappraisal of traditional aims and methods. Unlike the traditional concept, the modern concept of education believes that education should produce a learning society, not a learning minority. In simple language, higher education should be catering to the masses.

The change in emphasis in educational aims and objectives has made it necessary for teaching and learning methods to be reviewed, giving rise to a productive learning environment with the focus on learning and the learner rather than teaching and the teachers, with greater emphasis given to differentiation in needs, abilities and personalities in the development of independent and active learning.

The democratisation of higher education has given the concept 'equal opportunity' a new meaning, encompassing a wider scope of educational aims and objectives. It has given modern education certain characteristics, as summarized below:

- (a) Greater and more flexible access to higher education

Greater access does not mean mainly increasing the number of people enrolled in mainstream university

<sup>7</sup> Zaiton Osman & Sharipah Hanon Bidin. (June, 2003). *Providing equal opportunity in learning: the role of the OUM Digital Library in distance learning*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Change and Challenges of Public Library Services to Bridge the Digital Divide, Penang.

programmes but also to provide opportunities for those previously "excluded" for various reasons. Propagating lifelong education would ensure that any one who wishes to acquire qualifications at any stage of his life would be able to do so because there are alternative means by which the opportunity is provided.

(b) Learner-centred approach to learning

The importance given to the learner in the modern approach to education ensures that learner needs are given priority. In lifelong learning, the focus is on teaching the learner how to learn, not what to learn. In modern terms, it would mean "empowering" the learner such that he can be independent and resourceful throughout his lifetime of learning experiences. This also means that the learner is given the opportunity to learn at his own pace and according to his own style. He can undertake his learning anywhere, anytime, anyhow. Learning therefore becomes flexible, at a pace dictated by the learner and in accordance with negotiated objectives.

(c) Variety of teaching strategies

With the learner's interest at the heart of the teaching-learning process, the method and strategy of instruction need to adapt. Instruction has now to be skills-based, not subject-based, consistent with the need to prepare learners for lifelong learning, so as to teach them how to learn rather than what to learn. Instruction is individualised to cater to individual differences of the learners making it necessary for small-group teaching rather than the whole-class approach which assumes that learners learn at the same pace. A greater variety of teaching strategies have been devised in recent years to cope with the learner-centric pedagogy such as interdisciplinary team-teaching, project work, problem-based teaching and with greater ICT capability, web-based teaching, e-teaching, etc.

What implications does lifelong learning have for libraries? Bearing in mind that lifelong 'students' are now not confined to the 5-14 age cohort but more likely 5-65 years age cohort as

the learning population moves from primary schools to universities, libraries will have to reassess its collections, services and delivery systems to accommodate this learning continuum. There will be traditional as well as non-traditional universities. In the case of the non-traditional universities offering open and distance learning programmes, libraries will need to focus more on digital collections; services to be more flexible providing for remote access and delivery systems need to be efficient.

The issue is: When libraries move from providing library-centred to user-centred services, the library can no longer be a building but a system.

(4) Knowledge Management

The concept of Knowledge Management (KM) is basically one that advocates sharing of knowledge within a company or agency such that with the sharing of knowledge it will help the company or agency to combat competition and provide it with the competitive edge. It is a process that involves:

- i) Knowledge creation – recording information from top management downwards and vice versa. It includes documenting unwritten knowledge or in other words, documenting experiences of people relevant to the company operations.

This is not an easy task because the information may not be current and people are not forthcoming, preferring to be secretive.

- ii) Knowledge organisation - documenting and using retrieval systems to store and make accessible the necessary information.

What to document, how detailed and for whom are issues related to KM. In certain agencies, there will be a committee or jury of specialists to decide which information to document and store.

- iii) Knowledge dissemination/sharing

KM was introduced to reduce barriers in information/knowledge sharing in companies to facilitate decision-making and prevent unnecessary duplication of effort. Knowing what others are doing

in other departments will help departmental heads to make more informed decisions. Knowledge sharing is more effective if it involves all levels of staff – from top management downwards and vice versa. The logic of sharing strategic and operational knowledge is to make processes more efficient and intra-departmental communication more effective. As for its role in ensuring the company's monetary gains, it has been reported in the professional literature to be 'successful'. KM has also been described as "organisational learning" because in sharing the information or knowledge the whole organisation goes through a learning process. The success of KM is difficult to quantify because it is difficult to measure the success of knowledge-sharing or to ascertain to what extent organisational learning takes place.

But what does KM mean to libraries?

- i) The library can become the Centre for Knowledge Management in the institution by being involved in documenting, organising & disseminating the information or knowledge gathered from within the organisation. This is particularly viable for all libraries eg. in the case of university libraries, information about teaching, learning and research activities can not only be documented via published reports but also by interviewing the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans, lecturers, students, Ministry of Education officials, etc. In special libraries at government agencies or private companies, there may be problems with access to confidential information like pricing of commodities, marketing policies, marketing research results, etc. In Malaysia, there are a few successful agencies undertaking KM. From their experience, it can be said that the success of KM depends on the support of the management of the organisation while the main problem is that colleagues are not cooperative and not forthcoming with information, especially tacit information.
- ii) The library can create primary "live" information, instead of dealing with "passive information" which is often

secondhand, outdated, irrelevant and insignificant.

- iii) Staff must be trained or retrained in certain areas in order to function effectively such as the ability to interview effectively, the ability to relate to people without either intimidating them or being intimidated by them, knowledgeable in relevant subject areas, proficient at handling ICT information delivery systems, etc.
- iv) Allows library to be creative because there is neither universal approach to KM, nor one or best way of implementing it.
- v) Recognition that information is an important commodity but like any other product needs good marketing strategies. If the library wants to function as an information centre it has to convince its own market and society at large of the importance of its role as information provider.

#### (5) National Policies and Objectives

All countries have long-term strategic plans. In Malaysia, it is a 25-year plan (the Vision 2020) which forms the basis for national development till 2020. Briefly, the aim of Vision 2020 is to make Malaysia an industrialised nation by the year 2020. In order to achieve this aim, nine thrust areas were identified to drive the Vision 2020. One of the thrust areas is to make the Malaysian society a knowledge-based society.

In the case of Malaysia, not only is the public sector committed to achieving the strategic objectives of Vision 2020 but the private sector as well. Knowing where the nation is heading towards and the role played by each sector of society is important to the library and although the role of libraries is more indirect than direct, (serving the Ministry of Education and the university, etc.) libraries do have in their custody the nation's intellectual wealth which should be optimized in the development of the knowledge society. Considering the wealth of information resources located at libraries throughout Malaysia, if they had been read and used, Malaysia does not need to wait till the year 2020 to have an information-rich society.

## 2.2.2 THREAT

### (1) Proliferation of Information Providers

A potential threat is the proliferation of non-library information providing companies and agencies that provide information via Internet. They may impose charges for the information but the information is usually current. How can libraries compete when the collections available at libraries are mainly secondary information found in print and electronic media?

There are three areas that the new breed of information providers has found foothold:

- (a) delivery systems
- (b) content development
- (c) content management

At the recent International Conference of Asian Digital Libraries, held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2003, it was remarkable to listen to ICT specialists who have devised systems for information delivery. The focus was systems rather than content but it gave a good indication of what is imminent in the near future. Much as librarians were awed by the current developments, it also gave the impression that unless libraries take on a more pro-active approach, libraries will be by-passed as information centres.

So the issue is: Can libraries compete?

### (2) Globalisation

There are two aspects in globalisation – the positive and the negative, depending on how one views it. Pages 7 and 8, had given positive insights into what can happen with globalisation. There are two potentials:

- (i) Ability to outsource certain aspects of library functions such as acquisitions, cataloguing and information sources.
- (ii) Provide information services beyond home shores. It will be a daunting task as there will be a need to upgrade staff expertise but notwithstanding this, we need to explore the possibility.

From the negative point of view, it will spell the end of library services as we know it now, specifically with regard to information delivery. The library will remain the centre

for loans and reference, using print and electronic resources. These materials can be accessed on-site or from the home or office. However, the critical issue is currency and variety of information that cannot be supplied by libraries. Globalisation will then take away from the library its information delivery function because in speed and variety libraries will not be able to compete with information centres worldwide despite the cost.

### (3) National Policies and Objectives

Governmental support is critical in promoting the library's role in any organisation and as such national policies and objectives specifically formulated for the development of libraries and their role are critical.

Absence of such policies will deprive libraries of the basic infrastructure for its very existence.

## 3.0 ACCOUNTABILITY IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

Are libraries ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Having defined the environment (internal and external) it is obvious that while in the internal environment there are more weaknesses than strengths, in the external environment there are more opportunities than threats. How then can libraries take advantage of the opportunities that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to offer when library resources are inadequate and their role more peripheral than integral?

The answer is to strategise – through well-designed strategic plans, efficient organisation, capable leadership and effective control measures. As can be seen, these serve as management tools and strategies that library managers should adopt as part and parcel of their management strategy.

It is only when these management tools and strategies are in place can libraries ensure the achievement of their goals and objectives which should be an integral part of the overall organisational goals and objectives. The onus therefore lies with the library managers to maximise their opportunities and be accountable for the success of their performance. Seen in this light, **accountability therefore is the key factor**

as to whether or not library managers can meet the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**(1) PLANNING**

A well-designed plan would provide direction, minimise uncertainty and impact of changes, reduce waste and establish standards for goal achievements. The planning process incorporates the following steps:

1. Setting of goals and objectives
2. Formulating strategies
3. Developing action plans
4. Coordinating activities
5. Monitoring accomplishment of goals
6. Review / revise plan

For the libraries, it is crucial that they understand what their core business is, which is SERVICES. Their core business must be integrated into the core business of their organisations. In designing the strategies, the library has to first determine a strategic focus which will be incorporated in its (i) vision (ii) mission and (iii) objective statements :

**Example of : Vision**

- To be the leader in open learning

**Example of : Mission**

- To be the leading contributor in democratising education
- To develop quality education through multimode learning technologies
- To develop and enhance learning experiences towards the development of knowledge - based society

**Example of: Goals**

- To be in the forefront of knowledge
- To produce graduates of high quality
- To develop a permanent pool of excellent scholars
- To contribute to nation-building and the well being of the people
- To promote universal human values
- To develop an efficient, innovative and committed management

**Example of: Objectives**

Goal: To be in the forefront of knowledge  
 ↓  
 Objectives:

- to increase Science & Technology courses to 60% in all faculties
- 40% of General studies courses to be reduced and combined with science course
- to increase the research vote by 20% by the year 2004

**Example of: Strategic Plan**

Strategic Goals  
 University

- Upgrade academic achievement of weak students
- Upgrade opportunities & facilities for research for academic staff

↓ ↓

Library

- Implement collection development policies for teaching and learning
- Library as first stop research centre  
 Improve user education programmes
- Develop IT

Where does the issue of accountability arise in the formulation of the strategic plan? It is in the quantitative methods used to measure the accomplishment of goals and objectives, in the time frame given to accomplish each activity and in the quality measures used in the performance such as monitoring, setting standards (ISO) and benchmarking. However brilliant the plan, unless implemented, it is useless.

**(2) ORGANISING**

The organisation structure should facilitate the achievement of goals. Therefore it is important that the organisation structure is designed to facilitate work flow (whether via function, specialisation or process), define the chain of command (whether hierarchical, flat, etc.), define the span of control (the wider the less effective) and clarify issues such as centralisation vs. decentralisation.

The library management would have to structure the organisation in such a way as to ensure that the organisation structure facilitates rather than hinder the achievement of goals. The library management is therefore accountable in this aspect.

### (3) LEADING

Leading is influencing others to carry out tasks towards the achievements of goals. There are different types of leadership (autocratic, democratic, transformational, etc.) but there are certain traits or characteristics that reflect good leadership:

- (a) Develop corps of excellent staff
  - Staff development plan
  - Motivation
  - Competency training
  - Leadership training
  - Performance measurement
- (b) Monitor activities
- (c) Monitor achievement of goals
- (d) Flexible and adaptable leadership
- (e) Establish value culture – leadership by example

Leadership is not confined to being the Chief Librarian or the Library Director but leadership is found at all levels. Leaders may be managers but not all managers are leaders. The quality of human resource in any organisation depends on the quality of leadership. In this way, the library manager should be held accountable if staff cannot perform and goals cannot be achieved.

### (4) CONTROL

Control measures must be in place to monitor activities and ensure that goals are achieved. The effectiveness of any control system depends on how effectively it can facilitate the achievement of goals.

Why is a control system important?

- i) It is a means of measuring whether goals are met and if not why. You can have well-formulated strategic plans, well-designed organisation structure, highly motivated staff but without control there is no measure of goals achievement.
- ii) It is a management tool that can be used to monitor and measure activities (financial, performance, etc.) with greater objectivity.

How to measure?

There are basically three types of control measures that libraries can use:

- (a) Monitoring
- (b) ISO
- (c) Benchmarking

An efficient and effective control system shows accountability.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The inability to demonstrate their relevance to organisational goals has caused librarians to be relegated to second-class citizens in their own organisations. But who is to be blamed? The 21<sup>st</sup> century, bringing with it the challenges of globalisation, knowledge-management, digital library, life-long learning, TQM etc., will cause librarians to be more isolated until and unless library managers adopt and adapt strategies that can provide them with the 'strength' to confront these challenges. Library managers must therefore be held accountable for putting these strategies in place. Unless library managers are prepared to be accountable for their libraries' performance, the issue of lack of credibility will persist and libraries will always remain ineffective and its role peripheral within its organisation and beyond.

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