

THE LIBRARY AS AN INFORMATION MANAGER IN THE PERIOD OF CRISIS USING A HYPOTHETICAL ORGANISATION: A CASE STUDY OF CENTRE FOR HEALTH RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SERVICES

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Abstract

The library both physical and virtual has been and is still the curator of knowledge and the provider of information for as long as man is concerned. This has been right from the time the early man began putting his thoughts together in clay, parchment, papyrus and so forth. So that man can retrieve such information when he needs them again. However, then the name “library” has not been in use as it is today. It has also been observed over the years that the library is an organisation that has been in the services of assembling, providing, analyzing, disseminating presenting and managing information for man to use whenever a man requires such information. This paper, therefore, discussed the importance of information management in an organisation using the “Centre for Health Research and Information Services” (CHRIS) as a point of reference most of the time. CHRIS is a small hypothetical organisation health sector NGO concerned with HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Disability, and so forth, which marginalize sectors of society across the world. The paper also highlights why it is necessary for an organisation to develop an information management strategy and to undertake regular information audits. The paper argues that information management is a critical management function which should not be assigned to specialists who are not managers in the crisis period.

Keywords: Library, information manager, CHRIS, HIV/AIDS, and crisis.

Introduction

Every human organisation needs information for the smooth running of its affairs daily. Information is very crucial for planning. Organising, directing, communicating, controlling, monitoring and evaluating the goals and objectives as well as strategies for performance improvement, and generally for the tracking of vision and mission statement to keep the organisation/institution on course. “Information is an asset, and its effective management can have a direct and lasting impact on achieving business objectives”. That’s the story that needs

to be told” Queensland Government Enterprise (2018). While the importance of information in the setting and pursuit of organizational goals, objectives and strategies cannot be denied; of far greater importance is the management of such information. In other words, how the information is organized for use by an organisation and not just the availability of the information will determine what role any given information plays in the life of that organisation. Information management (IM) is the bedrock of the success of management in any organisation. According to Powell (2003), IM “supports and makes easier all the other activities of management”.

This paper examines the importance of IM for a hypothetical organisation – “Centre for Health Research and Information Services” (CHRIS).

Information on CHRIS shows that (1) it is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) concerned with health issues such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Disability, and so forth that marginalize sectors of society; (2) it is based in a large city. (3) it has a small staff complement both at its headquarters and in the field working as researchers; (4) its operations are limited to one geo-political zone; (5) it operates on a limited budget, (6) it is an information agency which collects information and processes and reissues information to other users (7) it operates and networks with other organizations in urban and rural areas; and (8) it was founded "to conduct research on appropriate health-related issues and to make relevant information available to various interested researchers, practitioners, policy-makers. Academics and other similar NGOs and community organisations”. The paper also discusses why an organisation should develop an information management strategy (IMS) and the role of information in the evaluation, planning and monitoring of IM in terms of crisis.

Methodology

This paper is based mainly on library research. Information was sourced from books and journals on the Internet.

Information Management (IM)

Definition

Below are some definitions of **Information Management from different scholars and what IM is about.**

IM is “a practice which supports and makes easier all the other activities of management Powell, (2003:2). It entails the coordination and integration of the various information-related functions in an organisation to ensure proper utilization of information for defined purposes. Powell argues that: “Good information management rests on some straightforward principles such as understanding everyone’s potential needs for, use of, creation of, and exchange of information to ensure a proper determination of the ‘appropriate quality of work, accuracy, detail, frequency, format, location, and maintenance of information so it can be used effectively and efficiently” (2003:2).

Prytherch, (2000-372) refers to IM as an “Impressive term for the various activities that contribute to the effective production, en-ordination, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information, in whatever format, and from internal or external sources, leading to the more efficient functioning of the organisation”.

Similarly, Robertson (2005) holds that IM is “an umbrella term that encompasses all the systems and processes within an organisation for the creation and use of corporate information”. Robertson contends further that IM incorporates “people, process, technology, and content to attain success in an organisation.

Again, Powell (2003:46) highlights two major reasons for IM “Firstly, the process of creating a resource out of a mass of data, documents, gossip, and so forth, requires management of such in any organisation provided such information is vital to the organisation in question”. Secondly, the “IM function must be performed by an organisation’s management and not assigned to specialists. From the researcher’s viewpoint, the following which are: “people, process, technology, and content are very key to IM in any organisation that has a vision mission statement, this is because no organisation can attain their set goals in conjunction with their vision/mission statement set in place without these (people, process, technology, and content) working together. Also, from the different scholars' definitions above, the researcher is very much in harmony with the scholars’ ideas that IM indeed:

- 1) has some straightforward principles that will enable any organization to succeed if followed duly;
- 2) is an impressive term; and
- 3) is an umbrella term that is an embodiment of all that the scholars put down in their different definitions of IM.

This goes to say that all of their definitions are accurate in this context and more can be added to theirs as researchers come up with other forms of the definition of IM that will be an addition to the existing body of knowledge with regards to IM.

Importance of Information Management (IM)

The importance of Information Management is stated below: The importance of something (valuable and significant), such as (textbooks, clothes, food, shelter and so forth) cannot be overemphasized likewise is Information Management to any organisation in the world today. Therefore, the Importance of information management is stated below: Now for any organisation to be successful in whatever they are into that is genuine has to put into practice effectively and efficiently the five administrative functions of “**Henri Fayol** as slated in Gaur, (2013). Which are: **Planning; Organising; Staffing; Directing; and Controlling**. Why because in any and every organisation, likewise in the library, there are management and administrative staff that are in charge of the daily operations in the organisation/library, who ought to work together to achieve” set goals of the organisation. But where this is lacking, there cannot be achievement of any sort, likewise in the said organisation of CHRIS.

This means that CHRIS ought to learn to inculcate the five administrative functions of “Henri Fayol” for better results. But in this context, IM can be said to be especially critical for small organisations like CHRIS which has limited financial and human resources, operates in diverse settings, meets the needs of people and organizations with different interests, and trades mainly in information to carry out their researches, must endeavours to work as a team by carrying out effectively and efficiently the five functions of administration stated above, to attain their organizational goal without stress. Invariably it is observed that without the conscious effort of CHRIS to apply the five administrative functions, the information “CHRIS” gathered for their managed to research appropriate various researches, will not be properly health-related issues, for which they are known.

Information Management Strategy

Definition and Principles

Below are some definitions of Information scholars. Bowman (2009) refers to IMS as a management strategy from different implementation plans for any organisation to attain their desired goals. However, for the implementation plan to organisation some basic steps are to be followed: work effectively and efficiently in any current situation);

- 1) They have to look at where they are (the current situation);
- 2) They have to decide where they want to go (the desired situation); and get there (the destination).
- 3) They have to define how they are going to get there (the destination).

Webb (2008: 5-7) agrees with Bowman's three principles or ideals of information management strategy, by putting his as follows, one: is "knowing where you are" which has to do with the organisation knowing its environment, in terms of market, customers, and so forth two is "knowing where you want to be" which has to do with the direction the organisation is heading to, with regards to its vision and mission statement. Three: is "knowing how to get there" which is implementing all the strategies that are available to get to the desired destination. This can only be achieved through a combined fourth of all employees of the organisation. From both Bowman and Webb's contribution, it stands out so clearly that information management strategy is a pointer to a specific direction shortly for an organisation in question. This can only happen when all employees and the managers at the different levels in the organisation work as a team with a common goal in view.

Importance of Information Management Strategy

IMS in any organisation aims to support the work of the organisation by improving the management of information in diverse ways. Namely the following but not limited to only these: (i) establishment of objectives which requires a systematic approach to planning. Choice of alternative course of action is made whereby forecasts are available and premises are established, (iii) formulation of derivative plans which serve as the sub plans or secondary plans which help in the achievement of the main plan of an organisation Gaur, (2013). An organisation such as CHRIS should develop an IMS plan because IMS serves as a blueprint for action and at the same time confirms the management commitment, approach, schedule and accountabilities required to implement sound IM and also as a project plan with one major objective which "successful implementation of IM (Bowman, 2009) Additionally, IMS serve as a navigator that directs the right course of any organisation that put IMS into practice to attain their set goals.

This is because, at the end of the organisational calendar, there will be a definite shift to success. If the strategy is followed religiously to the end plan, be it a short or long-term plan. After IMS has been imbibed and implemented, there is every need for CHIRS as an organisation to

inculcate the idea/habit of information audit for the benefit of the organisation's goal, and that takes the paper to the aspect of information audit below.

Information Audit (IA)

According to Henczel (2001:53) cited in (Orna, 1999:69), in her write up states that, there is no universally accepted definition of information audit but there is one that is adopted by ASLIB, the Association for Information Management in the UK the most appropriate as it incorporates the critical elements of information use and people. That is to say that an information audit is a process used to:

- Identify the information needs of the organisation and assign a level of strategic importance to those needs;
- Identify the resources and services currently provided to meet those needs;
- Map information flows within an organisation and between an organisation and its external environment; and
- Analyse gaps, duplications, inefficiencies and areas of over-provision that enable the identification of where changes are necessary.

According to Henezel (2000:225), “an information audit is a means by which an organisation can better understand how the tasks and activities that it supports contribute to its success”, duplication, and leakage of information”. Prytherch, (2000:349) puts it that: “Information audit is “examination and evaluation of existing information sources, services and products in an organisation, intending to develop a strategy for their more efficient and effective preparation, promotion. Based on the scholars' definitions, it is flawless to say that they complement each other in the sense that, they state clearly what information audit could and will do to any organisation if **(IA) is introduced to the organisation to assist with** the diverse transactions of the organisation successfully without any hazards, but with respects to their vision. Mission statement.

Now the issue is how can information audit assist in the evaluation, planning and monitoring of IM in an organisation? Information audit increases understanding of how an organisation works with regard to information and consequently concerning knowledge (Henczel, 2000:225). It helps in finding out what information resources and services people need to do their jobs, and how those information resources and services are used.... (P.214). More so, information audit increases understanding of how an organisation works based on the information and knowledge gathered in terms of the end product of the organisation in attaining

their goal. It also helps in finding out what information resources and services employees need to carry out their diverse jobs efficiently and effectively and how those information resources and services are truly used by employees for the common good of the organisation. Having seen how information manager (IM). **Information Management Strategy (IMS):** an information audit (IA) can assist any organisation in attaining its set goals, it is wise to say at this junction that, there is no how CHRIS could do without the library which is an information manager of old. CHRIS cannot and will not do without the library be it virtual or the physical library. Why because CHRIS is an organisation that is based in a large city that is concerned with health issues such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Disability, and so Forth.

Though it has a small staff complement both at its headquarters and in the field working as researchers; it also operates on a limited budget that is a minus. More so, CHRIS as an organisation that acts as an information agency which collects information and processes and reissues information to other users might as well operate and network with other organisations in urban and rural areas. To sum it up, the role of the library in the crisis period cannot be over-emphasized. Why because the library as an information manager enables CHRIS as an organisation to get back to work and protect, recover all the necessary information that its organisation will need by IMS that it has obtained in managing various information gathered in terms of research done before.... Similarly, Stricker, (2019:12) is of the view that.

Libraries are vital information hubs that organizations like CHRIS cannot do without and in the aftermath of a disaster, libraries take on an even greater community role, providing free access to technology and essential information to its users. This is a new, expanded role for libraries.

To illustrate further, Robertson (2005). Argues that ‘information management has meant “deploying new technology solutions, such as content or document management systems, data warehousing or portal applications” and these and many more are what the library is about today (21st century). This is why, the library as an information manager in the period of crisis could support hypothetical organisations – such as “Centre for Health Research and Information Services” (CHRIS) to bounce back on their feet, although CHRIS has a small staff complement both at its headquarters and in the field working as researchers and the budget it operates on is small. Notwithstanding, the library should not be a barrier to stopping CHRIS from working as an organisation.

CHRIS as an organisation can and could stiff make use of the library “to conduct research on appropriate health-related issues and to make relevant information available to various interested researchers, and so forth because, the library might/would always have a backup of disaster plan with their resources intact with which they will service their users of which CHRIS is one of such user.

Conclusion

Suffice it to say that, the importance of IM to an organisation such as (CHRIS) or any other organisation cannot be overstressed IM is the bedrock of IM strategy and information audit lies. Without IM, there is no way for an organisation to be able to plan, organize, lead, direct, discipline, control, and so forth, which will bring about the needed change in an organisation anywhere in the world. And with regards to the library, the same is applicable. But with regards to CHRIS, it will not be possible for them as an organisation to implement their various duties. However, if CHRIS, can adopt and apply the ten principles of information management by Robertson (2005), which are: (1). recognize (and manage) complexity: (2), focus on adoption; (3) deliver tangible & visible benefits, (4) prioritize according to business needs; (5) take a journey of a thousand steps, (6) provide strong leadership, (7), mitigate risks, (8) communicate extensively, (9), aim to deliver a seamless user experience, and choose the first project very carefully. There will be a tremendous results no matter the issues they (CHRIS) will encounter

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