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Information Flow Patterns in Organizations: The Library in Focus

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Introduction

Information flows in a circular format, just like water flows from one place to another even into people's houses, shops and offices like crude oil flowing in pipelines into people's cars and generators, so does information pervade every facet of society. An example is when a lecturer in a class passed information to students and requires a feed back from them.

According to Opara (2003) information is the life blood of modern organizations. That is to say that without information, an organization is bound to collapse. Information is needed to control the day-to-day running of an organization. Olowu (2004) says that information entails data, facts, imaginations, ideas, opinions, cultural values in a variety of media which includes print, audio-visual materials and electronic processes. This shows how information flows within and between cultural groups. The dynamic aspect of information flow represents an important part of Nissan (2002) alternative conceptualization, which focuses on transaction (e.g. data to information, information to knowledge). This means that data are necessary to produce information which in turn is necessary for creating knowledge that is conveyed (e.g. via paper, network, speech, observable action). Aguolu (2002) sees information as the message of human experience; that is, what is transmitted as signal, or a stimulus, that it assumes a response in the receiver, and therefore possesses a response potential. The message can be made on any subject, in any language and in any medium.

Concepts of Information

Psychologists have described information dissemination or communication as a need comparable with other basic needs while philosophers posit that the free flow of information is a right of the people which enables them to participate effectively in the process of economic and socio-political activities in the society and enhances education, knowledge and the learning process. For people to take calculated and appropriate decisions on issues that affect them, Eze (1999) while Agolu (2002) believe that the presence of information creates options and sets the stage for meaningful decision-making.

Information constitutes the raw materials from which options or alternatives emerge. Appe (2002) in her paper from State intervention to cultural synthesism in Bogota Columbia writes that in order to solve revolving problems between guerrilla groups, paramilitary militias, and drug trafficking, Columbia's cultural sector produced an art. The art acknowledges such rights as cultural autonomy and fostering communication and information flow in languages and in ways appropriate to diverse cultural communities see the Columbian Ministry of Culture (2002). The aim of information or communication is to educate, enlighten and provide knowledge which in turn transform people's outlook by what they know. By dissemination of information which includes communicating news of various events, day-today happenings in a community, which could be local,

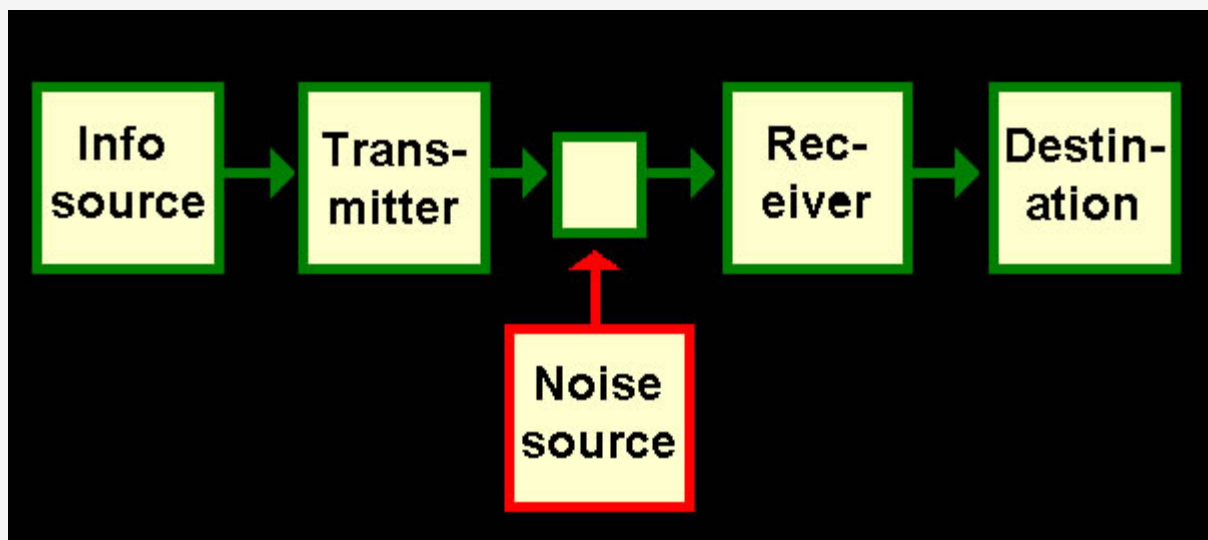
national or international to the people, they become enlightened and educated in various issues, through the knowledge acquired. The knowledge enhances understanding and gives good orientation which invariably generates the transformation of self and which in turn creates peace and tranquility within and between cultural groups Eze, (1999). Information is important for the mental, material, cultural and political development of the people

Theories of Information Flow

The Shannon-Weaver information Model of Communication. This information theory was propounded by Shannon and Weaver in 1947. It was originally concerned principally with communication technology, but later the theory was modified to suit students of human communication in 1949, thus necessitating the application of Shannon-Weaver idea to human communication which includes face-to-face interactions as opposed to mainly using the radio, newspapers or the telephone. However, they produced a general model of communication, which can be adapted to other fields, including library and information service.

Figure 1 represents the Shannon-Weaver general model of communication

The Shannon-Weaver model



The Shannon-Weaver model (1947) proposes that all communications must include six elements:-

- Source
- Encoder
- Message
- Channel
- Decoder
- Receiver

In a typical situation the Reference librarian becomes the source. The receiver is the user/clientele, while the channel is through books, audio-visuals, computers, journals, newspapers, magazines etc.

Apart from the Shannon-Weaver mode of communication there are also the traditional or classical theorists and the contemporary theorist who are of the view as stated bellow:

Traditional or Classical Perspective of Communication in an organization	Contemporary perspective or alternative perspective
Observation: They believe that information flows with fidelity. Which means faithfulness or	Believes that information does not flow with fidelity that it is subject to distortion.

loyalty to a person	
Information that flows can be predictable. Information released can be predicted to reach all the strata	Information flow is not predictable
Information flows with regularity	The contemporary perspective views information as being characterized by irregularity e.g. A circular released by the university librarian that is to be passed round to all the staff can be withheld by a member of staff who may not want others to get the information. A newspaper vendor may refuse to supply a paper, thereby, denying users access to information.
Information flows from sources to receiver. Continuity	However, the contemporary theorists are of the view that information flowing sometimes runs into a dead end and can discontinue.
Reliability	Instability

In the library situation a book may be available, but due to a possible back-log of unprocessed books, the user may not get access to the book he/she wanted. Another example is that a book that is processed and has been shelved can be mutilated by a user thereby denying others access to that information.

Application of theories to library and information science

The librarians have been described as the veritable mediators between man and a vast array of information resources Aguolu (2002) in library administration, the librarian's objective is to ensure that the goals of the library are met. He can achieve these using his staff. The intended message/instructions as observed in figure 4 would be framed by the librarian and passed down to his heads of sections or units. The unit heads would in turn pass these instructions down to their respective subordinates at the receiving end. The answers to the instructions are further supplied to the unit heads who would in turn pass these answers upwards to the librarian in-charge. The answers so received by librarian in-charge are what would guide him in decision making, budget preparation, annual reports and also management briefing in course of the organizational managements meetings.

In library, the free flow of information between the librarian in-charge and his subordinates is essential for the library to achieve its goal. The flow of material sources in the library affords the staff sufficient opportunity to deliver their duties effectively.

In fact the librarian is the mediator between man and information resources and if one discusses information flow without mentioning the librarian the discussion can never be complete. The librarian works relentlessly to make sure that information flows and that the users are satisfied.

Conclusion

The paper was able to establish the fact that the free flow of information among library staff and between the clientele is necessary and should not be ignored but should rather be taken with all seriousness. There is no way organization can operate effectively and efficiently without information. It is through information flow that librarians in-charge of libraries can plan, direct, co-ordinate and motivate their members of staff. Equally, the librarians get the feedback about the performance of their libraries from their clientele through the free flow of information.

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