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Practices in Library Staff Development: A case study of Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARAD) Library

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Abstract

This study has been conducted to judge and document the initiatives taken for staff development at the library of Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARAD) to enhance the performance of its employees for effective service delivery. This study also documents the visible change in professional improvement of library staff before and after such initiatives. The paper describes each initiative with explanation and practically applied examples showing its output and results.

This is an observational study where the data was collected through personal interviews, table-talks with employees, and annual Performance Evaluation Reports (PERs) of the subjects. Current and retrospective staff of PARAD library have participated in this study and provided their candid feedback.

The library job, unlike other jobs, is isolated and is limited to perform one-type of job description. Therefore, the library staff are not openly exposed to avail staff development opportunities. The study concludes that techniques (discussed in this paper and practically executed) are useful to develop competencies of library staff in order to be more fruitful. Annual Performance Evaluation Reports, individual interview results, and users' feedback on overall library performance is evident to show that staffs, have benefited both personally and professionally from such activities. Staff development activities taken at PARAD library has not only developed the skills at individual level but also contributed to achieve the organizational goals.

This paper presents original viewpoint by the authors based on the observation, interviews and examining the performance evaluation report of the subject population. A kind of first ever study conducted on development of library staff in Pakistan.

Introduction

Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARAD), Peshawar is one of oldest premiere national institutions in Pakistan, established in 1957. It is an autonomous organization, established under societies act. The academy is recognized as center of excellence for human recourse development by United Nations' Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since 1997 [1]. PARAD has three basic obligations, i.e., a.) to impart in-service training, b.) conduct research on different issues of rural development, and c.) to experiment pilot projects in the same areas. Looking at emerging needs of rural development, short thematic courses are designed for government functionaries. Quantitatively 1146 courses have been organized till December 1, 2012 which includes 616 regular, 295 special, 76 short, 103 decentralized, and 56 courses for foreigners. Number of participants trained are 34424 as up to December 1, 2012.

Staff development (hereinafter used as SD) activities in PARAD are not new. Being a training and research organization, PARAD has taken up initiatives to build its capacity over the last 30 years. Conducting Training of Trainers (ToT) programs, sending faculty abroad for training, job rotations, introducing research-based trainings, conducting training need assessments, engaging employees in experimentation projects, collaborating with other organizations for resource sharing have been an active role of PARAD that contributed for the development and capacity building of staff working at different cadres.

The staff development activities give liberty to hang loose, refresh their minds, and get ready with new zeal and zest for the work. Staff development initiatives adopted for library staffs aimed to prepare both for the current role as well as to equip them to face the challenges and changes of the future. It is noticed that traditionally, three elements are taken into consideration for the library staff development process: (i) practical involvement of employees, (ii) field visits to similar organizations and (iii) specialized training sessions that helps building the capacity of staff to use the job related technologies and resources effectively and efficiently [2].

Methodology and Objectives:

This study examines and record viewpoints of the staff that benefited from SD activities. Data was collected from Performance Evaluation Reports, table-talks with library workers, meetings and interviews of library professional and para-professional staff. Objectives were to document the initiatives taken for library staff development in organization and to describe each initiative with practical example. Inter-related other objectives of this study are to:

1. Overview and document the practice of SD activities and its implications on staff
2. Examine the performance evaluation reports of staff in order to judge the outcome of SD initiatives

3. Evaluate the overall progress of staff development (SD) initiatives taken at PARD library
4. Examine the change in performance of staffs for effective service delivery

What is Staff Development?

Staff development is broadly defined as Professional Development by Wikipedia. “Staff development refers to the processes, programs and activities through which every organization develops, enhances and improves the skills, competencies and overall performance of its employees and workers.” [3]. University of Georgia, in their staff development policy, defines that “Staff development can be viewed as the activities and programs (formal or informal and on or off campus) that help staff members learn about responsibilities, develop required skills and competencies necessary to accomplish institutional and divisional goals and purposes, and grow personally and professionally to prepare themselves for advancement”[4]

Library Staff Development is the process directed towards the personal and professional growth of employees and other personnel while they are in direct contact with public dealing activities like librarians, information professionals and other library staff are doing. According to Joanne Trepp [5], staff development is:

- *“Program which guides & encourages employees to acquire knowledge, increase their Skills, & develop their abilities on a continuing basis*
- *Coordinated effort to help employees learn to do their jobs better*
- *Continuous improvement of the organization through the growth & development of the individual to increase the effectiveness of all staff”*

Effective staff development program try to create recognizable link between the personal and professional growth of staff, its development needs and the objectives of the organization or service in support of the achievement of the corporate objectives. The program should also be committed to the philosophy of being acknowledged and seek out to expand the development standards and opportunities for all staff. [4]

From the above discussion, we conclude that in general, the formal and informal staff development activities may consist of Continuing education (to acquire knowledge for scholastic reasons), in-service trainings (on-job training opportunity provided for learning within agency/section to assist staff for better service delivery), training for specific functions (developing expert technical and manual skills; helps the personnel to perform functions effectively), induction training (the process of socializing by which an individual absorbs the organizational goals and objective for the achievement of personal growth), skill enhancement (gaining or improving psychomotor, cognitive, teaching, effective, communicative & supervisory skills), attitudinal and behavioral improvement, executive development (develop

management skills), ongoing trainings, on the job training, orientations (to help the new workers to become proficient as soon as possible).

Why Staff Development? Review of Literature

Staff development programs are the foundation of workforce development and ensuring that employees have the appropriate essential knowledge, skills and competence to undertake their roles. Olaniyan [6] concludes that training builds the capacity of an employee and by doing so it reduces the workload of supervisors. Gallagher [7] is of the opinion that manager is supposed to be willing to give extra time to staffs to be well prepared for new assignments. Holderied [8] (giving his real life experiences) explained that whatever is done in a systematic manner to improve productivity, well-being and efficiency of personnel can be considered as staff development. Allan [9] described the rationale for staff development and discussed multiple methods and tools for workplace learning for library staff. The main idea behind this motivation is the improvement of library. Groves [10] discussed techniques of how library staff can deal with their upset patrons efficiently. Kealy [11] concluded that some core skills required by library staff are not always learnt in through formal programs or in the workplace, but can be imparted through other means. Adams [12] almost taken up the similar study aiming to describe the activities of a 'staff development committee' at an academic library in New Zealand. Adams' study attempted to examine the procedure and product in terms of outcomes.

Staff development is mistakenly taken as troublesome all-day training sessions. This apprehension is the other way round of how staff development should occur and feel to employees. Staff development can exhibit itself in different types and forms of continuing education activities i.e. trainings, workshops, work shadowing, mentoring, trial and error, coaching, delegation, job rotation, open learning programs, and feedback. *"If executed correctly, the effects of training on employee performance can often encourage growth within the worker and the organization itself"* [13]

A staff development program, ranging from continuing education to higher education, to even basic job skills training, have a certain cost and direct benefits to the employee. This not only enhances job satisfaction for employees but also led to greater loyalty to the organization. Training, education and experiences that adds up to employees' resume are worthwhile attainable in this regard.

Evaluation of staff development is closely related with evaluation of learning activities which can be viewed in number of ways. One such method was developed by Donald Kirkpatrick, who described four levels for program evaluation i.e. reaction, learning, behavior and results. The first level describes or focuses on the target group in terms of their reactionary change toward environment. The second level is the growth in knowledge, skills and attitude as

a result of series of activities being undertaken. The third level similarly measures the attitudinal change in workplace. The fourth level measures the qualitative results in the target group.

Staff Development Vs. Professional Development

Well most of the times both terms are used simultaneous and alternatively to each other. Staff development is broadly referred as Professional Development by Wikipedia also. Online search on Wikipedia for the term “Staff Development” is redirected to “Professional Development”. Similarly extensive searching on different scholarly material revealed that both terms are usually used alternatively to each other. Looking at the basic functions and objectives of staff development which defines that SD is more likely intended towards job-related skills i.e. technical skills, workplace learning, and professional competencies. SD activities required where productivity and efficiency needs to be improved. Professional Development (PD) basically intends to enhance career-related skills which has broader spectrum than staff development activities. PD activities help create more professional employee while it is also inclined towards professionalism and personal growth.

Staff Development Activities at PARD Library

PARD Library was established in 1957 with the inception of its parent organization. It has a collection of more than 80,000 publications and 14 staff members are currently working in different capacities mentioned in table 1.

Beside permanent staff members, one Research Associate in BPS-17 is deputed to library on rotation basis to renders his/her services for some definite time helping in the research activities of the library staff.

Before getting into specific tactics and details taken up for staff development done at PARD library and discuss real life examples, let me describe that activities, mentioned hereunder, pertaining to staff development, focuses on four categories i.e. knowledge, skills, talent and experience.

Professional training opportunities play major role to enhance knowledge and skills. Professional and non-professional staffs of library are enrolled in different workshops held at the academy to sharpen their skills and improve their knowledge of work environment and technical skills. This initiative helps to build their horizon about specific library activities and inculcated positive attitude towards learning and seeking. Special lectures on *Professional Ethics*, *Professionalism in the work Environment*, *Customer Satisfaction* and *humaneering* provided inspirational and motivational values to staffs.

Project team—in this technique two or more employees, often from different sections, brought together to carry out a defined project. Library strengthening and upgradation project was

launched in 2008 to strengthen and upgrade the available resources of the library for better service delivery to the users. All employees were grouped for different tasks in order to involve them practically in the process of learning by doing. This action not only enhanced their knowledge of project cycle management but also developed their skills of report writing, tabulation works and creating summaries, presenting data, and managing events. The project involved different work assignments and for each assignment variant groups were formed to carry out assigned tasks i.e. reporting on software development component, evaluating deployment of electronic material, proposing suggestions for renovation work, selecting furniture items, designing interiors and suggesting decoration of different sections.

Table 1: Library Staff in PARD

S.No	Designation	Basic Pay scale (BPS)	Working Experience¹
1	Research Librarian	18	10 years
2	Assistant Research Librarian	17	14 years
3	Publication Officer	17	07 years
4	Research Associate (IT)	17	07 years
5	Library Assistant 1 (male)	16	10 years
6	Cataloguer/Artist	16	09 years
7	Library Assistant 2 (Female)	14	05 years
8	Stenographer	14	06 years
9	Calligrapher/Computer Operator	11	12 years
10	Book Binder	07	09 years
11	Photographer	07	09 years
12	Projectionist	07	14 years
13	Library Attendant 1	01	10 years
14	Library Attendant 2	01	08 years

¹ As on August 24, 2012 at the time of writing this paper

Problem solving groups— Individuals perform professional activities during their entire professional career but are normally unaware of novelty, creation and innovation to be adopted for better understanding of related affairs. Library staff (from different sections) is brought together to examine work-related issues and to solve a particular problem. For example two employees were given task to redesign shelving system for the library. Both of them came up with different suggestions—although both suggestions were not workable at the end. In second example two groups of employees were engaged in evaluating the searching module of newly developed software where both groups provided healthy feedback. These measures created a sense of competition, creation and being practically involved in an innovative process. Allan [9] calls this method ‘Delphi Technique’

Buddy system—as a normal practice, colleagues support each other in office work either formally or informally. Group activities promote learning from each other and can take a variety of different forms. Group assignments are significant to improve group dynamics and participatory learning environment. The library staff is involved in buddy system to learn from each other. This technique further helps in creating group dynamics, sense of volunteerism and group work spirit between the employees. For example during library automation process a bulk of work spine labeling, shelving, captioning, data entry etc. was performed in groups turn by turn. One group was directed to teach the process to the next group. Considerable growth of volunteerism and group work spirits seen in staff when giving them an opportunity to learn different skills from each other.

Secondment— Monotonous work environment is boring and sometimes create lethargy and dullness. New responsibilities and new challenges can be a paradigm shift for library employees to impart new ideas, and skills enhancement by getting them engaged in a diversified activities and not to let them down to sinecure or become redundant. At the same time it keeps one’s adaptability and skillfulness to different roles. Keeping in view this phenomenon, the library staff is shifted from one section to another and handed over diversified tasks. This technique provides an opportunity for the staff to learn and work with new assignments. For example, special task or a different position is assigned to a staff member for a period of time. It is shifting of responsibilities from one section to another to train them in different work environments.

Avocation—undertaking an extra activity in addition to current duties provide ample opportunity for staff to foster their skills. For example library staffs were involved in management, facilitation/coordination with training course participants (held at the academy), preparation of case studies, supervision and guidance of internees. It is also noticed that attachment with internees has considerably enhanced the teaching and training skills of the employees and increased their cultural, personal and social knowledge. Employees were also involved in presentations during training courses conducted in the academy. Avocation

technique can greatly contribute to expose the potentials of a person's pleasurable and uplift in the level of job satisfaction.

Meet-N-Greet—In order to be alive and functioning effectively with regards to staff development, it is of greatest importance to congregate and exchange ideas about work environment and improvements. Ongoing meetings on regular basis automatically remind staff at once to plan and move ahead. The objective behind managing frequency of meetings is to retain the level of understanding between the supervisor and the worker. This not only enables the staff to overcome the communication gap but also helps to keep up momentum.

Field Trips— Field trips are useful tool that provide experiential learning outside of the work environment. The doctrine behind this situated learning experience is to analyze the event in terms of concepts surrounding the knowledge so as to develop a deeper understanding. As part of the training workshops the staffs take part in a variety of trips to enhance and contextualize their learning. A series of visits to different organizations have been conducted not only to provide an additional method of investigation and experiential learning but to giving them a good room to network away from the workplace. The trip itself encourages staff to engage and avail the opportunity to gain hands on experience where possible. However, contents of the training program are always directly relevant to the context of the field trip to allow participants to spend time reflecting.

Professional Skills Training—professional skills are the foundation of success at every organization. Employees are often brought together in a formal setting to learn about technical skills like software usage, internet browsing etc. Professional skill training ensures greater efficiency, greater staff motivation, provision of better and higher quality of services, and to gain work related benefits also. This segment includes training workshops on LIMS, using electronic DDC & Number building techniques on Web Dewey, Browsing online databases for focused topics, and developing expertise on open-source and free library software.

Technology Guidance—the staffs, in separated sessions, was put up to work on acquired technologies i.e. use of barcode readers, implanting electromagnetic strips in books, magnetizing and demagnetizing process of electromagnetic strips, setting up fire alarm and control system, emergency and disaster management tips, to manage general surveillance system installed in the library and how to use book theft controlling system. Opportunities have been provided in different sessions to use Z39.5 module of the newly developed software which uses Search and retrieve via Uniform Resource Locator (SRU). Timely guidance, training and knowledge, and practical involvement in different technologies make the staff alive in carrying out routine tasks.

Specialized Trainings—creating staff development plan in the area of technology integration is an exceptionally difficult and competitive task. Conceivable results of a good program and the significance of technology to the learning process demands that such events must carefully be

designed, implemented, executed and evaluated. Staff work-related specialized training sessions on newly developed library management system, electronic and web dewey systems used for building class number electronically were provided. Similarly sessions on web Dewey and online databases used for searching e-books in social sciences, socio-economic issues were also conducted. The library staff has also been given opportunity to work on other computerized library management systems (other than the one implemented in the library) including working on other library software i.e. WinISIS² and LIMS³. These software are widely used in small libraries in Pakistan, having all basic features which gives help understanding the fundamental concept of computerization of library material. This action was useful to equip library staff to train the new internees on small library software.

Incentives— Although incentives can not be directly regarded as staff development activity rather it is an indirect way to enhance performance of the employees. Moreover, performance appraisal is an integral part of performance management, therefore, it is of the utmost requirement to give fringe benefits in shape of honorarium and awards to the staffs. This is done once in a year on equal basis to avoid any discrimination among the employees.

Future Planning

Meaningful staff development plan is inevitable to improve organizational professional practice and learning. Planning for staff development reflect organizational objectives, it helps gaining self-awareness, seeking outside input in order to be up-to-date, developing action steps to improve job satisfaction and change in the very short term, and setting up longer term goals for the new areas to be explored. It is, therefore, that the administration has setup future plans for staff development and is working to incorporate some measures in the future.

Lunch-N-Learn—to arrange a speaker dilate upon technical or general issues regarding library matters followed by a lunch and discussion by the staffs.

Specialized Lecture—invite national scholar to speak about specific topic chosen by the staff themselves.

Invite company—to invite multinational company to display/demonstrate their products pertaining to library and information sciences. This may also include technical and professional equipments of latest technologies.

² Windows Integrated Set of Information System, open source software developed by UNESCO.

³ LIMS (Library Information Management System), a free software available through the platform of PAKLAG (Pakistan Library Automation Group) was initially installed for computerization and data entry in PARD library.

Off-campus training opportunities—currently staff development program include in-campus training opportunities for library staff. It is planned in future to send library staff to attend trainings and workshops outside the campus. This not only will enhance their learning capacities but also will help to get an outer exposure of other libraries.

Resource mobilization and HR initiatives—this technique will be applied on experimental basis to send library staff to render their services for a specified duration in other libraries such as to help them in data conversion, correction of bibliographic records, provide useable tips for library automation and digitization etc.

Staff development portal—to create an online portal for library staff development that would help library staff to choose from variety of special tasks, develop their horizon and participate voluntarily in different staff development activities. Furthermore, this portal will help new inducted staff and internees as well.

Policy Formulation—this is now needed significantly to develop well formulated staff development policy and get it approved from the higher authorities so as to continue staff development activities smoothly and regularly in future.

CONCLUSION

Staff development activities are as important for library staff as it is practiced in other occupations. Contrasting other jobs, the library employees are isolated and are confined to perform almost similar tasks. Thus, chances are reduced to get benefited to work in different cadres and avail staff development opportunities.

Different staff development activities taken at PARD library are evident that library staff has considerably developed their competencies. PERs of the last 4 years showing that staffs have gain necessary skills and are performing in diversified fields. The staffs, who used to do one job, are now much more equipped to do several jobs and can perform additional assignments in a benefited manner. These activities has not only developed the library staff professionally and personally but also contributed to achieve the organizational goals.

Informal individual interviews, conducted with employees, has revealed that they have developed expertise on database, software, digitization and automation activities and techniques without having formal education. Moreover, other improvements include behavioral and attitudinal values, working effectively and efficiently with routine matters, improving quality of work, reducing turnover time, easy operations and getting acquaintance with new tools, machines and methods, enhancing competencies to handle stressed situations, command over related technologies, and improving skills in research and report writing are some designated

areas identified by the staffs themselves that make cause as part of professional and personal development.

Real life examples, observations and activities discussed in this paper clearly indicate that the PARD library believes in staff development opportunities to be motivating driving force that enhances efficiency and productivity in professional as well as personal life. This has not only developed their capacity but also established their temperament in the workplace. Effective modus operandi to staff development elucidates new ways to encourage professional growth.

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