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# Managing individual and organisational information needs in special libraries: the case of the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology, Zaria Technical Library.

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Abstract

In view of the information explosion and the complex information needs of management and individual within an organisation, libraries/information centres have a great role to play not only in identifying, selecting and disseminating those information that will be useful to management and individual but also in managing the information effectively. This paper, therefore propose to the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) Zaria technical library, the use of management information (MI) as management techniques not only to ensure that the library is meeting the college objectives but also to create conditions, like research/working teams, strengthening informal communication and collaboration, that will nurture creativity.

## Introduction

Two major factors distinguish special library from other libraries. First, special library is maintained by an individual corporation, association, governmental agency or any other group. Secondly it is mainly devoted to a special subject or group of subjects and offering specialised services to a specialised clientele.

So the first and main goal of a special library and the role it plays within an organisation has always been supporting the organisation in achieving its overall objectives. This support is rendered through the provision of functional, effective and dynamic information which is always the live-wire of the survival of the organisation.

The special library provides information first and foremost to the management of the organisation to which it belongs. This information is essentially to help management plan effectively, take meaningful decision and execute good policies. This type of information is what Baure (1980:204) called managing management. The special library also provide information

to individuals within the organisation, but the information is mostly job related which will enable them execute their assigned job effectively and also improve them skilfully.

For the information supplied to management and individual to produce the desired change and thereby enabling the system to work properly, the special library manager or as he is sometime called the information manager must be prepared not only to provide the information needs of management and individuals but also to manage effectively any user's or organisational information. Baure (1980:206) emphasised that even those that are remote and complicated.

So, in order for the information manager to manage effectively the information needs of both users and management, he has to first of all determine their needs, select, organise and disseminate, and more importantly he must have some means to determine the influence of the information he supplies. To do this conveniently, the information manager has to employ a new management technique that is called 'management information' (MI). This term is variously defined by many information scientists. However, Ward (1978:60) summarised all the definition and simplified it as that data which needs to be collected and analyses to ensure that the department is meeting corporate objectives in to the most cost effective manner.

Before moving on let us quickly draw distinction between management information system (MIS), information management (IM) and management information (MI) so as to tidy up our discussion. Whereas MIS is a means of providing particular types of information to clearly defined levels of management, IM is the planning, budgeting, organising, directing, training and control associated with information while MI has to o with collection of data and information which have to be anályses to ensure that the information centre is meeting corporate objectives.

Management information is not exclusively data used by departmental manager, it is also information which is generated by the information manager and which should also be used by him so that he can assess his progress, can see how he is copping with demands, can assess the benefits of the work that he is doing and can contribute to service development.

From the foregoing, it can be discerned that MI can be performed at three levels, the first of course is the administrative level. At this level data and information are collected and analyses to ensure that information supply to organisational management is very effective and is helping the management in achieving the objectives for the organisation is set. The second level is the individual level in which data and information are collected and analyses to

ensure that information supply to individual member of the organisation is achieving the desired objective of improving their job performance and increasing their skill acquisition. The third and final level had to do with the information manager himself or the information management team in a large information centre. Here data and information are collected and analyses to ensure that the information manager's performance within the library or information centre is effective. This self managerial appraisal is what Turner (1987:103) called "physician heal thyself".

It is quite convincing from the above that every management needs MI especially the departments/centres that specialise in providing information. It is in the light of the above that this researcher, having discovered the importance of NCAT Zaria as the only college serving the various organs of aviation industry in both Nigeria and some African countries, set out to analyze the library's information services to management and individual members of the college. The paper proposes the adoption of MI as management tool by the management of the college library because it assumed that the adoption will greatly propel the college library in speedily and effectively achieving the objectives for which it is set. This will in turn justify to the federal government which established the college and the various organs of the aviation industry who are benefitting from the product of the college the need for the college to continue to exist functionally. Management information in this paper is limited to managing information as it effects senior management staff of the college, heads of schools/departments and the instructors. The paper does not however cover students and other non-academic staff.

Management information is already employed in many organisation and library/information centres. For example, Ward (1987:50) used as a case study, the information services department of Gloxo Group Research Limited to consider the management of the department in the wider company context, and then examined the information needs of management, deficiencies in the exiting system and prospects for the future. Similarly, Hall (1987:134) demonstrates clearly how he needs financial management information to run BLCMP Library Services Limited.

**Historical background of the NCAT Zaria**

The Nigeria College of Aviation Studies and formerly known as Nigerian Civil Aviation Training Centre was established in 29th September 1964 through an act known as the Nigerian Civil Aviation Training Centre. The college was established with the assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Civil Aviation Organisation (CAO). The long range objective of the college is to provide trained personnel, on a continuous basis, to the civil aviation industry as a whole, that is, pilots, aircraft maintenance engineer, air traffic services, aeronautical electronics and telecommunication

maintenance personnel and other highly skilled manpower required for the aviation sector, to ensure safe air and group operations in accordance with recognised international standards and practices., (Imashen, 1991:5).

**Organisational structure of the college**

The day-to-day activities of the college are carried out under the commandant of the college, his principal officers are mainly the registrar, the college bursar, the head of works and the training coordinator. Under the training coordinator are four training schools made up a number of departments and units to carry out the training functions of the college. The four schools are:

i) the flying school;

ii) the aircraft maintenance engineering school;

iii) the air traffic services and communication school; and,

iv) the aeronautical electronics and telecommunication school.

**The place of the library**

By design, the library is also amongst one principal departments of the college; it comes as a unit directly under the supervision of the training coordinator, thus it enjoys the same departmental status as the four training schools earlier mentioned. The library was established in 1964 along with the college and it is charged with the responsibility of supporting the college in its teaching programmes as a complementary educational agency as well as catering for the information needs of the teaching and administrative staff as well as the students.

Proper training of personal involved in civil aviation has always been considered as one of paramount importance for aviation safety and efficiency. So, just like the college is the heart of the aviation industry so also the library is the heart of the college. It pumps out useful information to the management staff and student.

**Managing organisational information needs**

The management team of NCAT will need vital information for it to successfully formulate and execute good policies that will satisfy the training needs of its clienteles as well as the appropriate authority that established it. In view of this, the information manager is not jut to supply information to the management, but he has to appropriately select, analyze, systematically organise, disseminate and monitor the information he is supplying. The most important aspect of management information is for the information manager to find a way of getting feedbacks on the effect of the information he is

supplying. It is this feedback information that will allow him to make far reaching decision making on the present as well as the future strategies of providing information. To do this effectively Chrishanson and Ahrensfeld (1980:151) noted that the manager has to learn about the organisation - its aims, structure, products problems as well as users of the products, and its information needs. Then he should develop information services and communicate with management.

Feedback information is very vital to the survival of any system. So, feedback information should not just be limited to the college management but also by extension, the information manager has to collect and analyze information from the various organs of the aviation industry i.e. the Nigeria Airways (Plc), Nigeria Air Force, Nigerian Airport Authority, etc. as well as foreign countries that are sending their personnel for training in the college. It is this feedback information that will allow the information manager advice the management before it plans and executes policies. Through this process, the information is laying foundation for building an information centre that can become not only management's partner but more importantly, an indispensable management tool. The key, of course, is to spread the understanding that information is precious and a highly useful commodity.

In a related study on Glaxo Group Research Ltd, Ward (1987:50) noted that information services has two main proprieties. The first is to ensure that any published information (i.e. Information produced outside the company) which is essential for Research and Development (R&D) activity is acquired. Secondly, the department is involved in handling certain internally generated information in corporate information system. And that for both aspects of the service, the department must develop symbiotic relationship with its customers. The information centre is equally responsible for Gloxo overseas companies. It support their marketing and medical activities through the provision of comprehensive published information on Glaxo's major products.

As mentioned earlier, the management team in the NCAT consists of schools/department on the other hand. These people constitute the policy making body of the college They constitute members of various Boards-academic, administrative, research, etc. It is to these people that the information manager should concentrate, he should aggressively but diplomatically sell his information, he should try to supply information even before requests are made. And should keep management happy with good follow up services. Through a number of good initiatives, the information manager can keep records of information that will help him to analyze whether the information he is supplying is meeting the desired objectives. Fig 1 below show an example of a record that can be used to collect and analyze information in order to determine whether the information supplies is quite useful, timely and appropriate.

Fig.1:

Nigerian College of Aviation Technology, Zaria
Library/Information Centre Information
Request/Analyze Card

1. Name of officer/School/Department: .....
2. Type of Information requested for: .....
3. Purpose for which Information is sought: .....
4. Subject for which Information is sought: .....
5. Previous Information sought on the subject: .....
6. Whether the previous Information sought was formal, relevant and useful: .....
7. Any other relevant Information: .....

It should not be forgotten that the head of schools/ department are serving dual roles; as members of the college management team and as managers of their individual school/department. So, record on each school/department has to be kept and analyzed. The information manager should carefully note any overloading of information needs of schools/ department. This information can later be used for a number of developmental programmes, things like rationalisation and cost effective management can all come as a result of overlapping of information needs of schools/department.

**Managing individual information needs**

The provision of information to individual within the college is mainly to support the activities in which the instructors are engaged in. Therefore, there is the need for information manager to identify the information need and seeking behaviour of the instructors as well as their specific activities. Odeinde (1974:2) argued that in order to meet the information needs of users adequately, emphasis must be placed on the study of their characteristics because their needs and their use for information ultimately differs because of differences in personal characteristics, discipline and kind of job they perform.

Fig.2:

Nigerian College of Aviation Technology, Zaria.
Library/Information Centre Information
Request/Analyze Card

Name:..... School/Department.....
Highest qualification: ..... Rank: .....
Subject(s) taught: .....
Area of specialisation: .....
Area(s) of interest: .....

| Date | Information requested/provided | Purpose for which information is requested/provided | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

Fig.2 shows another example of a record cards that can be used to collate and analyze information supply to individuals. With this the information manager can effectively and adequately plan, select, acquire, organise, disseminate and monitor information for present as well as for future use of individual instructor. The information manager should also note the overlapping of individual information needs within and across schools/departments. He can also use a combination of questionnaire and interview to collect analysis data and information that will help him to formulate adequate information policies for the college.

**Creating research/working teams and encouraging collaboration**

Through management information, the information manager can create as far as possible within the organisation the conditions that would nurture creativity. Top among these are creating research/ working teams, encouraging collaboration and strengthening informal communication among

instructors.

Since the information manager keeps records of individuals as well as school/departments information needs and seeking behaviour (Fig. 1 and 2), he can glaringly see areas of similarities of information needs of both individual instructors. The information manager can then use these similarities to group instructors into different teams thereby supplying and monitoring information provided them collectively. Many individuals and schools/departments acquire information through informal channels. The information manager should equally identify these channels and find a way of managing them.

In the same vain, the information manager, aware of who is writing what, can effectively bring together two instructors to collaborate.

## Conclusion

As we continue to march towards the information age, the onus lies on our libraries and information centres to manage adequately and effectively the information explosion and the complex information needs of individual as well as management of organisation.

It is my ardent desire that not only NCAT Zaria library will employ management of information to ensure that the library is meeting corporate objectives but also all other libraries and information centres.

This paper concludes by making the following recommendations:

1) That the management of NCAT Zaria technical library should look seriously into the possibility of employing MI as management tools to manage adequately and effectively the information needs of both instructors and management of the college.

2) To facilitate the above, the technical library should be computerised and other information technologies, like telephones, photocopying machine, microfilm reader/printer, etc. should be installed.

3) The information manager should continue to create, within the college in particular and in the aviation industry in general, conditions that would nurture creativity.

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