



STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Abstract

In library management, the human aspect is often neglected, and more emphasis is given to task operations. Most library managers rarely accept that their juniors are human and that they do have needs for self-realization, nearly as much as they themselves do. As a result most libraries experience the problems of staff turnover, absenteeism, lethargy, low morale, poor performance, and lack of discipline. In view of this situation, this study is set out to examine the present pattern of staff development in Sri Lankan University Libraries. It further aims to investigate individual attitudes to staff development and consider the influence of such attitudes, personal backgrounds, and their job satisfaction on an individual's career progress.

University Library Management

In realization that universities should produce people committed to the development of the nation, some significant changes have taken place over the past few years in the outlook of university administrators, research scholars, teachers, and students in Sri Lanka. As a result, they have started realizing that the library is an active force tremendously important in teaching and research and is an integral part of a university.

The university libraries are in the charge of librarians with support staff depending on the size of each library and the service it is expected to provide. Large universities maintain faculty and departmental libraries in addition to the central library overseen by a librarian. The workloads of libraries are generally categorized as professional, paraprofessional and non-professional. The professionals are the senior staff, including the librarian who is responsible for the overall functions of the library, deputy librarian whose functions are forecasting and planning, organizing, commanding, co-ordinating, and controlling, senior assistant librarians and assistant librarians who are responsible for day-to-day operations of the library. The paraprofessionals are the senior library assistants, library assistants and technicians. The third category, the non-professionals consist of the clerks and typists. The Higher Education Act No. 20 of 1966 refers to these three categories, and since 1981 an assistant registrar (library service) has been included in the paraprofessional staff.

In a library, the work is departmentalised. There are separate departments for acquisitions, cataloguing, reader services, periodicals, and binding. The division of work in a university library has been on the basis of function and form. Senior assistant librarians and assistant librarians work as heads of the major departments. Within each of these major sections there will be a further hierarchy: a second-in-command, and employees with special areas of responsibility. In addition, there are assistant librarians in charge of faculty libraries. There is an assistant registrar of library services who is in charge of such functions as student registration. Further, there are clerical assistants and junior employees attached to all these areas of work for routine and clerical operations.

Staff Development

The realization of a library's purpose of providing a professional service to the public depends on how well the employees of the library carry out their duties and how adequately these employees perform, on their own self-motivation, and how well their supervisors motivate them. It is necessary for librarians to examine how they can motivate their staff in the early and mid-career years through the use of participative management, professional advancement and continuing education to satisfy the needs for efficient services as well as the needs of the employees. Therefore in librarianship, more attention should be paid to finding systematic approaches to staff development, which is an important issue faced by academic libraries at present owing to the problems such as declining budget allocations, fewer members of the staff, and lack of mobility and prospects for promotion



of those remaining. The object of a well-conceived staff development system should be firstly to improve the performance by meeting the need of the employees and secondly to integrate these needs with the needs of the organization. Just like a child continues to be fed, in order to ensure his/her growth into a healthy and useful adult, so should an employee continue receiving nourishment from his/her organization to remain useful to him/herself and to the organization. The implication here is that a happy and healthy employee will work well for the organization enabling it to achieve its objectives better.

Staff Training

According to Leap and Crino (1989) training is the creation of an environment where employees may acquire or learn specific, job-related behaviours, knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes. If one wishes to make a distinction between training and development, it would be that training is directed at helping employees to perform better in their current jobs. Development, on the other hand, is based on the fact that an employee will need an evolving set of skills, abilities, and an amount of knowledge to perform well in the succession of positions placed during his/her career. There is the need generally in all university libraries for the formal training of the paraprofessional staff aimed at giving them the background knowledge of librarianship, which is necessary for effective and efficient performance of their duties. Members of the paraprofessional staff are automatically endowed with a significant influence on the functioning of the library and they suffer from a lack of formal training in carrying out the bulk of routine duties in the libraries.

The senior members of the professional staff have little time for training their juniors in the variety of skills and techniques needed in the library. The members of the supervisory staff teach only the procedures and routines needed in a particular area but do not rotate their subordinates frequently for wider experience. Therefore, there is the need to teach them these procedures, skills, and techniques that are likely to help them in their different undertakings in various departments through organized and systematic programmes of in-service and on-the-job training. However, most of the university libraries do not have well-organized training and development programmes for the newcomers. The total process of staff training and development starts on the day the employees concerned joins the organization. If they are to be successful, they need to learn about the organization and the environment in which it operates as well as the specialties of its library. All members of the staff should be encouraged to view their role as a major contribution to the success of the organization.

Moreover, the librarian will have to consider the training requirement of his new recruits before their first day at work. There may be standard training programmes either for every new person who joins the organization or for each new recruit to the library. Anyhow, the training should be the induction programme to familiarize the new recruit with the organization, its activities and the way in which the library operates. It is important that the induction process begins as soon as possible. If new recruits are not given adequate information at an early stage, they may make assumptions and take actions, which are inappropriate; possibly leading to difficulties which could otherwise have been avoided. It can be much more difficult to undo early misunderstandings than to provide accurate information at the start. Although, it may be followed by complex training programmes, the induction process itself is a straightforward one. To improve training, I would like to recommend the following:

- a) Employees will have to be trained as specialists in their respective fields. The right person should be selected for the right job and trained in the relevant area. His/her performance should be evaluated thereafter so as to ascertain the impact of the training s/he has received.
- b) Due to rapid changes in technologies, refresher courses should be given frequently so as to improve overall knowledge and operational ability.
- c) Training should be properly utilized for self-development, which will reflect on the service of libraries to the users.



- d) In the training programmes, practical problems and finding solutions for them should be given priority over hypothetical assumptions and standard solutions meant for perfect conditions.
- e) Experts and specialists in different areas should be invited to deliver lectures, and conduct seminars and workshops to impart first-hand knowledge about the library sector and development in librarianship.

Succession Planning and Career Management

These two concepts have evolved over the last few decades based on the experiences made by various company management experts. Human resource development (HRD) will be meaningless for the employees if it fails to ensure any growth in their career. Such a growth is possible only if succession planning and career management are systematically introduced into the institution concerned. That is why many companies rely heavily on these practices. Succession plan is to highlight short-term recruitment and training problems. The age of the employees indicates who is nearing retirement and who can serve longer, while immediate possible successors are identified. Employees' performance is also rated. Such a plan can be a useful general guide for the short term to ensure that there is some provision for the future. As university libraries have not yet formally institutionalised a succession-planning scheme, some significant attempts must be made in this direction.

Career Management encourages employees to analyze and assess their ambitions, and give them information about a company's career opportunities. It is seen as a way of raising morale, reducing employee turnover, and improving overall manpower management. Actually, career management is a process whereby an individual sets career goals and identifies the means to achieve them. The main focus of career planning is helping the employees to achieve a better match between personal goals and the opportunities that are realistically available in the organization. It would be useful to make new employees aware of the various phases of development in the company and plan their specific career paths with senior employees.

University libraries should take steps to identify employees having potentials for being developed in some other work area. Such employees should be given a chance, of course with their consent, to work in the area in which their potential has been assessed to be good. As a result of this provision, many employees may be able to show excellent results in areas other than their original specialty. For this purpose, job enrichment and job rotation can be introduced. Employees in the fields of cataloguing, reference services, lending etc. and other small cadres can be given large areas by merging two or more areas into one. This will give positive results by giving the employees exposure to group work, experience in and familiarity with a variety of areas, interaction with a group of people having a range of responsibilities, taste of shared responsibility, and alertness to different emergency requirements. Therefore the managements of Sri Lankan University libraries should seriously consider the implementation of suitable career and succession planning systems.

Performance Appraisal

Since organizations exist to achieve goals, the degree of success that individual employees have reached in achieving their particular goals is important in determining organizational effectiveness. The assessment of how successful employees have been at meeting their individual goals, therefore, becomes a critical part of human resource management. This leads us to the topic of performance appraisal.

Appraisal is a continuing process in management development. It is essential for ensuring that the organization has the right type of personnel and they are carrying out their functions effectively and efficiently. Bakighir (1993) states that performance appraisal is the process through which the progress, the results, and the personality of employees are reviewed and assessed by their immediate supervisors. Such review and assessment should be carried out on regular basis to meet a specific purpose such as promotion, transfer, reassignment, and demotion or sometimes,



even dismissal. John and Jordan (1982) observe that the private sector and libraries in the United States, for example, make an extra payment for good performance. According to John and Jordan, one way of rewarding the staff is through promotions. Another one is through open appreciation.

As evident from this study, most of the university libraries in Sri Lanka do not practise performance assessment methods to ascertain the actual performance of the staff. Librarians should be very logical in their approach to staff problems. Then the employee can keep the annual increment as a measurement of their performance. Library employees have to be informed about their existing performance levels, in-order to upgrade them. Not only does performance assessment help the librarian to discover the talents hitherto unknown among his/her own staff but also gives an understanding of the attitudes of the staff to work and how such attitudes can be improved upon. Since performance assessment provides opportunities to understand the attitude of the staff towards their work, it is hoped that the same assessment can help to identify the areas where the employee's performance is below the required standard and where improvement can be expected if appropriate coaching is given. In a profession like librarianship, in which most people work in groups, appraisal should start in the work group. Group appraisal implies an objective approach with objectives agreed upon by the work group led by the library management involving senior managers.

Participative Management (PM)

Wambugu (1982) has identified the PM as one of the effective ways of developing the staff in many organizations. Shokeon (1994) defines PM as a process in which the objectives of the organization and the procedures involved in achieving the same as those pursued by the workers in a free and frank environment. Findings from the present study reveal that most of the Sri Lankan University libraries do not practise participative management proceedings successfully. In order to induce participative management in Sri Lankan University libraries we can have staff meetings regularly. In a small library with a small staff, the decisions or policies can be discussed at staff meetings. A large library such as a university library with several departments requires a more formal management structure than a small library. Therefore they can have regular staff meetings scheduled with proper agendas. These group interactions must always involve representatives of all groups of employees who can be affected by the policy or decision being considered. A formal communication network should be established in university libraries to ensure that the entire membership of the staff keeps abreast of all developments. Participants must be well informed of the issues being discussed. Once the group has taken a decision on an issue the head must decide on its feasibility.

It is recommended that, university librarians should have staff meetings to discuss general matters or common issues in the library. The minutes of the senior staff meetings should be circulated among all the relevant persons and any other member of the staff should have access to them to ensure that they are aware of the decisions made and reasons for such decisions taken. In addition, each section can have meetings once a month and discuss developments of general or special significance to that particular section. Decisions taken at meetings should be informed to the senior management through the circulation of minutes.

Staff Development Policy

In order to carry out systematic staff development, a library must have a clearly defined staff development scheme. The absence of a systematic staff development policy is a barrier for employees of university libraries to develop themselves. Therefore, university libraries should develop a clear statement of policy on personnel development and make them known and understood throughout their organizations and at the same time ensure implementation through supportive procedures and sufficient financing.

It should be emphasised that it is essential for libraries to establish policies on staff development. The statement of policy should clearly state the aims of the library and the objectives of staff development such as



- (a) to motivate the staff
- (b) to improve job performance
- (c) to develop staff potential
- (d) to improve the standard of services
- (e) to contribute to the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the library
- (f) to rotate the staff appropriately
- (g) to promote creativity
- (h) to prepare the staff for promotion

Such a policy statement should show where the main activities and responsibilities for staff development rest and who is responsible for what and when. It should also indicate the scope and type of activities and programmes to be undertaken. Finally, the policy should have all members of the library staff in view and should indicate where they fit in on the basis of their different levels of efficiency. For the benefit of the administrator it should be added that a separate and adequate budget for staff development would be maintained. Having established a policy the next essential step is to facilitate staff development. Therefore a senior member of the staff, preferably the librarian, should take responsibility for staff development, and the other members in supervisory capacities should be encouraged to participate in its organization and implementation. On the whole, staff development programmes should be provided for all levels of the staff.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is justifiable to state that university libraries in Sri Lanka do not have clearly-defined staff development policies of their own. Therefore this paper suggests that each university library should have a well-written staff development policy from the outset, as successful staff development requires full awareness among the staff of the opportunities available to them. Even the implementation of such programmes is handicapped by the lack of staff, which is one of the biggest problems in the university libraries in Sri Lanka. When libraries require management training both prior to and during one's career, the need for one's participation in training activities is higher. Therefore, the vacancies within the library sector should be filled as soon as possible. Moreover, the institutional support policies can greatly facilitate employees' performance development in university libraries. Implementation of a succession planning system is very important in this context. Finally, holding regular staff meetings and maintaining proper communication among the staff at all levels are also helpful in creating a suitable environment for staff development.

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