CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN MANAGEMENT: IMPERATIVES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

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Abstract

This paper examines creativity and innovation in management as a concern to academic librarians. It provides conceptual background on creativity and innovation. The paper explains the functions of academic libraries and suggests steps in establishing a climate for creativity and innovation. The rationale for creativity and innovation in academic libraries and characteristics of creative and innovative librarians are addressed to a large extent. The paper also identifies some challenges to creativity and innovations in information system as poor research ability, poor thinking habit, inadequate funding, poor staff attitude, low technological literacy, lack of reward system and bureaucracy. The paper concludes that where creativity and innovations are lacking, the library fails to provide quality information resources and services to users. This is evidenced in low users' patronage, poor students' performance, poor research output, etc. The paper recommends among others that library managers should create a climate for creativity and innovations by way of accepting changes in library activities, rewarding creative and innovative skills, encouraging library staff training and re-training, and managing failure in the library system despite all odds.

Key Words: Creativity, Innovation, Academic Libraries, Academic Librarians

Introduction

In recent times, the quest for quality education has received widespread international attention. Some of the most important issues under consideration have been creativity and innovations in the entire educational system including library. The library as the nerve centre of academic activities in educational systems has to embrace creativity and innovations in all ramifications. This guarantees the provision of information resources and services to the highest degree in all academic fields of its clientele. Creativity and innovation, often used interchangeably, are the catalyst that transform the library environment, information resources and services in the digital era of 21st century. According to Hornby (2010), creativity simply means the ability to create or introduce new ideas that could be used to solve problems. It connotes originality. Innovation, on the other hand, can be regarded as the modification or improvement on the existing ideas to solve problems. The two concepts are necessary in the management of libraries especially with the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in information handling and delivery.

The new and emerging technologies which drive creativity and innovations in libraries have significantly influenced the library environment, making it more attractive with modern facilities that could make reading interesting. Creativity and innovation have transformed the library, especially in developed world, into a one-stop information centre where there are parking lots, cafeteria, convenience, recreational unit, conference room, reprographic unit and a lot more. These facilities make library users comfortable to an extent and learning less burdensome. The provision of quality information resources such books, journals, government document, reference resources, Africana collection, etc in print and non-print formats could be enhanced through creativity and innovations. Apart from the library facilities and information resources provision, the potential power of creativity and innovations in librarianship has also challenged the traditional methods of managing libraries in terms of information services delivery. Akintunde (2006) observes that many university libraries in Nigeria are still managed traditionally. This has resulted in organizational inertia causing a high rate of dissatisfaction with the

level of library services, among students, researchers, teaching and non-teaching staff, and the entire education stakeholders. This is an indication that most academic libraries have not adopted creative and innovative approaches to library management.

Library and information professionals otherwise known as academic librarians must be seen as vanguard for creativity and innovations in university libraries because they direct library activities and provide expertise needed for quality services delivery. Academic librarians are professional librarians with academic status who have been acquired formal education in the art and science of information acquisition, handling, management, and services. The conditions for academic status of librarians are the same with those of other academic staff in the university. They assume leadership, management, and supervisory roles in libraries thus, serving mostly as library managers, deputy library managers, and heads of divisions or units in the library. Considering these higher responsibilities, it means the progress of university libraries is inextricably linked with the number of creative and innovative academic staff present in such libraries. This signals that if library managers must be relevant and gain competitive advantages in information professions, improve and sustain the quality of information services, and reposition the library in its place of relevance, creativity and innovations should be integrated into the management of such libraries. Consequently, this paper examines creativity and innovations in management as it concerns academic librarians.

Creativity and Innovations: Conceptual Framework

Creativity and innovations are concepts that are related in a way but also different from each other. Creativity is the essential first step to innovations. That means, there cannot be any innovation without creativity. Creativity is the ability to visualize, foresee, and generate new ideas. Innovation, on the other hand, means the use of the new ideas to enhance products or services. The two concepts are mostly used in librarianship to connote revolutionary strategy which permeates new ways of doing things in libraries and information centres. They are associated with the rapid advances in Information Technologies (ITs) applicable to information acquisition, storage, and delivery. Creativity is the bringing into existence a new idea that can be used in solving a particular problem. It is the ability and power to produce ideas that are both novel and valuable which could be adopted to overcome challenges. To Rao (2012), creativity is simply the ability to imagine or invent something, better still, generate new ideas by combining, changing, or reapplying existing ideas. Creativity is the product of hard mental exercise which involves going beyond the usual situations and carrying out gradual alterations and refinements over a period of time in order to discover a better, improved, and readily accepted way of doing things. Creativity, as noted by Zaid and Oyelude (2012), involves the application of new methods to familiar ways to meet library users' expectations and needs. According to the authors, creativity, sometimes need not involve fiercely original ideas but simply the modifications of a well-known idea or approach for a desired result.

Innovations, on the other hand, is the process of creating and implementing new ideas. According to Hornby (2010), innovations simply means the introduction of new things, ideas or ways of doing something. It is the ability to apply new ideas that will enable one to undertake activities differently. In other words, it is all about using individual initiative, imagination, intuition, and insight to change things around or devise ways of doing things to accommodate new situations (Anyanwu, 2010). To Trott (2005), innovation is viewed as the management of all the activities in the process of idea generation, technological development, manufacturing and marketing of new or improved products or services. The author notes that innovation could be basically applicable to product/service development and process development. Rao (2012) notes that there are many types of innovations considering the fact that new ideas take many forms. According to the author, technical innovation is the creation of new information products and services, process innovation involves creating a new means of producing and distributing the information products and services, and administrative innovation involves the creation of management designs that support the production and delivery of the information products and services.

Suffice to note that creativity and innovations are *sine qua non* in library management for achieving library goals and objectives.

Functions of Academic Libraries

Every organization is established for a purpose. To attain that purpose, there must be sets of activities undertaken by such organization. Be that as it may, any university library engages in a lot of activities to provide relevant information resources and services in support of learning, teaching, and research activities in the host institution. In other words, the library selects, acquires, organizes, disseminates, and delivers quality information resources and services to facilitates its functions which are guided by the goals and objectives of the university. According to Okiy (2006) and Etim (2010), the functions of University library includes the following:

i.   Provision of information resources to support learning and teaching activities in all the academic programmes of the parent institution. Such information resources include core textbooks, reference sources, journals, electronic resources, etc.

ii. Making available adequate information resources for research purposes which should be in consonance with the needs of the Academic Faculties and researchers.

iii. Provision of dependable standard works especially in professional disciplines.

iv. Ensuring availability of relevant information resources for recreational and personal development of library clientele.

v.   Provision of specialized information on the segments of the wider community within which the university is situated.

vi. Provision of study accommodation that could enhance reading and increase users' patronage.

vii. Linking with other academic libraries with a view to developing a network of academic library resources that are at the disposal of all scholars.

viii. Provision of a wide range of information services that could facilitate effective and efficient use of information resources available in the library.

In view of the variety of these functions, academic librarians often described as "knowledge managers" must change their approaches to library management (Akwang, 2014). The author stresses that without prioritization of innovative management in librarianship and attentions of academic librarians, libraries will be totally incapacitated and unable to compete globally.

Rationale for Creativity and Innovation in Academic Libraries

The integration of creativity and innovation into library services cannot be overemphasized. This is in view of the present technological advancement, increasing demand for convenience, and high demand for sophisticated information by library users. The rationale for innovation and creativity in academic library include the following:

i.   To create positive impact on information services activities such as acquisition, processing, packaging, re-packaging, organization, dissemination, storage and retrieval of data and information.

ii. To enhance effective information usage, thus building library users' loyalty as a result of enhanced services, quality resources, and transformed library environment.

iii. To ensure meaningful interaction between library users and information, thus enhancing their skills and competences.

iv. To accommodate differences in library users' information searching behaviour and remove barriers to information access by providing new learning opportunities and experiences.

v.   To reposition academic libraries in their place of relevance in the information conscious society.

vi. To equip library professionals with relevant skills needed to gain competitive advantages in the face of global opportunities.

Steps in Establishing a Climate for Creativity and Innovation in Libraries

Creativity and innovation are best sources of organizational success. Library as an organization should not be left out if it must succeed. Therefore, there must be a permissive atmosphere that encourages creativity and innovation in the library. According to Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert (2009), steps to establish creative and innovative climate in organizations including library are:

i. **Accept Change:** There is an understanding that many library managers find it difficult to embrace change. Perhaps, due to the challenges that come with it, they are uncomfortable with a continuing process of change, which is the essential accompaniment of creativity and innovation. Therefore, librarians must believe that change will benefit them and the libraries as well. This belief is more likely to arise if library staff (professionals, para-professionals and support staff) are properly informed or educated on the need for and logic of the change to all members of staff.

ii. **Encourage New Ideas:** Academic librarians see themselves and their ideas as the best even when such ideas may be obsolete. With this notion, most of them refuse to sought for or recognize valuable sources of new ideas. To establish a climate for creativity and innovation, librarians in leadership positions either at the top or low level must make it clear in word and deed that they welcome new approaches to information services delivery. In addition, suggestions from other library staff at various levels must be listened to, analyzed, and implemented if the suggestions support growth and efficiency.

iii. **Foster Interaction Among Staff:** Interaction is one factor that improves camaraderie and communication among staff in a workplace. It enhances teamwork which should be progressively enhanced in libraries. Academic librarians in their respective divisions and units need to give individual staff the opportunity to interact with others within the same division or library in order to exchange useful information on challenging issues in the library. Again, librarians like any other professionals in other academic fields have the opportunity of interacting with colleagues during conferences, workshops, symposiums, and other similar gatherings. Such interactions bring about free flow ideas that could culminate into new methods or processes of solving problems relating to information acquisition, organization, repackaging, delivery, and the entire information system.

iv. **Create a Fun-loving Culture:** Although, it is often believed that performing task efficiently demands a high level of seriousness from the staff. It is also pertinent to know that having fun in a workplace could encourage learning and discovery. According to Rao (2012), a climate with a certain (child-like but not childish) playfulness in the air lets people try things out without knowing what will happen. Academic librarians need to ease tensions and conflicts in libraries by creating a fun-loving culture. This could be evidenced when staff working under them always wear smiles on their faces, tease and joke with one another. The author notes that jokes are about unexpected things, as are creative and innovative. Making joke is, in itself, a very creative activity, and develops the "creative muscle" needed to constantly innovate. In other words, creating a fun-loving culture in libraries could enhance workplace collaboration as well foster organizational creativity and innovation.

v. **Establish a Reward System:** A good reward system is an energizer that could be used to induce staff behaviour towards the achievement of organizational goals. That means, library staff need to be rewarded for a task well done. There are many forms of rewards which may be grouped as financial rewards otherwise known as "hard benefits" and non-financial rewards also called "soft benefits". Financial rewards are bonus and salary increase, study fellowship, tour allowance, subsidized or free health care, paid time-off, etc. Non-financial

rewards are recognition, praise, appreciation, applause and celebrations, awards, alternative work schedule, etc. By rewarding creative staff, the library managers demonstrate that creative and innovative behaviour is valued. This will not only motivate the staff concerned to higher productivity level but it will motivate others to emulate the valued behaviour, thus, creating room for organizational creativity and innovation.

vi.   **Provide Clear Objectives and Freedom to Achieve Them:** Every organization including library must have a purpose for creativity and innovations. Academic libraries as service organizations consider user satisfaction an overriding priority. Today's competitive information environment brought especially by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has caused library users to expect more ever-improving levels of services, in terms of quality, reliability, and delivery from their libraries. Therefore, library managers need to make clear the purpose, objectives, and directions for creativity and innovation. The provision of guidelines and reasonable constraints could give library managers some control over certain factors like the amount of time, number and cadre of staff, financial resources needed, etc.

vii. **Accept and Manage Failure:** Failure is a state or condition of not meeting a desirable or intended objectives. It can be so devastating and unwelcoming especially when the expectations and involvement are high. It is pertinent to note that many new ideas, methods, procedures generated with the aim of creating positive impact on library environment could prove impractical or useless. This could be attributed to a lot of factors such as incompetent personnel, lack of commitment, compression of ideas, inappropriate assumptions, etc. No doubt, failure could discourage many library managers from nurturing creativity and innovations but the fact remains that failure could be regarded as a liability of newness. Sometimes, organizations that survived over a long term could have failed overtime. Library managers need to accept and manage failure by way of re-examining ideas in a more effective manner, minimize internal and external influences and pressures, put in human and financial resources to the best advantage, integrate all the relevant workgroups, and monitor the implementation process critically.

Characteristics of Creative and Innovative Librarians

Generally, creative people are those individuals who possess the ability of developing new ideas. Whereas innovative people are those individuals who make use of the ideas. Etuk in Ossai-Onah, Amaechi, Oduagwu, and Oduagwu (2013) describes creative and innovative librarians as those individuals who are capable of developing, retaining, and expressing a substantial portion of innate potentials with which all humans are born and equipped towards organizational growth. In a way, creative and innovative librarians do not allow such potentials to be suppressed by life experience at home or at workplace, or by any conceptual blockage. According to the authors, some of the characteristics of creative and innovative librarians are discussed as follows:

i.   **Technology Literate:** Technology happens to be a catalyst for radical change facilitated by creativity and innovation. Therefore, a librarian who is creative and innovative must discover, learn and understanding how and when to use ICT tools, and specialize in the use of the tools. In other words, librarians who develop and apply ICT literacy to make a change in handling professional tasks are creative and innovative. Again, technological literate librarians have access to global information on what is happening in other libraries and information centres via Internet, Telnet, Gopher, Archie, and other Internet-aided facilities. The information gathered could be cross-fertilize and translated to usable creativity and innovation.

ii.   **Insightful:** For a librarian to be creative and innovative, he or she must have deep insight into the realities of librarianship. Being insightful means that librarians need to ask relevant questions, investigate procedures, and explore opportunities to be able to arrive at dependable solutions to

problems related to the profession. In other words, creative and innovative librarians should be inquisitive and curious to know the new things or happenings in their profession.

iii. **Zealous:** Zeal is a great force, energy, or enthusiasm connected with something that one feels strongly about. It happens to be one of the factors that drives creativity and innovation. For a librarian to be creative and innovative, there must be such driving force that will always propels him or her to think of and seek for new ways of information handling.

iv. **Persistent:** Creative and innovative librarians need to display some level of persistence when seeking unique solutions to problems. Although, it is a common thing to see library managers surrender when they are on the brink of solutions maybe because they lack courage and self-confidence which does not stimulate creativity and innovation in libraries. Library managers must be unrelenting in generating, developing, and implementing ideas and approaches that support positive change in the library and library profession.

v. **Competent:** Competency reveals one's skill for doing a particular job or task. Creative and innovative librarians need to maintain a high level of competence in performing all library tasks. They need to be best brains especially in this technological age. Being creative and innovative enable them to provide solutions to challenging situations encountered by library staff in the process of performing library tasks.

vi. **Analytical Minded:** Analytical simply means using a logical method of thinking about something in order to understand it, especially by looking at all the parts separately. Creative and innovative librarians are analytical minded. That means, they possess some level of investigative mindset that enables them to analyze situations and events critically in order to come up with change oriented ideas.

vii. **Open and Receptive:** Being open and receptive depicts willingness to listen to others and accept new ideas and suggestions. Creative and innovative librarians welcome other peoples' views, ideas, suggestions, or advice on a particular thing. They are at alert to grab half-formed ideas and possibilities initiated by staff at lower levels or non-professionals provided the ideas are within the context of ensuring quality services delivery. Being open and receptive to ideas of others, will make academic librarians learn new things that can help them behave creatively.

viii. **Effective in Communication:** Communication is a process that provides a common ground for the management of libraries. Information professionals could develop and implement plans by talking with other staff about how best to achieve organizational objectives. Creative and innovative librarians are known for effective communication skills which enables them to communicate and share newly discovered ideas to the management of host institutions, library management team, and other stakeholders before they can be integrated into the library. Apart from exchanging information regularly, effective communication allows librarians to draw on the vast array of talents available within and between libraries and information centres.

Constraints to Integration of Creativity and Innovations in Academic Libraries

The integration of creativity and innovations in academic libraries is not without limitations. The following factors could be regarded as the constraints.

i. **Poor Research Ability**: Research is a process of investigating thoroughly, carefully, and more exhaustively about a particular issue in order to discover and interpret facts or to revise accepted knowledge in the light of new facts or ideas. Going by this, research is a process that gives librarians the opportunity to gather dependable information on creativity and innovation and how they are integrated in libraries especially in the developed countries. Notwithstanding its importance, it is a widely observed that research ability of librarians is poor and that could be attributed to complexities and demands of the exercise. Research is seen by many as intellectual challenging and painstaking exercise, time consuming, and financial demanding.

ii. **Poor Thinking Habits**: Thinking is a process of communicating to oneself in one's mind, in a bid to find a solution to a problem. Thinking plays a fundamental role in creativity and innovation since they have to do with critical thinking in order to discover something different from the usual. Notwithstanding, most librarians lay emphasis on the traditional approach to library activities. They seem to exhibit poor thinking habit, not thinking to generate new ideas or re-applying ideas to support creativity and innovation within the library.

iii. **Inadequate Funding**: There is virtually nothing that can work without proper funding. Inadequate funding happens to be one of the major factors that affects creativity and innovation in the library. Most libraries do not take staff training and re-training seriously. Library staff are not always sponsored to conferences, workshops, seminar, symposium, etc due to inadequate funding. By so doing, the exposure to the various training programmes which supposed to serve as platforms for librarians to ask questions, and share ideas is lacking and that also hinders creativity and innovation in libraries.

iv. **Poor Staff Attitude**: Attitude can be seen as those characteristics, usually long lasting, that largely determine how staff commit themselves to intended actions. It is indisputable that the attitude of library staff determines the quality of services offered in such library. When library staff display poor job attitude, a wide range of undesirable consequences may follow ranging from job dissatisfaction, lack of job involvement, low commitment, lack of creativity and innovation drive, and other negative work moods.

v. **Low Technological Literacy**: Technological advancement has brought unprecedented changes in the way libraries are managed. Besides, the potential power of technology enables libraries to embrace creativity and innovation towards resources and services delivery. This development supposed to be welcomed by all types of libraries including academic libraries. But, investigations show that most librarians are not computer literate and as such cannot keep up with the pace of technological innovations in librarianship. Thus, the low level technological literacy among librarians is a very serious constraint.

vi. **Lack of Reward System**: Reward system is driven by the need to reward the right things and confer the right messages about what is important in terms of expected behaviour and outcomes. It is observed that the university management, government, and other concerned constituencies seem not to tailor their reward strategies to satisfy the needs and wants of university staff including academic librarians.

vii. **Bureaucracy**: Bureaucracy, according to Bhagwan and Bhushan (2010), is a hierarchical administrative structure in which each official fits like a cog in a complex machine. To put it simply, bureaucracy means hierarchies and long lines of communication within an organization. Bureaucracy has a lot of defects which includes lengthy and roundabout way of doing things, red-tapism (dogged and blind attachment to rules), excessive adherence to formalism, inflexibility, etc. For instance, it is required that approval by the authorities be given before any idea is implemented and this involves a long process and sometimes lobbying which at the end may not even be favourable. In other words, getting things done especially in the library is sometimes very difficult due to the overriding defects of bureaucracy which are detrimental to the generation of creative and innovative ideas in the library system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The essence of creativity and innovation in management of libraries cannot be undervalued. It behooves that in this era of technological advancement, it is more important than ever to be creative and innovative. That means, library managers need to think of new ways and be open to completely different ways of managing libraries in terms of acquisition, organization, re-packaging, dissemination, and delivery of information. However, the desired changes in libraries demands a more realistic and holistic approach to be able to surmount the challenges and transform the library system for effective services

delivery. Academic librarians have no option but to be desirous of being creative and innovative at all cost. It is therefore recommended among others that:

i. All education constituencies (government, management staff, lecturers, librarians, students, etc) should embrace creativity and innovation as tools for organizational effectiveness.

ii. Library managers or heads of libraries should develop a good crop of alternatives towards creativity and innovations in the areas of staffing, library environment (facilities), provision of information resources and services, etc.

iii. Academic librarians should adopt the suggested steps to establishing a climate for creativity and innovations in the libraries.

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