

Pursuing Continuous Professional Development as a personal responsibility and business: my learning journey and experience

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Abstract:

Constant flux in the needs of communities, changing technologies and growth in professional knowledge demands that library and information professionals increase and update their skills on an ongoing basis. Continuing professional development is an essential tool especially with regards to the use of Information and Communication Technology. The librarian has the responsibility of pursuing an ongoing learning that will improve knowledge and skills through regular self-assessment, performance appraisal participation, monitoring developments in the profession to identify opportunities to advance in knowledge and skills; and developing a personal learning plan, to enable him make judicious choices and seek learning needed for new roles. I started my career as a library educator in a higher institution before I was laterally transferred to the library. By that time, there was no policy for staff development in the institution. Determined to develop and improve myself, I enrolled in Science Education programme when post graduate course in Library and Information Science was unavailable in nearby university. When it became available, I quickly switched over to that because of it's relevance to my work and benefit my employer. In my daily work, I created time to read journal articles, magazines and other professional materials to improve myself. I set out a percentage of my income for self development/publication, to attend conference/ workshops and to publish books and journal articles. To my credit, I have published 5 books, 6 chapter contributions, 25 journal articles, and 57 conference and workshop attendance. We should have time for our professional development and guard our professional performance development time zealously and ensure that it is part of our work schedule. This paper highlights step by step journey, using the IFLA CPD Guidelines and how it has helped me in improving my career and service delivery to our library patrons.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Library and Information Professionals, Continuing Education, Personal Learning experience, IFLA CPD Guidelines

Introduction

Continuing education and learning is important for renewing the expertise and skills needed for service delivery to our esteemed library patrons in the digital information era. High level of professional library staff enhances the quality of service delivery that any library can offer. The librarian is an active intermediary between library patrons and the resources and continuing professional education (CPE), a continuous basis is indispensable to ensure quality, efficient, effective and adequate service delivery in our libraries, both formal and informal ways, but it falls primarily on the individual librarian to find, participate in or even create such opportunities, which raises the question of personal motivation and drive (Arua, Asogwa, Ebisi, Nwebiem, Ukwuaba, Eze & Ezukwuoke, 2017).

The concept of continuing professional development (CPD) recognizes that education is the only way in which individuals continue to learn, grow and develop as professionals throughout their careers and professional lives. CPD is a process of lifelong learning which makes one to expand his/her personal and professional potential to meet the present and future needs of patrons and deliver service outcomes and priorities. CPD in the opinion of Marchington and Wilkinson (2008) is the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. It assures that one meets the requisite knowledge and skill levels that relate to one's evolving scope of professional practice. CPD is also the ongoing training and education that practicing librarians embark on with a view to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, acquire new technical skills necessary for creativity and innovativeness, and keeping up to date with the rapid and numerous changes taking place in the information world (Ukachi & Onuoha, 2013). CPD could be seen as an enabler to creativity and innovativeness. Majid (2004) defines CPD as a systematic method of learning that leads to growth and improvement in professional abilities, enabling individuals to function successfully in a changing work environment. The purpose of CPD is to fill the knowledge gap that exists between acquiring educational qualifications and functioning on the job. It consists of activities and practices that equip the professionals with the relevant competencies to ultimately upgrade their knowledge and skills to meet their professional needs. Examples of CPD activities include training courses, professional reading, work exchange, mentoring and publishing (Bury, 2010).

CPD may take various forms and can be in the form of face-to-face programmes, or distance learning programs, can be conducted informally in the form of lectures, workshops, seminars, and conferences; as well as through formal options, such as certified training programmes or other qualifying course, Bury stated. Learning and development activities can be grouped as formal, informal, and on-the-job types. Formal education involves careful planning, has set outcomes or learning objectives and the person is conscious of their learning experiences (Steptoe-Warren, 2013). Formal activities include courses and workshops offered in-house, by educational institutions or by professional association; are organized, structured programmes that explicitly aim to foster understanding, knowledge and skills (Living Stone, 1999; Auster & Chan, 2004). Informal education occurs spontaneously in many different places such as at work, at home, and through interactions with other people, takes place independently from trainer-led programmes, outside educational establishment and is not assessed (Steptoe-Warren, 2013). Informal activities include attending conferences, discussion with colleagues, participating in e-mail discussion lists, reading professional literature and pursuing self directed projects. On-the-job education consists of acquisition of skills while working on the job. It may involve following written and verbal instructions as well as observing others and then attempting the task. This form of education usually

involves a superior or an experienced employee passing on their knowledge and skills to the trainee (Steptoe-Warren, 2013).

Importance of CPD to Library and Information Professionals

Continuing education is important in every profession but it is absolutely more important in a profession like librarianship where rapid change affects the scope, knowledge-base and methodologies of the profession. Information explosion, development and application of information communication technologies (ICTs), changing dynamics of information users and even trends in library and information science have necessitated the need for continuing professional development in library and information profession. Librarians recognize the necessity of remaining lifelong learner in order to keep pace with the ever-expanding amount of available information due to the nature of the job as information provider and dissemination. Long & Applegate (2008) states that the area of professional practice experiencing the most rapid change over the last one and half decade has been information technology, especially web and its many applications. In addition to knowing how to use these emerging technologies in their job, librarians must be capable of instructing the library users on how to use these systems. Thus, the library staff should be encouraged to upgrade their educational and professional qualification through attendance to academic conferences, seminars, workshops within and outside library and information science area.

CPD programmes intensify the ability of a librarian to learn more skills, enhance their knowledge and revalidate their innate competencies. The need for a CPD will naturally increase because of a sort of blended professionals. Librarians are in the boundaries of learning information communication technologies (ICTs) related skills and it is their utmost duty to learn these skills to teach varying aspects of library services with IT components (Corcoran & McGuiness, 2014). Supporting staff training and education is indispensable strategy for motivating workers. This will give the librarians or information professional's opportunities for self-improvement and development to meet the challenges and requirements of new equipment and new techniques of performing a task (Tella, Ayeni & Popoila, 2007).

Responsibility for Continuous Professional Development

Learning has become more and more important both in personal and organizational context. As knowledge has become the key factor for achieving efficient service and high productivity, organizations need people with high level of knowledge, skills and abilities which eventually lead to desirable organizational success. Beyond doubt, organizations are interested in continuous learning of the staff because of the improving skills, flexibility of the employees (Brooks, 2008). Armstrong (2012) asserts that everyone in the organization should be encouraged and given the opportunity to learn and develop their skills and knowledge to the maximum levels of their capacity. Thus, the organization needs to invest in learning, continuing education and development by providing appropriate learning opportunities and facilities, or by providing financial and/or time support (for example, paid leave) (Havener & Stolt, cited in Pont & Jantson, 2015). There is a great deal of support for the notion that librarians have a deep commitment to professional development and continuing education.

The responsibility for CPD lies with the professional association (Wood, 1999). Adanu (2007), Blair (2000) opined that it is the employer that has the responsibility of pursuing CPD and not the professional association. Adanu found that librarians believed that participation in CPD was a shared responsibility of both the library and librarian. Campell, Rita & Graeme (2000) stated that CPD is the responsibility of the employer and the employee. A closer

examination of the individual's responsibility in embarking on CPD, Ofie-Aboagye (1995) noted that although the individual has primary responsibility for his professional development, the kind of work environment that must exist for the professional is one that is conducive to a healthy CPD curriculum.

Library Associations locally and globally have undertaken some responsibility for CPD. IFLA embraces all aspects of professional development and learning in the workplace. IFLA has a section on continuing professional development and workplace learning (CPDWL) that assembles all library professionals interested and whose duties concern quality improvement of systems for delivering CPDWL programme. National Library Association, such as the Nigerian Library Association has CPD policy for librarians, which includes certification, chartership, fellowship and revalidation.

The Chartered Institute of personnel and Development placed emphasis that CPD should:

- be continuous and that professionals should always be looking for ways to improve performance,
- be the responsibility of the individual learner to own and manage,
- be driven by learning needs and development of the individual,
- be evaluative rather than descriptive of what has taken place,
- be an essential component of professional and personal life, never an optional extra.

To keep abreast with the changes, trends, and developments in the field of library and information science practitioners require training and retraining themselves, particularly in technological skills acquisition. It is the primary responsibility of the individual library and information practitioner to pursue ongoing learning that will improve his/her knowledge and skills constantly. IFLA Code of Ethics state that librarians and other information workers strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing their knowledge and skills (IFLA, 2012). Individuals are responsible for themselves, their profession and society and should develop themselves regardless of the challenges of sponsorship. This treatise will x-ray my chequered learning journey as an individual library and information practitioner.

My Learning Journey and Experience

I started my career in Library and Information field as a Library Educator in higher education sector in 1992. I was laterally transferred to the library in 1994 when library science course was phased out of the College of Education sector. I had a chequered history with respect to my learning journey. At that period, our institution has no policy on staff development as a state-managed institution. Despite this, I was determined to develop and improve myself professionally. But my major constraint was that the university in the vicinity where one could progress his career does not offer a post graduate (PG) course in Library and Information Science. As a result, with the burning desire to continue learning, I decided to enroll in Postgraduate course in Science Education programme. When the university commenced a PG studies in Library and Information Science, I quickly switched over to that because it is the area of study relevant to my work, which will help improve my daily work of service delivery and benefit my employer. I had a lean income, but this was not a major obstacle to my desire to continue education; so I struggled to continue to strive. In my daily work, I created time to read journal articles, magazines and other professional reading

materials to improve myself. I also engaged myself in writing and publishing works as a means of self-development. Though my resources were lean, I set out a percentage of my income for publication/self development, to attend conferences and workshops that come my way and to publish books and journal articles, and to my credit, I have published five books, six chapter contributions, 25 journal articles in both local and international journals and 57 conference/workshop attendance and paper presentations.

Professional development is more than just attending the activities and conferences of library association. IFLA guidelines of CPD states the (principles) and best practices as it concern the learner. These demand the individual professional:

- conducting regular self assessment congruent with the job responsibilities and aspiration;
- participating in performance appraisals;
- monitoring developments that impact the professions and seek out and uses opportunities to close competency gaps and to advance knowledge and skills;
- Developing a personal learning plan that will lead to both improvement in current performance and future career advancement, makes judicious choices of formal learning resources based on the best available information;
- Seeking learning for present responsibilities before preparing for a new position (IFLA, 2016).

Guided by the IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development: Principles and Best Practices, I present my learning journey and experience, through the following methods:

- Assessing my own skills on regular basis
- Taking part in annual performance appraisals
- Seeking opportunities to close my competency gaps
- Developing a personal learning plan
- Seeking the learning needed for my present job

Regular Assessment of my Skills

I assessed my own skills on a regular basis. A nice method I used in assessing my own skills to study job descriptions. I was not actually seeking for a new job but studying job descriptions at various positions I have been helped to identify the skills required for job openings and have enabled me to build up the skills. For instance, when I was a Deputy College Librarian (DCL), I sought for the responsibilities that the position entails in order to enable me function very well. I became a DCL in-charge of Technical Services and later transferred to head the Public Services Department of our Library. At each of these stages, I consulted a source: *Essentials of Management for African University Libraries* written by S.I. Ifidon. This book is a good resource material that has a chapter on job description of various cadres of library personnel and their entry qualifications. It became a handbook to me that at each position, I sought for the duties attached to it and also looked for the requisite requirements for the next position I will aspire after the present one. At the same time, I used this method to assess my skills, build up the skills and help expand my career options.

As part of assessing my own skills, I looked out for job openings and duties that are listed regularly. There are advertisements in newspapers, job websites such as Jobrapido, Job Alert –Jobs for Librarian/Nigeria, Jobs for new Recruitments/Nigeria, etc and in various countries in the world too. On regular basis, I looked out for such job openings that are similar to each of my current position and compared them with regards to duties and responsibilities. This was an effective means to check for blind spots. As a Deputy College Librarian, I sought for the requirements for a Chief Librarian/College Librarian which was the next level to ascend to. I read advertisements for these position and identified the required skills for them and started working towards acquiring these skills and requirements. I always tried to have more than the minimum requirements. I became a Chief Librarian on October 1, 2018.

Participating in Annual Performance Appraisals

In all establishments, be it private or public, there is always annual performance appraisal for all personnel of the institution. Performance appraisal is more than just a part of the process of bureaucracy in an establishment and as such cannot be ignored. I made the most use out of the annual performance appraisal and utilized it to get feedback on how to work on my professional development. As we know, promotions are not done annually but in every three or four years as the case may be. I used the outcome of each year's performance appraisal to consolidate and build up needed skills. Most importantly, I usually discuss with my immediate supervisor or boss before and even after the appraisal. This helped me to redirect my attention to start planning for them.

Sometimes, in the course of time, I found it extremely difficult recalling projects of works I undertook over a couple of months or even in past years. I had to use a time-boxing method which assisted me to keep a record of history of my critical works. Basically, one has to allocate items on my to-do-list to a specific time slot in my calendar to help me recall the period of the project was done. Time boxing is a very simple technique to manage time and become more productive. The purpose is to use one's time productively. The idea is to allocate a certain time to an activity in advance and then complete the activity within that timeframe. In time management, time-boxing allocates a fixed time period, called a time-box, within which planned activity takes place. For an example is to plan a meeting agenda and determine upfront, how long you want to handle each topic. Usually, at the end of each specific task, I will analyze my progress and then move to the next task.



Source: Bealers.com (2015)

Read more: www.toolshero.com

Figure 1 example of time-boxing technique.

Seeking out Opportunities to Close my Competency Gap

A list of competencies abounds in Librarianship. Competency Indexes/lists present a list of prints that help us to track the skills and attributes to equip ourselves in order to perform our role effectively and efficiently. One example is the Competency Index for the Library Field compiled by Webjunction, which is a valuable resource for libraries, helping staff to identify and obtain the knowledge, skills and support needed to power relevant and vibrant libraries. It identifies skills needed by library staff to develop to serve the information needs of their patrons. Three elements in particular have been emphasized throughout the Competency Index 21st Century-Skills, accountability, and community engagement. (Webjunction, 2015). The Competency Index for the Library Field presents various specializations within our

professions and their requirements. Other competency indexes include Knowledge Competencies Framework for the Academic and Business Librarian, list of Fundamental Leadership and Management Competencies, STAR Checklist, ALA Library Leadership Competencies, NorthAmerican Serials Interest Group – that documents on core competencies for electronic resources librarians, print serial management and scholarly communications librarians. For instance, a middle career librarian who aspires to take on a managerial role at work or display leadership role in librarianship consults list of fundamental leadership and management competencies that can support his career development. It is worthy to note that though competency lists help in assessing oneself, it is not advisable to be used in isolation. Maximum benefits can be obtained if one consults a superior who can give him feedback on the gaps in his knowledge and skills. Peer groups and mentors also play role here in identifying a learning need. I made effective use of my superiors, mentors as well as peer groups in the course of my career development

Developing Personal Learning Plans

Library and information science field have highly resourceful and educated professionals where peers are able and capable of identifying their learning needs and the options available to “level up” their skills. In line with the IFLA guidelines that once the available options that can meet any learning needs are identified, I focused on determining the quality, which means that I need to filter and prioritize. As I said earlier, I left studying Science Education and switched over to Library and Information Science which is relevant to my work and benefit my employer. At a time, I stopped attending conferences and workshops that are not related to my field and focused only on those relevant to my work and which will enhance my career. Filtering and prioritizing to determine equality can be difficult given the plethora of new learning formats, from mini tutorials to full-length online courses and what should guide us in prioritizing which learning to pursue (Limis, 2011). IFLA CPD guideline indicates that as employees, we should give priority to learning that will improve the current performance and that is supported by the employer. Learning relevant for a new position if not supported by the employer can be conducted by the individual using personal time and resources. At a time in my career, I applied to be allowed to embark on staff development but it has not been approved, the reason being that the quota for staff development for my department had been filled up. In order to develop myself, I resorted to part time/weekend programme so that it would not conflict with my job. Out of the 57 conferences/workshops I attended only about 7 were supported by my employer in the 27 years of working experience. Expenses for the other 50 conferences/ workshops were borne by me using my resources.

Personal current awareness system is very crucial in learning needs and career development. I have always focused on areas that can make me better at projects I embarked if there are new areas I wish to pursue. If such areas are unagreeable with my employer, I would spend personal time. I often hear people complain that employers are not supportive or unable to support such options. That was never a hindrance to me. First develop yourself and present yourself to your employer or even to labour market and you will sell like hot cake. One would need to be creative to explore using new learning opportunities or accept the unavailability of certain options.

Seeking the Learning Needed for Present Responsibilities

One needs to seek for learning needed for present responsibilities before preparing for a new position. IFLA CPD Guidelines states that it is the most important to realize that professional development needs to be a part of daily work. Setting aside time for learning is very crucial in our professional development. This entails setting aside fairly large amount of time dedicated for professional development, which could be time spent on reading journal articles, magazines, watching webinars, or writing and publishing. I usually utilize any free period I have in reading and writing. I also utilize periods after work to do my personal work. That helped me to publish my first book within the four years of employment, a second book after another 2 years and a third after another 2 years plus journal articles and conferences attended within the period. One factor that enhanced my productivity was an advice from an enlightened colleague who suggested having a weekly plan of action. This worked for me and from the weekly plan; I developed a monthly plan of action in which I desired to be producing a paper monthly. Though this was not easy and not followed strictly. Again, I considered using time-boxing technique that helped to streamline spending of time and set aside time for self-development.

Personal learning plan can also involve sharing and discussing with colleagues on issues and trends. You can watch webinars together with colleagues, set aside time to discuss the relevance of the learning to each person's continuing education.

Conclusion

CPD is a vital tool for maintaining the skills and expertise of staff with regards to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is a fact that success or failure of any library largely depends on the level and capacity of this staff. Academic librarians should exploit innovative and accessible modes of CPD if they wish to navigate the changes occurring within the profession. He needs to assess his own skills from time to time regularly, develop personal learning plans, address the current gaps in our competencies and be ready to take future responsibilities. He should create time for our own professional development, guard our time zealously and make professional development a part of our daily schedule. Thus, the individual should take responsibility for his/her professional development.

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