Toward Building Collaboration Between Library And Information Services Practitioners And Educators

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Abstract

The paper revisited the concept and essence of collaboration and nature of collaboration It examined the need for collaboration in-between educators information services practitioners as well as the challenges to its successes. As way forward, it advocated that in order to ensure successes in collaborative venture between the educators and library and information services practitioners, it is necessary that it is built on clear vision and mission, trust and confidence, inclusive stakeholder platform, strategic plan, systemic plan implementation approaches, democratic managerial and leadership styles, define role playing and participation, and sustained human and material resource presence. Besides, like the information services practitioner, the educators, should be encouraged to form the habit of enhancing and replenishing the content of the resource centres/libraries in their domain through donations and gifts of relevant print and electronic information resources and sources within their reach to facilitate coping with varying needs of the customers.

Introduction

Conceptually, collaboration can be conceived as an associated partnership of a unified identity and shared values aimed at performing given operations, tasks, and function(s) to achieve common vision, mission, goals and objectives. As a phenomenon, it is a collection/set of mutually inclusive and exclusive endeavours/ ventures united by common purpose, identity and shared values to effectively and efficiently achieve common vision, mission, goals and objectives. It can also be viewed as a network of united purposes for pursuing common vision, mission, goals and objectives. In another dimension, as a process, collaboration is another way of doing things collectively to achieve common purpose at least costs and efforts. The common denominator in the perspectives of collaboration is mutual unity of varied interests propelled by the zeal to cooperate in unison to effectively and efficiently achieve desired goals and objectives which otherwise may not be easily achieved individualistically. Crudely posited, collaborate

simply implies connect, unite and cooperate; while collaboration implies connection, unity and cooperation.

Naturally, communities, institutions and societies of all types are made up of collections/ sets of peoples of varied mutually inclusive and exclusive interests, purposes, ambitions, vision, aspirations and priorities. In management parlance, the same variations in perceptions and conceptions are tenable amongst the members of typical management team in any organisation and establishment. Similarly, the existing and prospective customers and other stakeholders of both profit oriented and not-for- profit oriented service providers and establishments also have incongruent vision, goals, objectives, vision and expectations. To this extent, and realistically too, it can be argued that attempts to actualise and sustain any type of service provision, creativity and innovation that will effectively facilitate and enhance any type of development and advancement necessary to accommodate the collective interests and expectations of the varying stakeholders will largely depend on the extent of the interdependence of designated set of allied interest individuals, groups, institutions, stakeholders and role-players at work. This state of affairs has been facilitated even more by the concomitant effects of the contemporary 21st century virtual paradigm where the world has been transformed digitally into global village due to the unending potentials and impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) that have broken the barriers of locations and time. With effective utilisation of ICTs, interest groups and associates are and can easily get connected irrespective of their locations and time across the globe as if they were in the same room.

Basis of Collaboration

Essentially, the need for collaboration for any venture/ endeavour can be associated with the need to: (a) achieve envisioned common vision, mission, goals and objectives of hitherto varied interests and purposes;

(b) facilitate and ensure participation and integration of community of mutually exclusive interests';

(c) promote, enhance and sustain human interface requirements for collective purposes;

(d) ensure effective distribution and utilisation of required material resources;

(e) integrate, promote and sustain shared interests and values;

(f) down play monopolistic tendencies and approaches to doing things individualistically;

(g) facilitate, enhance and sustain effectiveness and efficiency at least human and material costs;

(h) facilitate, support and sustain the implementation of 'working the talk' pronouncements, declarations and policies;

(i) avert unnecessary costs and ensure effective management of risks;

(j) promote and support team building, consensus generation and unity of purpose; and

(k) promote and support role -players' and stakeholders' empowerment, participation, and integration. However, the extent to which collaborative initiative of any sort is achieved between and among interest stakeholders is a function of the type, nature and scale of the cooperative venture; the capacity of the stakeholders and role-players; the nature of the environment and timing/ schedule of operation; the type and nature of the available human and material resources; the type, nature, viability and relevance of alternative options; the type and nature of the tasks and challenges involved; the administrative structure and leadership style employed; and the envisioned expectations of the collaborative venture/ initiative.

Nature of Collaboration

By and large, collaboration, especially informal groupings based on common denomination, can be started base on earlier familiarity with each other due to shared common location of place of work and/or abode, institution of learning, membership of profession and social media network, vocation, and other types of acquaintances. Such type of familiarities give rise to easy formation and sustenance of partnerships of all sorts such as brotherhoods, sisterhoods, comrades, fellowship, etc. to satisfy given needs and motives and also cope with the dynamics of the time, expectations and challenges. However, depending on the vision, mission, goals and objectives in focus, collaborative initiatives especially in educational institutions and for information services delivery can be established to address issues related to: capacity building and human resource management, educational programmes, library and information services delivery, distance learning (E-Learning), research and development, publishing and book trade, advocacy and promotion, computing and Internetting, communication and social media linkages, etc.

By and large and regardless of the ensuing collaborative setting, emerging collaboration initiatives can be inform of:

(a) Informal Networks where the cooperating members may operate on the same platform devoid of hierarchical relations but tied to commonly agreed ties and interests, obligations and commitments, and shared values and expectations. Such informal arrangements can facilitate the emergence of acceptable, reliable and viable collaborative model venture, provide strategic opportunities for enduring partnerships, maintenance of standardised quality services, enhanced intra and inter communication between and among the cooperation members, and ensure optimal mutual support and relationships for the success of the venture;

(b)Formal Alliances where relationships of the partnering members are formalised and tied to common identity, vision, mission, goals and objectives and interest. The extent of the operations, performance, contributions, commitments and role-playing of the respective collaborating partners is guided by the mutually and clearly enunciated terms of agreement and policy guidelines conceived as the bonding factor;

(c) Formal Coalitions on usually predetermine issues, projects, ventures, operations, services, mission, tasks, and programmes where the collective relationships and extent of engagements between and among the partnering members are formalised to facilitate the execution of the various tasks in focus. Such coalitions could be locality/grassroots based geared to overcome the prevailing primordial challenges in an institution or an area. It could be professionally based to support and strategise the way out of the professional challenges, development and advancement. Also, it be society/community based with broad based representations of the cooperating members of the community which may include but not limited to the traditional institutions, NGOs, educational institutions, information services providers, health institutions, security agencies, CBOs and professionals of all shades united by common identity and purpose to pursue projects and programmes of overall common interests to the society/community;

(d)Formal Partnerships where the memberships are united by defined and clearly written terms of contract, agreement, relationships, operations, vision and mission under common shared values, interests, responsibilities, resources, recognition and value additions for the attainment of the overall goals and objectives of the partnering members. However, the extent of the successes or otherwise of such partnering is dictated by the actual level of involvement of the members, efforts employed, the trust and respect exhibited, the effective utilisation of the available time, and effective management and sustenance of the successes recorded and shared; and

(e) Emergent Collaboration where collaboration initiative amongst the members is fully established under common identity and entity with all the requisite independent human and material resources ranging from human and financial capitals, defined terms of reference, and strategic plans on variety of ventures such as information services, education, healthcare delivery, advocacy and public awareness, etc. for the common good of the partners in action and indeed the society and community at large.

Collaboration Between Educators and Information Services Practitioners

The general expectation of educators irrespective of the type of educational institutions they are located is to facilitate easy access and acquisition of relevant knowledge by the students in line with the curriculum of study designed for such programme. Such tasks are essentially carried out through teaching and research using variety of teaching, learning and research facilities and methods of instruction. In like manner, the general expectation of library and information services practitioners is to facilitate easy access and utilisation of relevant print and electronic/digital information resources, sources and services for acquisition of the desired knowledge by the students, staff and other stakeholders regardless of their location and time of need. A cursory assessment of the expectations before the educators and library and information science practitioners collectively lead to serving as veritable intermediaries between knowledge acquisition endeavours and access to information for knowledge acquisition by students and other stakeholders. The educators' and information services practitioners' common denominator and primary stakeholders are the students who by design are strategically on the frontline. This

picture points to the need to establish collaboration in-between the educators and the library and information services practitioners due to their collective interests, vision, mission and objectives of effective satisfaction of the aspirations of the students using variety of viable and relevant options (Mohammed, Z. 2017).

Collaboration in-between the educators and the library and information services practitioners could be effectively built start from informal networking emanating from earlier familiarity with each other to formal collaboration informs of strategic alliance, coalition and emergent collaboration to effectively satisfy the yearnings of the students and other stakeholders. In another dimension, the formal collaboration between the educators and library and information services practitioners can be locally/grassroots based where the whole operations are restricted to the given educational institution supporting the venture. However, it could be transformed into community based arrangement where it involves and accommodates all the relevant stakeholders (educational institutions, students and relevant others) located in the locality/community. It can also be inform of emergent collaboration which coverage could be divisional, zonal or national.

In another perspective to systematically ensure smooth transition in collaboration venture between the educators and information services practitioners especially in educational institutions, segmented approaches should be considered. To this end, collaboration can modestly start by subject discipline base where the collaboration will be based on respective subject areas of specialisation. This can be followed by cross discipline collaboration where mutually related subject disciplines/specialisations are encouraged to collaborate sectorially. The climax of the collaboration is when it is multi-discipline based where the collaboration venture cuts across all the subject disciplines in the institution are seamlessly integrated into one context. However, the successes or otherwise of any type of collaborative arrangement formally agreed upon by the educators and information services practitioner is largely a function of availability of central information resources and sources pool from which all the relevant stakeholders/role-players in the collaborative scheme can easily and effectively access and utilise needed information resource, sources and services regardless of the nature, format and package, and also irrespective of their location and time of need.

The veritable bedrock and platform for effective collaborative venture for information access and utilisation by all the stakeholders in knowledge acquisition and information access for knowledge acquisition is library collections and services supported by functional Digital Repository (DR) (Mohammed, Z. :2009). Depending upon the nature and structure of the environment and management, digital repository can be established specifically for an institution (IDR), a community (CDR), a neighbourhood (NDR) and for a set of institutions in zonal/divisional setting (ZDR) backed by the collective efforts of the partnering members and customers in the development and sustenance of its collection and services. The content of typical collaborative DR is usually a by-product of continued collective contributions of digital information resources and services from not only the library system but the educators, and to

some extent the students and other strategic stakeholders and partners. It is expected that the educators, administrators, practitioners and indeed the students and other strategic stakeholder should willingly deposit their academic publications and research reports in the DR access and utilisation by the target customers/user. However, in another dimension, the platform and bed rock for effective collaborative venture for the collective benefits of the stakeholders in knowledge acquisition and for information access and utilisation for knowledge acquisition can be expanded to include the establishment of Smart Digital Information Commons (SDIC). It serves as strategic and serene avenue for information access and utilisation especially for knowledge acquisition by the target members of a community on 24/7 operational regime. By and large, it is important and necessary that the educators, as it is with the information services practitioners, are engaged and encouraged in enhancing and replenishing the content of the resource centre/library in their domain through donations and gifts of relevant print and electronic information resources and sources within their reach to facilitate coping with varying needs of the customers.

Challenges to Collaborative Venture

From all indications and assessment of the state of the art of knowledge acquisition and access and utilisation of information for knowledge acquisition, there exist some obvious challenges to successful collaboration between the educators and library and information services practitioners. These tend to affect their collective interests to assist the knowledge seekers and information access and utilisation for knowledge acquisition by the students and other stakeholders. The challenges to effective exploitation of the collaborative venture between the educators and information services practitioners can be viewed from three perspectives:

(a) lack of shared vision and mission which could lead to gradual drift from the essence of the collaboration;

(b) non availability of adequate requisite and relevant human and material resources which could eventually lead to frustration amongst the students and other stakeholders in information access and utilisation, lack of reliable relevant alternative resources, delayed accomplishment of tasks, non achievement of the desired goals and expectations of the collaborative venture; and

(c) lack of effective organisational management and leadership structure which could lead to overdependence, repetition and duplication of efforts and duties, role conflicts and disharmony, and personality clashes and redundancy.

The Way Forward

Essentially, attempts to successfully build collaboration between educators and library and information services practitioners should be premised on: (a) mutually agreed upon realistic goals and expectations; (b)shared value and value addition; (c) set rules of engagement and policy guidelines; (d)established formal and informal communication channels and links; (e)

monitoring and evaluation mechanism; (f) trust, accountability, mutual respect and reliability; and (g) democratised leadership and managerial setting. Hence, in order to ensure successes in collaborative venture between the educators and library and information services practitioners, it is necessary that it is built on clear vision and mission, trust and confidence, inclusive stakeholder platform, strategic plan, systemic plan implementation approaches, democratic managerial and leadership styles, define role playing and participation, and sustained human and material resource presence. Besides, the educators, should be encouraged to form the habit of enhancing and replenishing the content of the resource centres/libraries in their domain through donations and gifts of relevant print and electronic information resources and sources within their reach to facilitate coping with varying needs of the customers.

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