

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN THE LIBRARY OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OCEANOGRAPHY

— Mr. M. P. TAPASWI
Mr. G. H. SAINEKAR

Introduction

India is a very large country with people of diverse characteristics. While significant percentage of the population has limited opportunity for formal education, this fertile land persistently gives birth to a number of intellectual gems. Many of them are 'identified' by other developed countries and absorbed in various important positions in their system. Hard work, intelligence, happy attitude towards life in a very complex social structure with least physical comforts, etc., are the in-born qualities of this population.

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is one of the S&T organisations in India encouraging the scientific intellects and fostering careers in science and technology and creating a home for such gems. The National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) is a unique institution in India and among countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The institute has modern laboratories and well developed infrastructural facilities and finds its unique position in the CSIR family. NIO is responsible for oceanographic research in India. It has maintained its rank among the first five best in the group of forty

laboratories of CSIR, whatever be the criteria for performance measurement. As is the institute so is its library. The library is one of the best facilities developed over three decades of institute's establishment and possesses various international databases and electronic search and information retrieval systems. At this given opportunity, an attempt has been made here to look back at how the system was nurtured, has progressed and has remained excellent in the past thirty years of the institute as the one and only one of its kind.

Moral values

The NIO library follows Dr. Ranganathan's five laws of library science as the most fundamental elements in structuring its collection, organisation, and services. It makes the knowledge bases available to the users, and that is its highest priority. A few examples to quote:

The user visits the library to borrow or consult a specific document. At times unfortunately, (s)he does not find the document at its place. The user brings this to the notice of the library staff for help. Here the work of library staff begins. The staff starts searching for the document at most probable places. Normally, the document is located. If these primary efforts to trace the document fail, a thorough search for it commences. The user is kept informed of the progress in locating the document. As such, the misplacement should not occur. However, the library follows an open-access system and makes the document available to the user considering it as the most fundamental service. In spite of the modern information handling tools and techniques, if the user does not get the required document, all efforts are in vain. The user's satisfaction gives a great pleasure to the library staff.

The user is informally intimated about the appearance of his contribution in the journal issue that has arrives in the day's mail or about the receipt of the document he had requested for. This small informal approach satisfies users to a large extent. The user visits the library immediately to see the document. Such 'prompted'

visits of the users to the library satisfy the staff. These simple actions make long-lasting impact on the minds of the users.

The users from other institutions also write for the items they require. Quick response to their queries earns appreciation.

Spontaneous appreciation from the users in turn has created confidence in the decision makers. The institute is desirous of obtaining ISO-2000 certification for its various divisions/sections. The Library is in the forefront in obtaining this certification as all the tasks are being carried out systematically.

Today, the clientele of this library is not limited to the institute staff alone. Marine science information users from private sector as well as other R&D and academic institutions depend on this library. With its service to the users even beyond the institute the library has been able to achieve the status of 'National Information Centre for Marine Sciences (NICMAS)'. This recognition has come from outside the institution; the prestigious governmental organ - National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT) - has bestowed this status.

Closer to the user

The effective existence of libraries depends on the number of active users they serve. This demands a closer interaction with the users and it is very necessary to understand their requirements, and fulfil them. The NIO library tries to be closer to the users in different ways.

The Library Committee is the formal communication channel between the representatives of the users and the library staff. The committee has been in existence since the beginning. The recommendations of the committee help the authorities to take an appropriate decision. Earlier, the library committee consisted of the heads of the divisions. Later, it was thought that the senior-most member of a division should better represent the division in the committee and put across the

requirements of his colleagues. Later still it was made more effective by involving the most frequent visitors of the library in the committee work and by reconstitution of the committee accordingly. The committee has been very active in building the library collection, and recommending actions that favour the users of the library. Justifying increased funding, accepting cuts on the journal subscriptions during the period of recession, redesigning some rules to enact self discipline and always encouraging library staff to try out new ideas which would help build library resources and their use are some of the significant actions to the credit of the library committee. The members on the committee remain in office for one year.

The service points are handled by the senior staff of the institute library. The circulation counter and the literature search services are vital among them. The informal contacts with the users become very easy through these services.

The computerised literature search service was introduced in the library in 1985. The use of computers was not very common in the country during those days. An orientation of the user to computerised search services has become most successful. This includes formulation of search expression and retrieval of relevant and useful information.

A dialogue with our distant marine science community in India has always been a pleasure for library staff. Conferences, symposia, workshops are the events to meet such users. We do not miss such opportunities. In the recent past we even met our users on east coast of India by participating in Aquaculture Trade Fair and workshops organised jointly by Aquaculture Foundation of India and Indian Council of Agricultural Research at Vijayawada, Chennai, Mandapam Camp and Tuticorin as well as at Visakhapatnam organised by the Regional Centre of NIO. Presentations at all the venues were complimented by live demonstrations of computerised library resources and services. To our knowledge such participation of library/information centres in trade fairs, workshops, etc. to

disseminate information is not known atleast in India. This novel idea received wide appreciation.

Inviting formal feedback from the users in evaluating different services was also another method practised to remain closer to the user. Two of the reports based on such feedback have helped in evaluating the services.

Tightly knit, lean, productive staff

The staff strength in the library is bare minimum. This keeps the library staff always occupied. The minimum strength has also helped in eliminating hierarchical barriers. Everyone works in a cohesive manner. While the routine jobs are assigned to each individual, matters of urgency are handled by all staff together. Processing and movement of newly acquired documents, their circulation, and shelving are immediately taken over by the other staff if the designated person is not available. Smaller staff strength has helped in increasing innovativeness. Introduction of new items, services, and ways of handling and processing information are accepted willingly by the staff rather than compulsively by command.

The use of computers in library was introduced in 1985. Due consideration was given for computerization of the housekeeping operations pertaining to the acquisition of books and their technical processing. This helped in relieving large percentage of man hours which would be otherwise required in discharging these routine activities manually. Spare time, thus accrued, was fruitfully utilised for entering retrospective acquisitions and clearing the backlog and in providing assistance to the users. Voluminous work of keying in bibliographic data pertaining to over 20,000 items procured prior to the computerization was handled without hiring external workforce or increasing the staff strength. This has resulted in converting this into an On-line Public Access Catalogue.

Merger of the maps section, which otherwise was a separate entity in the institute under the control of one of the scientific staff, also

took place smoothly. It was considered 'a document' and the work pertaining to it, including cataloging of 3000 items, was carried out at a stretch.

The job empowerment has resulted in increasing the productivity of the group. 'Ready-steady-set-go' formula was adopted to cut on the hierarchical reporting/checking. The formula worked well to relieve senior professionals for better jobs. Computations of service charges, late fee and their deposit to the institute funds, handling of external literature search and document delivery requests, the data entry operations on the computers, housekeeping, loan activities, etc., are handled by a single person made responsible for the jobs without the chain of commands. Division of labour with fixed responsibilities in such aspects has increased productivity of the staff and most of these jobs are done routinely, mechanically. Ofcourse, clear-cut procedures are set, action plans are charted, necessary corrections are made before the system is made keep going routinely in the initial stage of formulation of the strategy itself. These actions have helped in achieving highest productivity with least staff. The senior-most person in the library keeps a track of these activities only at periodic intervals.

Face to face communication among the associates, training to adopt new skills are considered essential while expecting higher productivity. The job security and financial rewards by way of timely promotions exist in the CSIR system which the library staff has enjoyed all these years.

The staff of the library discharge their duty with a family feeling. This does not mean that the system is without any troubles. Troubles do exist, yet the library functions well because all the staff work as a team.

The library has also experienced troubles from some members at times. While every staff is given full freedom in discharging his assigned tasks, encouraged for the innovativeness, the need to adhere to the discipline was scrupulously followed. The staff failing

to accept the basic discipline was weeded out in order to keep the system healthy - an unusual process particularly in governmental organisations.

Action orientation

The library never accepted to continue to work in given conditions. It always tried to find a way out to overcome the situation by way of an action. Discussions among the colleagues within the library as well as with the users have crystallised actions. Here are some examples:

Inadequate funding was experienced by the library twice during past thirty years. At one time the conditions were favourable to convince the higher authorities and obtain more funds to continue serial subscriptions and procure monographs. 'Making a case' and 'putting it up unambiguously' was a big exercise. However, the homework was so perfect that the authorities gave in return more than what was expected. At another time, the country and therefore the institute was passing through the phase of short of foreign currency. No one was in a mood to consider enhanced funding. It was during the devaluation of the rupee and reduced foreign currency within the country. It was the time to accept the cuts and manage the library subscriptions well. A large number of subscriptions were required to be cut. Library staff ventured in the bibliometric studies and ranked journals using local parameters. It therefore became easy to convince the users and prune the journal subscriptions. An assurance to obtain copies using document delivery services for the unavailable items, of interest enabled library staff in discharging their responsibility in the interest of the country.

Compilation of bibliographies was considered a job of the scientists about twenty years earlier in the institute. In India, these activities during those days were still carried out manually. As a prototype, the library staff compiled first bibliography on the Primary Production in the Oceans. The pre-print compilation was appraised by many experts for its quality, and comprehensiveness. This bibliography

was so much in demand that it had to be printed twice. The library never looked back on this kind of documentation services since then. The library has always been considered for the responsibility of compiling subsequent bibliographies. All of them were compiled for a specific purpose like distribution in conferences, meetings, etc., or for reviewing a new subject taken up for a study in India. The current awareness bulletin 'Aquatitles' of those days was also very well received by the scientific community. The library staff even earned an 'honorarium' for compilation of some bibliographies - a job assigned by other institution - at the time when the concept of 'free library service' still persisted.

This activity also helped the Library earn its first personal computer for its own use. The library was very fortunate in receiving the computer at a very early stage. The arrival of computer catalysed the actions in different directions. Development of a database structure compatible with international standards; programming for housekeeping operations, shift from manual compilation of bibliographies on general topics of interest to computerised literature search on very specialized topics; and compilation of library catalogue in machine readable form, kept the staff more busy in action oriented activities. Each of these actions brought success, name and honour to the library.

Today, this library has been recognised as a national facility (NICMAS) supported by NISSAT. With this support, the library has now embarked upon an ambitious project of building a bibliographic data base with abstracts on Indian Ocean literature. Each entry in the database is being backed up with the availability of original source. The data is being entered only after referring to the original, ensuring both quality and reliability. All international standards are used in building this database to stand aloft in the competitive market.

This library also provided leadership in compiling and maintaining a Union Catalogue of Scientific Serial's in the libraries of Goa State. The compilation was supported by NISSAT, DSIR.

On an international scene, the library acts as an Indian co-ordinating centre for Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Information System (ASFIS). The decision of association with ASFIS has benefited not only the library and the country but the whole marine science community. The library has been able to send bibliographic description with abstracts of around 800 Indian items per year since last eight years for inclusion in their Aquatic Sciences & Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) database. This enables in disseminating information on the contributions by the Indian marine science researchers to their counterparts in other countries. Initially, a study was undertaken to identify gaps in the database as far as Indian literature is concerned. We noticed a large number of contributions that remained uncovered. Therefore, in order to bridge the gaps the input for earlier years was also taken up simultaneously.

The library also helps other less developed countries in meeting their literature requirements under its South-South co-operation programme. For example, the library has been one of the major document supplier to the countries in East Africa - A project supported by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the United Nations. This action helped in making this library known worldwide for its promptness and positive attitude in promoting marine science information.

The positive actions at the international level brought a recognition to this library. Today, the library staff has been able to represent on the Group of Experts in Marine Information Management (GE-MIM) of IOC. The International Association of Marine Science Libraries & Information Centres (IAMSLIC) also spotted the NIO library staff to offer a membership at no charge under their 'twinning membership programme'.

Looking back, we realise that this success is not of the library staff alone. It is due to the continual support, encouragement, and, above all, autonomy given by the authorities at every stage of its development. They also championed our failures. The success is

102 *In Search of Excellence - Librarianship*

also due to the users - from NIO as well as from other institutions - who were always with us. Their use of the library always kept our minds innovative in providing excellent service to the best of our ability.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Director, NIO for constant encouragement, support and permission to share this success story with our colleagues. Thanks are due also to Dr. G.N. Swamy for his suggestions on the manuscript and to the publication committee members who have gone through the manuscript and made comments for improvement.