

Consultancy As Employment Options for Library And Information Science

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ABSTRACT

Library consultancy is usually seen more as the business and revenue generation arm of the library. If pursued independently it can actually function as an 'employer of labour and developed further to provide services both within and outside the immediate library environment. This paper examines the nature and prospects of consultancy as a suitable employment option for graduates of library and information science.

Introduction

The library and information services as a profession is rapidly changing with lots of challenges and new expectations for the professionals; especially fresh graduates who have to adapt to these demands and complete for scarce employment opportunities. These demands and challenges informed primarily by the technological advancements in information services have not only changed the traditional practices and roles of the library and information profession but have on the one hand thrown open the field to other professionals and novices with just basic computer skills to complete and sometime marginalise the library and information service professionals in their chosen fields. On the other and brighter side, these advances offer a broad base technological fluidity that allows professional librarians to make inroads into the growing vistas of opportunities in the field and the information technology world in general.

Consultancy therefore becomes a very vital and rich avenue where these myriad of opportunities in the information services and libraries can coalesce and be fruitfully exploited to provide employment for graduates of library and information science, provide the immediate library services beyond the confines of the library and of course provide an important interface between traditional librarianship and the challenges of modernisation.

Consultancy

The Wikipedia defines information technology consulting as a field that encompasses information technology consulting, technology consulting, business and technology services etc and focus on advising businesses on how best to use information technology to meet their business and research objectives. In addition to providing advice, library information consultants often implement, deploy and administer information packages on behalf of their client. A library and information services consultant therefore provides expertise to clients who require a particular type of knowledge or service for a specific period of time, thus providing an economy to the client. In other situations, companies and organisation undertaking or implementing a major project may need additional staff to assist with increased work during that

period. Being an expert or a professional in the library and information services with a wide knowledge of the subject matter, a consultant usually works and engages with multiple and changing clients. Thus clients have access to deeper levels of expertise than would be feasible for them to retain in-house, and to purchase only as much service as desired.

Library and information services consultancy can therefore be deployed to tackle the dual problem of shortage of expertise and its lack of organisation by making what little there is available to clients in a properly scheduled manner. Just as common inventory pools and statistically calculated stock levels help alleviate the problem of material shortages and working capital stringency, so well organised library and information services consultancies can alleviate the problem of technical knowhow, availability and effectiveness of service provision.

Library and Information Services and Consultancy

Gvernsey and white (1989) define library consultancy as part of information consultancy which extends to the area of publishing, marketing, printing, book selling, database design, computing and management. These services can either be lumped together into one consultancy package or treated separately as specialised consultancies to encourage specialisation. Other areas that can be broached into include information brokering, information counselling and information system designs. These areas of information management can be exclusively traditional and library based to provide services for research and the academics or more liberal and broad-based making inroads into other facets of life like entertainment, news, print/electronic media, advertisement, tourism, religion, economics and even politics.

Bates (2003) sees library and information 'consultancy as an independent and liberal information service provision that serves research, analysis and management for lucrative fees. She specifically noted areas like online research, telephone research, document delivery, training and seminars and provision of competitive intelligence for individuals and

organisations. Mohammed and Abubakar (2006) also identify information consultancy and other traditional library work as the broad categories of jobs that graduates of library and information science could take. These also include publishing, public relation services and computer based services.

Library/Information Consultancy Opportunities

The Library Association within the context of this paper defines a consultant as a specialist who gives experts information/advice on library and information needs. Seen from this perspective, opportunities in the library and information consultancy are basically define within the context of the areas of specialisation and these areas are further complicated with the nature of the breakthroughs in information technology. Hinged on the internet and the World Wide Web, the information management are being revolutionized by the flexibility, speed and variety of the new technology.

This has informed the emergence of several layers of both service provides and providers and ever growing hunger for more and more services by the clientele. Hence from manual to automation and now to computerisation, library and information services in Nigeria have within the last few years been revolutionised to adapt to the challenges of modernisation and contribute significantly in virtually every aspect of the society.

The library and information profession can therefore projects into hitherto exclusive domains of politics, economics, tourism, religion and even security in addition to their traditional role in the library. This has been possible largely through the provision of consultancy services that are in some cases an extension of existing library services, new departments under the libraries or independents consultancy service providers establish and man by professional librarians.

Whether as library extension services or independent consultancy firms, consultancy services create information management systems and environment that consists of numerous units and sub-units, 'each with peculiar specialisation task all geared towards the satisfaction of the general and specific needs of its users. Oilman (1985) identifies some of these possible areas library and information consultancy, suitably applicable to the Nigerian graduate of library and information sciences as:-

- i. Design and implementation of library automated systems.
- ii. Design and implementation of customised information systems.

- iii. Design and implementation of information system networks for organization.
- iv. Research and pooling of information for individual and cooperate clients.
- v. Operating of existing library and information systems for clients.
- vi. Provision of training and manpower development for individuals and organisation.
- vii. Provision of Maintenance and management services for clients.

Others relevant areas for library information consultancy in Nigeria would include rendering other user-specific services and exploring other awareness that can fall into any of the fields of publishing, market, publicity, research, library systems design and management. It is imperative however, that consultancies note the traditional norms and ethics of the profession must be upheld even in the fast-pace and cut-throat competitiveness of the field; the user/client should remain the primary focus of every library and information consultant.

Conclusion

As in all facets of development, financial constraints are the major impediments to library and information Sciences consultancy. Setting up consulting firms and expanding libraries to accommodate such demands is capital intensive and too horrendous for poorly funded public libraries and cash strap private enterprises. While the prospects are quite bright and promising, this lack of initial capital has been quite a drawback in the quest for establishing and developing library and information services consultancies on Nigeria. This is unfortunate, as the number of Unemployed graduates continue to rise, there is the urgent need for both government and the organised private sector to seize this opportunity to expand existing openings in libraries, and establish more independent consultancies' that will absorb a sizeable portion of the human resources wasting in the library and information science fields and of course open doors for aggressive revenue generation through both local and international provision of library and information science services.

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