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The Use of Social Intelligence as a Tool for Improving the Relevance of Libraries in the Society

Abstract

The roles libraries play in contributing to the progress of the society cannot be overemphasized because libraries are one of the institutions needed for the over-all attainment of 21st-century goals. This paper argues that the use of Social Intelligence in the library services would aid the creation of new experience for library users and other stakeholders, which will result in increasing the credibility and recognition of libraries across various societies. Its main objective is to create awareness for the potential benefits of Social Intelligence to the library practices in the society. It uses the Social Intelligence Model of Daniel Goleman 2006. The components of the Model Social Awareness – primal empathy, attunement, empathetic accuracy, social recognition - and Social Facilities – synchrony, self-presentation, influence and concern – are used to describe the applicability of the Model to improving library relevance in the society. It concludes that Social Intelligence can be efficiently deployed in the context of Librarianship because it exposes an emerging new science with startling implications for the interpersonal world of library personnel and library users and recommends that library personnel should be exposed to and trained Social Intelligence because doing so will equip them in acquiring the requisite abilities needed to play their part in positioning libraries for relevance in the society they are established.

Keywords: Daniel Goleman, Libraries, Library Personnel, Library Users, Social Awareness, Social Facilities, Social Intelligence, Society.

Introduction

Library is a building that houses books and other information resources collected, organized, preserved, maintained and used to serve the reading, referencing, recreation and research purposes of the users (Sulyman, Adeyefa and Amzat, 2021). The roles libraries play in contributing to the progress of the society cannot be overemphasized. This makes Unwin (2019) to submit that libraries are one of the institutions needed for the over-all attainment of 21st-century goals.

The library is an organic environment situated within the public sphere that acts as a nexus point for growth and exchange of information (Irvin, 2021) within a society and libraries achieved the mandates for which they are established in the society by basing their services and activities on the importance of developing relationships and engaging with people, which thus results in serving as institutions that entrench equity and inclusion, regardless of the overriding social diversity.

Libraries are socially relevant concepts that operate in accordance with social systems. Kolawole and Igwe (2016) posited that libraries play strategic roles in the development of every society. They further submitted that libraries can easily fulfill their mandates in the society by understanding the political, economic, religious, demographic, psychographic and social factors dominating the activities and interaction in the society.

Unwin (2019) posited that libraries are much more than just places where information and knowledge are transacted. They also serve important social, cultural and indeed political roles…to reduce inequalities. Libraries are crucial to the growth, progress and development of every society, because libraries are the institutions providing information in diverse formats to meet the information needs of the society; thereby serving as intellectual backbone enriching, supporting and sustaining the intellectual development of a society. This makes it essential for libraries to increase access to information, enable people to be able to use their information resources. This demand makes it the primary responsibility of libraries to acquire information materials relevant to needs of the society they are meant to serve.

One of the ways libraries can be of relevance in the society is through Social Intelligence. The Social Intelligence, according Balkhi (2020), is commonly referred to as street smarts. It is the ability to get along with others, build relationships and navigate social environments. In the context of Library and Information Science, Social Intelligence is the ability of library management to get along with their users and stakeholders, have the understanding of what motivates individuals to use particular information resources, build robust, harmonious and reliable relationships and navigate social environment in respect to the predominant attributes of users in the society a library is located.

This therefore, affirmed that the varying social characteristics of users make it a necessity for libraries to design, adapt, refine and sustain methods and strategies to become fully familiar with and sensitive to the lifestyles of both their active and potential users, improving the literacy skills of the society members, bridging the gaps between the society members and their information needs, provide qualitative and reliable information services to the society members by considering users' information seeking behaviours and use. This makes this paper to be set out to justify the use of Social Intelligence as a Tool for improving the relevance of libraries in the society.

Statement of the Problem

Every society has unique, dynamic and distinct ways societal members cohabitate; ranging from their culture, traditions and practices, which make society to be an ever-evolving human institution. This is to say that society has its symbols, systems, which can be shared and learned through different social institutions which library is an integral part of. The library has various roles to play in the preservation and sustenance of cultural heritage, promotion of culture, stimulation of learning about cultural practices and provision of information akin to the information needs of the societal members.

However, it has been observed by Ari (2017); LISBDNetwork (2016) that libraries are lagging behind in providing quality information services to the members of the society, especially in the developing countries where many studies have revealed that societal members are not feeling the effect of libraries' services, which are hinged on the notion that libraries are not adequately serving their respective societies because libraries lack the understanding of the aspirations, motivations and ideals which social activities are built and revolved.

Hence, for libraries to bridge the gaps identified above, inspire the societal members to cultivate interest in the library services, promoting the status of libraries, redeem the image and prestige of Librarians and Librarianship in the society, rise to the demand of supplying information suitable to the needs of the society by providing quality, timely, relevant and adequate information services, library leaders and managers have to deploy the practices of Social Intelligence to the library services to create new experience for library users and other stakeholders. This will result in increasing the credibility and recognition of libraries across various societies.

Objectives of the Paper

This paper is guided by the following objectives:

1. To create awareness for the potential benefits of using Social Intelligence in the library practices in the society,
2. To advocate for the use of Social Intelligence by library managers to improve the services of libraries in the society, and;
3. To suggest and recommend possible ways libraries can be more relevant in the society.

Review of Related Literature

Society: A Brief Review

Sociologists have attempted to describe society in different ways. Reitz (2004) defines society as a corporate entity consisting of group of people who meet periodically to share a common interest, especially one that is academic or professional. Society is also seen as a unit consisting of institutions and cultural patterns which are exclusive to a group of people.

According to Ralph Linton in Daramola, as cited in National Open University of Nigeria [NOUN] (2009), society is any group of people who have lived and worked together long enough to think of themselves as a social unit with well defined limits. Society could be organized or unorganized; it could be complex or simple, depending on its structure.

Kolawole and Igwe (2016) averred that society creates equilibrating forces like culture and customs which are often influenced by and modified by libraries and information services. They further noted that society comprises collectivity, and members share a sense of oneness, cultural patterns and a whole network of relationships which defines roles and obligations among members. They concluded that human society is made up of various elements and characteristics such as common geographical area, variety of interactions, feeling of solidarity, social organisations, different activities, functions and culture.

Intelligence: A Brief Review

Cherry (2019) argues that intelligence is one of the most talked about subjects in Psychology because there is no standard definition of what exactly constitutes it. Some researchers have

suggested that intelligence is a single, general ability. Others believe that intelligence encompasses a range of aptitudes, abilities, skills and talents.

The term "Intelligence Quotient," otherwise known as IQ was first coined in the early 20th century by William Stern, a German Psychologist. French Psychologist, Alfred Binet later developed the very first intelligence tests to help the French government identify school children who needed extra academic assistance. Binet was the first Psychologist to introduce the concept of mental age or a set of abilities that children of a certain age possess (Nicolas et al, 2013).

Gardner (2011), in his book titled "Frame of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligence," defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings. Gardner categorised intelligence into two: On one hand, intelligence is seen as an interaction between certain proclivities and potentials and, on the other hand, intelligence is seeing the opportunities and constraints that characterize a particular cultural setting.

Social Intelligence: A Brief Review

The Theory of Social Intelligence was first brought to the forefront by an American Psychologist known as Edward Thorndike in 1920, who defined Social Intelligence as the ability to understand and manage men and women and boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations (Morin, 2020).

Social Intelligence revolves around an individual's ability to understand, and act on, the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of other people. This type of intelligence can take place "in the moment" of face-to-face conversations but also appears during times of deliberate thinking. It involves emotional intelligence and self-awareness (The Positivity Project, 2016).

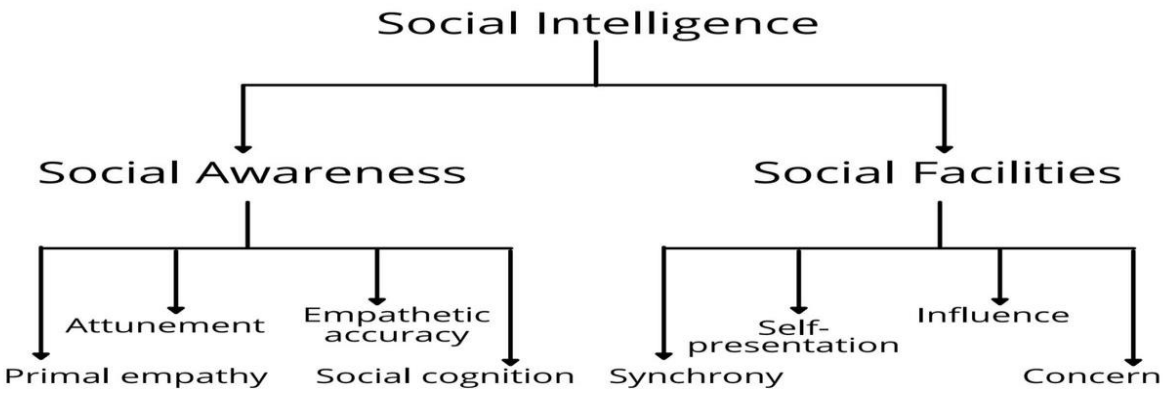
Social Intelligence is different from other forms of intelligences because Intelligence Quotient (IQ) mostly works at individual level, Emotional Intelligence (EQ) mostly works at one-on-one level, while Social Intelligence works at one-to-many level. Social Intelligence helps individuals build relationships and is important to numerous aspects of a person's life. It allows an individual to form friendships and alliances. On a group level, Social Intelligence allows us to function as humans. It validates the notion that humans are social beings and rely on each other's

cooperation. By understanding ourselves and other people, we can find ways to collaborate for mutual benefit.

The Components of Social Intelligence

Social Intelligence has been conceptualised in different ways by different Psychologists, with most of them emphasising on being aware to the predominant issues in a society. For instance, Balkhi (2020) pinpointed six (6) components of Social Intelligence as 1) Verbal fluency and conversational skills, 2) Knowledge of social roles, rules, and scripts, 3) Effective listening skills, 4) Understanding what makes other people tick, 5) Role-playing and social self-efficacy and 6) Impression management skills.

The famous Neuroscientist and Psychologist, Daniel Goleman, in his book titled "Social Intelligence," and published in 2006 categorised Social Intelligence into two broad categories namely: Social Awareness and Social Facility and four capacities for each category, which are shown in figure 1 below:



Source: Goleman (2006). Social Intelligence.

This paper will, therefore, use the Goleman's components as a template for improving the relevance of libraries in the society.

Relevance of Libraries in the Society: A Review

The relevance of libraries in societies cannot be downplayed. That is why scholars have identified various roles libraries have to play to bring their relevance into fore in any society they are established. Wyber (2019) simplified library roles by submitting that provision of access to

information is the core mission of libraries. By acquiring, preserving and organising information and allowing users to read and apply it, libraries have long been at the heart of the cultural and research infrastructure. Libraries are guardians of much of the world's documentary heritage, as well as the source of the raw materials for innovation.

The Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA] (2014) are more direct in outlining some conditions that can influence the relevance of libraries in the society by submitting that library and information services and professionals thrive best in an environment where people respect and strive for truth, knowledge, justice; where governments are committed to freedom of access to information and freedom of expression; citizens have enquiring minds; literacy is a necessary skill; reading for pleasure is a popular activity; history and heritage are valued; information is abundant; there is evidence-based practice; people actively seek information to reduce inequality; there is a sharing society; there is pride in civic and institutional infrastructure, and investment in knowledge is seen as essential for successful outcomes.

The notion that libraries are established to provide access to information was also corroborated by Kolawole and Igwe (2016) when they submitted that libraries play many roles in the society, such as supporting education and research, promotion of mass literacy and adult education, documentation and promotion of culture, facilitation of recreation, conservation of knowledge, serve as agents of conflict resolution, serve as a tool for curbing youth restiveness, serve as a tool for environmental protection programmes and serve as a tool for re-branding the nation.

Libraries exist in the communities they are situated to give (Ayoung and Abbott, 2021) beneficiary societies the chance to improve their well-being while also enabling them to increase their levels of relative social change, cohesion and empowerment. For instance, it can't be argued that one of the library roles is central around the teaching and training the users on information literacy. However, there is no doubt that it will be difficult for libraries to teach information literacy if they are not sensitive to and aware of the underlying characteristics of their users.

Connaway (2015) argued that libraries have an important social mission. In the 19th century, the building of libraries formed part of the effort to educate and enable those who were not among the elite. While the world has changed, the core mission of libraries remains relevant, and arguably more so than ever. As it becomes clearer and clearer what can be achieved with

information, it becomes more and more imperative that everyone has the possibility to benefit from library resources and services.

The conscious realisation that libraries can only be of relevance in their respective society through the quality of services they render to the society members makes David Lankes, in his book "The Atlas of New Librarianship" to state that future libraries will be valued more for services than for book collections. He asserts that library services will move from traditional role of book storage and lending into a dynamic community space. The author further recommended that libraries need to embrace both their physical and virtual environment, allowing their patrons to interact with them wherever they are located via any means they choose to access information (Connaway, 2015).

Unwin (2019) argued that libraries are established for information dissemination. He posited that information continue to hold a powerful place in our socio-cultural and economic psyche irrespective of whether it is documented on paper or on a computer screen and libraries will continue to be a major driver in the determination of information flow in a society, because libraries are the gateways to varieties of information that paved the way for knowledge society where people have the capabilities not just to acquire information, but also to transform information into knowledge and understanding, which empowers users to enhance their livelihoods and contribute to the social and economic development of their societies.

How Social Intelligence Skills Can Improve Library Relevance in a Society: A Description

Here, the components of Goleman's Model are expatiated in pertinent to improving the relevance of libraries in the society:

Social Awareness

This aspect of the Goleman's Model is concerned with the sensitivity of the library management and staff to the trends, themes, aspirations, motivations and development of the members of their society. This is because a library's level of awareness to events happening around it fuels its desire for responsiveness to providing information in regards to that event. For libraries to be socially aware, they must be familiar with the demography and psychographic details of their

society. Demography reveals the profiles of the users to the library, while psychography reveals the level of thinking of the society members and the underlying factors influencing their thinking.

For instance, a society may be apprehensive or reluctant to embrace the provision of information services through the use of ICT by the library. Instead of forcing the society members to accept technology as a medium of information provision, which may make such services to be ineffective, a socially aware library will pay attention to the factors causing the users apprehension, show the users the benefits they may derive from the provision of information through technology and continuously engage with the society members and be alerted to how new systems, values and culture that may be beneficial to the library are evolving among the users.

The sub-parts of Social Awareness are:

a. **Primal Empathy:** This is concerned with the emotional connection the library staff share with the society members. It involves library staff's deep feeling with the society members and their sensitivity to society members' non-verbal emotional signals.
b. **Attunement:** This is concerned with the ability of the library staff to be in tune with the updates and trends in the society. For library workers to be in attunement with the society members, library staff must possess the ability to listen receptively and attune to users' mental, psychological, physical and intellectual conditions.
c. **Empathic Accuracy:** This is concerned with the skills of the library staff to exhibit high level of understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of their users. When library staff can correctly feel at the same level with their users, it makes the users feel comfortable to express themselves when they come to the library and also encourage them to be patronising the library.
d. **Social Cognition:** This is concerned with the sensitivity of the library staff about how the social world works. Every society has its norms, values and priorities and library services will be effective if they are designed, tailored and adapted to sustain a society's norms, values and principles.

Social Facility

Library is a social facility because it is an instrument expected to meet all aspects of information needs of the members of the society it is located. For libraries to fulfill this purpose, Connaway (2013) posited that libraries will need to continue to adapt and provide services for people to use, create, and curate information and content. Librarians, library users, and potential users indicate that relationships are important. This may call for a different type of librarians in the future – one who embraces change. New technologies, modes of communication, and delivery of services will continue to force librarians to rethink the services of the moment. This will require developing relationships with members of the community to provide user-centered services and systems that meet their needs and expectations.

The sub-parts of Social Facilities are:

a. **Synchrony:** This means that library personnel should be interacting smoothly with the society members at the nonverbal level. The library can be in synchrony with the society they are located when it respects every components of the society it is hosted. This can happen when the library is situated at the right place without ill feelings from every member of the society.
b. **Self-presentation:** This involves the ability of the library personnel to present themselves as ready to meet the information and research supports of the society members. Effective presentation occurs when the library personnel design the right services in the right format and tailor it towards the right users who will use such information to add value to themselves. This can occur in the areas of Information Management, Reference Services, Current Awareness Services, etc.
c. **Influence:** This is the ability of shaping the outcome of social interactions. Libraries influence social interaction when they acquire and disseminate quality and timely information to the users. The book clubs and readers' forum where users assemble themselves to discuss their social affairs are typical examples of how libraries influence social interaction.

   The essence of this is to make the library more appreciated. According to ALIA (2014), the reasons for the existence of libraries are more important than the ways to use the libraries. Libraries exist to help preserve the human record and promote equality of

opportunity by connecting people with information and ideas and it the outcomes of the ideas users gained from information provided by libraries that will determine the objectivity and logicality of interactions among themselves.

d. **Concern:** This is concerned with the library personnel caring about society members' needs and acting accordingly to meet those needs. Society members are impressed and encouraged to patronise the library when the library personnel show deep interest and concern for their information gaps and initiate services to respond to their requests.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Social Intelligence can be efficiently deployed in the context of Librarianship because it exposes an emerging new science with startling implications for the interpersonal world of library personnel and library users, with its most fundamental discovery that libraries personnel are designed for sociability, constantly engaged in a "neural ballet" that connects the library personnel brain-to-brain with the society members (Amazon, 2021). The nexus between this theory and Librarianship is that library personnel's reactions to society members and vice versa, have a far-reaching biological impact, sending out cascades of hormones that regulate everything from the hearts of the library personnel to their immune systems, making good relationships act like vitamins and bad relationships like poisons. With the skills of Social Intelligence, library personnel can connect with society members' emotions and the warmth the society members will feel will shortened the consequences of isolation or relentless social stress that may make them reluctant to the use or under appreciation of the values of libraries to them.

This paper, therefore make the following recommendations:

1. Library personnel should be exposed to and trained in the components of Social Intelligence because doing so will equip them in acquiring the requisite abilities needed to play their part in positioning libraries for relevance in the society they are established.
2. Library managers and administrators should continuously redesign their approaches to information provision and adapt proven practices that are related to the nomenclatures in their host society from other parts of the world.
3. User education should be continuously conducted for library users because it will make them realise the importance of libraries in their society.

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