

# **ACCOUNTABILITY IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT: ISSUES & STRATEGIES FOR THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

If libraries are judged on their own merit, in isolation from their parent organisations, the majority in the ASEAN countries can be said to be excellent, even in comparison with libraries in other more developed countries. However it is only when librarians are judged for their role vis a vis their parent organizations that their contribution is seen to be more peripheral rather than integral. For example, most university libraries are not fully integrated into the teaching – learning process which forms the core business of universities. Apart from pedagogical constraints that do not encourage resource-based or information-based independent learning, the status of librarians has never been acknowledged by the academia to be at par. It is librarians who have always assumed that libraries are critical to national development although not many outside the library community acknowledge the importance of the library's role.

There are certain indicators that reflect this lack of recognition:

- i) change in nomenclature from 'librarians' to 'information professionals/specialists,' 'librarianship' to 'information science' as if libraries in the early 1950's & 1960's had not been dealing with information
- ii) librarians not awarded the same recognition vis-à-vis other professions in schemes of service and salary scales despite the fact that librarians have academic and professional qualifications (Librarian vs. Registrar & Bursar)
- iii) the proliferation of members of other professions (engineers, computer scientists, academics, economists; etc.) taking the lead role in information provision & dissemination.

The issues today is, against this background, are librarians in the position to cope with the demands and challenges that the 21<sup>st</sup> century present?

## 2.0 CHALLENGES OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

### 2.1 DEFINING THE ENVIRONMENT

The 21<sup>st</sup> century can be described as the era of innovative technology. The advancement in the field of ICT is unprecedented, but there are other issues just as important that libraries can identify - issues that will require libraries to review their management capabilities.

In facing the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, libraries would first have to assess themselves – their strengths and weaknesses as well as to identify the opportunities and threats presented by their external environment. The SWOT analysis undertaken in this paper is not based on research data but used to illustrate the need for libraries to assess their capabilities.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	<b>STRENGTH</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Collection</li><li>2. Reputation</li><li>3. User Education</li></ol>	<b>WEAKNESESS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Collection</li><li>2. Staff</li><li>3. Funds</li><li>4. Usage</li><li>5. Peripheral role</li><li>6. Non-integrated Strategic plan</li></ol>
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	<b>OPPORTUNITY</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lifelong education</li><li>2. Innovative technology</li><li>3. Knowledge management</li><li>4. Globalisation</li><li>5. national policies &amp; Objectives</li></ol>	<b>THREAT</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Proliferation of information providers</li><li>2. Globalisation</li></ol>

## 2.2 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

### 2.21 STRENGTHS

The ability to assess our strengths/weaknesses is important so that we are in the position of strength when faced with the need to change or adapt to new circumstances. In general the library's strength can be attributed to the following:

## 1. Collection

In the 1950's & 1960', the size of the collection is the measure of the library's worth. As such weeding exercises were seldom undertaken for fear that large libraries (by virtue of their collections) will lose their competitive edge. Today, the issue of size is not important because collections are found worldwide, with a proliferation of electronic databases. Usage is important, whether it be on site or remote. Taken together, the collections in libraries total millions and represent the country's wealth. If only they are read, Malaysia does not have to wait till the year 2020 to produce an information literate society.

## 2. Reputation

Libraries exist today because the traditional concept of the library being at the heart of learning still prevails. In most countries, education is regarded as a priority area in national development. They believe that a literate population is the country's foremost asset and catalyst for national advancement. This belief has prevailed till today but not substantiated by the usage of the library.

## 3. User Education

User education programmes are offered by most libraries, both as formally or informally. It is the best way to promote libraries and library use because not only do these programmes enable librarians to come into direct contact with the clients, show clients the proficiency of librarians (both the academic aspect of library work (information retrieval) as well as the technical aspect (ICT)), it provides libraries with the opportunities to be integrated into the teaching and learning process.

## **2.22 WEAKNESSES**

Unfortunately, there are more weaknesses than strengths in our analysis of the internal environment. They are:

### 1. Collections

Generally, libraries have in their collection materials that contain data that are more archival than current. They are excellent for scholars and researchers from the academia but users of the 21<sup>st</sup> are weaned on ICT and expect information at a press of the button. We now have e-books, e-journals and internet for content provided by commercial vendors at a very high cost. Access to Internet and electronic databases will become passé in a few years and by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we probably need more technologically advanced materials that can automatically analyse data at the press of button without manipulating the data.

## 2. Staff

The majority of library staff are generally passive and not proactive. This is where library education plays a part. Librarians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be multi-skilled and have sound subject knowledge. Library schools would have to be more responsive to these needs and take into account that librarians of the future will not be sitting at a desk in a library but will work in a virtual environment with PC's as colleagues. Multi-skilled, she will need to communicate well, proficient in several subject areas, innovative in the use of ICT, academic and independent.

## 3. Funds

Lack of funds is a perpetual problem at all libraries. Notwithstanding the fact there are libraries that are well-endowed (in Malaysia, the National Library and university libraries) the funds are never adequate to fulfill all objectives. This has resulted in libraries undertaking resource-sharing of collections & services to reduce expenditure and optimize usage.

## 4. Usage

Despite their importance libraries are not used to the optimum level and with the establishment of digital libraries, which makes remote access easy, library visits will be more for pleasure (peace, quiet and air-conditioning comfort) than for information needs. In a recent survey of undergraduates (2003) at the University of Malaya Library only a small percentage visit the library every day (17.2%), the majority (54 %) a few times a week. The survey<sup>1</sup> also shows that the majority of students do not use the electronic database (e-books – undergraduates 6.4%, postgraduates 16.41%) preferring the printed books instead (undergraduates 84.6%, postgraduates 87.5%). There is a need to market library services to increase usage, whether on-site or remote. At the OUM Library, statistics obtained from log-ins of e-books and e-journals show that:

- (i) remote access is greater than on-site access and
- (ii) usage of e-books higher than e-journals

## 5. Peripheral role of libraries

There is no real evidence to show that libraries are integrated into the core business of their institutions, especially academic libraries and special libraries. In the case of University, libraries, there is no evidence to show that there is a correlation between usage of library resources and academic achievement. But in a survey undertaken at the University of Malaya, to determine whether the user education programme (Information Skills GXEX1401) is useful for their learning, the majority of students surveyed replied in the affirmative.

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1.ZAITON Osman, Kiran Kaur and Zanariah Saupi Udin (2003) A survey of student satisfaction at the University of Malaya Library, *Kekal Abadi*, 22(1), p.1-17

## **2.3 EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **2.31 INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY**

The phrase “innovative technology” is deliberately used here to denote the innovative aspects of technology because we believe that not since the wheel has there been a development so global that it has not touched every aspect of life and every level of society – e-learning, e-government., e-business. From Parliament to shopping, technology has become part of life. Reaching the moon is now a reality – everything else is possible.

In the case of libraries, the development of information gateways or portals offers great opportunities for library and information professionals to give their services to users a real push. Information portal can offer users one stop work stations where they can search across a multitude of resources and retrieve electronic and book resources in one station. Information portals can provide integration of sources for searching and for location and delivery of materials – in whatever format they exist. Portal brings the opportunity to develop e-library services – to meet the growing expectations of student population.

“Implementing a portal can change the environment in which users discover information and get better access to the wealth of contents” (Murray. 2003)<sup>2</sup>

### **2.32 GLOBALISATION**

The term “globalisation” is associated mainly with business where companies in their strategic management plans take global competitiveness or “hyper competition” seriously. As described by Hitt, “a global economy is one in which goods, services, people, skills and ideas move freely across geographic borders. Relatively unfettered by artificial constraints, such as tariffs, the global economy significantly expands & complicates a firm’s competitive environment”.<sup>3</sup>

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2.MURRAY, Robin (2003) Information portals: casting a new light on learning for universities. Campus-Wide Information Systems, vol. 20 (4) pp. 146 - 151

3. HITT, Michael A. et.al. Strategic management: competitiveness and globalization. 5th ed. Mason, Ohio, Thompson South Western, 2003. p11

Innovative technology has made it possible for business to be conducted in a global environment but how does globalisation affect librarians?

- i) Concept of self-sufficiency has given way to global out sourcing by cutting out the role of the middle man, including the librarian. This has implications for the library in matters relating to human resource and organisation structure.

**Examples:**

- a. Acquisitions : librarians do not need to go through local agents. There are many more companies on Internet who can acquire anything for you ranging from equipment to books.
- b. Cataloging : OCLC is a case in point although it does not cater for non-English items.
- c. Information Services : It is a matter of time before information services are conducted on a global basis replacing libraries and librarians except for the provision of local information which however may be taken over by local companies with enough entrepreneurial acumen to take over the information market.

- ii) Demand for wide-ranging information

Imagine providing information services for the whole world, when most libraries cannot even satisfy the information needs of their own clientele. Theoretically, however, this is what globalisation could generate. Do we have the potential for it? In reality, no. Working on the premise that no one person can provide all information on everything, it will be a massive task but if libraries do not do it other more enterprising professionals would. It is a worth thought.

For example, libraries in Malaysia need not confine themselves to providing information merely about Malaysia but through databases subscribed and information networks established via the universities & ministries, librarians can play a role. This will have implications for the library in terms of collections, human resource (must be proficient in English and other languages, have working knowledge of subject areas, etc.) and job expertise & skills (indexing, desktop publishing, web-design, etc.).

The question that begs to be asked at this juncture is – do we still need libraries and librarians in the face of globalisation?.

### **2.33 LIFELONG LEARNING**

The move towards a more democratic form of education in the 1960's and 1970's resulted in a shift in the concept of education from one that was authoritarian and elitist to one that advocated "equal opportunity in education"<sup>2</sup>. "Equal opportunity in education" was seen as the democratic right of all individuals ---- irrespective of race, status, age or ability but at the same time "equal opportunity" does not mean the same treatment for everyone.

For equal opportunity to be meaningful, however, education must be extended on a continuous lifelong basis with opportunities for success provided at every stage of the continuum. Any attempt at early elimination would render the democratisation process ineffective and make a mockery of the principle of "equal opportunity"

Conceptualising education as a lifelong process was an effort at translating democratic principles into educational practice. Democratising education on the principles of equal opportunity meant a re-appraisal of traditional aims and methods. Unlike the traditional concept, the modern concept of education believes that education should produce a learning society, not a learning minority. In simple language, higher education should be catering to the masses.

The change in emphasis in educational aims and objectives has made it necessary for teaching and learning methods to be reviewed, giving rise to a productive learning environment with the focus on learning and the learner rather than teaching and the teachers, in greater emphasis given to differentiation in needs, abilities and personalities in the development of independent and active learning

The democratization of higher education has given the concept "equal opportunity" a new meaning, encompassing a wider scope of educational aims and objectives. It has given modern education certain characteristics, as summarized below:

1. Greater and more flexible access to higher education

Greater access does not mean mainly increasing the number of people enrolled in mainstream university programmes but also to provide opportunities for those previously "excluded" for various reasons. Propagating lifelong education would ensure that any one who wishes to

acquire qualifications at any stage of his life would be able to do so because there are alternative means by which the opportunity is provided.

## 2. Learner-centred approach to learning

The importance given to the learner in the modern approach to education ensures that learner needs are given priority. In lifelong learning, the focus is on teaching the learner how to learn, not what to learn. In modern terms, it would mean “empowering” the learner such that he can be independent and resourceful throughout his lifetime of learning experiences. This also means that the learner is given the opportunity to learn at his own pace and according to his own style. He can undertake his learning anywhere, anytime, anyhow. Learning therefore becomes flexible, at a pace dictated by the learner and in accordance with negotiated objectives.

## 3. Variety of teaching strategies

With the learner’s interest at the heart of the teaching-learning process, the method and strategy of instruction need to adapt. Instruction has now to be skills-based, not subject-based, consistent with the need to prepare learners for lifelong learning, so as to teach them how to learn rather than what to learn. Instruction is individualised to cater to individual differences of the learners making it necessary for small-group teaching rather than the whole-class approach which assumes that learners learn at the same pace. A greater variety of teaching strategies have been devised in recent years to cope with the learner-centric pedagogy such as interdisciplinary team-teaching, project work, problem-based teaching and with greater ICT capability, web-based teaching, e-teaching, etc.

What implications does lifelong learning have for libraries?. Bearing in mind that lifelong “students” are now not confined to the 5-14 age cohort but more likely 5-65 as the learning population moves from primary schools to universities, libraries will have to reassess its collections, services and delivery systems to accommodate this learning continuum. There will be traditional as well as non-traditional universities. In the case of the non-traditional universities offering open and distance learning programmes, libraries will need to focus more on digital collections, services to be more flexible providing for remote access and delivery systems need to be efficient.

Most importantly, libraries need to move from the library-centred to user-centred services. In such cases, the library can no longer be a building but a system.

## 2.34 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The concept of KM is basically one that advocates sharing of knowledge within a company or agency such that with the sharing of knowledge it will help the company or agency to combat competition and provide it with the competitive edge. It is a process that involves:

- i) Knowledge creation – recording information from top management downwards and vice versa. It includes documenting unwritten knowledge or in other words, documenting experiences of people relevant to the company operations.

This is not an easy task because the information may not be current and people are not forthcoming, preferring to be secretive.

- ii) Knowledge organisation - documenting and using retrieval systems to store and make accessible the necessary information.

What to document, how detailed and for whom are issues related to KM. In certain agencies, there will be a committee or jury of specialists to decide which information to document and store.

- iii) Knowledge dissemination/sharing

KM was introduced to reduce barriers in information/knowledge sharing in companies to facilitate decision-making and prevent unnecessary duplication of effort. Knowing what others are doing in other department will help departmental heads to make more informed decisions. Knowledge sharing is more effective if it involves all levels of staff – from top management downwards and vice versa. The logic of sharing strategic and operational knowledge is to make processes more efficient and intra-departmental communication more effective. As for its monetary value it has been reported in the professional literature to be successful. KM has also been described as “organisational learning” because in sharing the information or knowledge the whole organisation goes through a learning process. The success of KM is difficult to quantify because it is difficult to measure the success of knowledge-sharing or to ascertain to what extent organisational learning takes place.

*But what does KM mean to libraries?*

- i) The library can become the centre for Knowledge Management in the institution by being involved in documenting, organising &

disseminating the information or knowledge gathered from within the organisation This is particularly viable for all libraries eg. In the case of university libraries information about teaching, learning & research activities can not only be documented via published reports but also by interviewing the VC, Deputy VC's, Deans, lecturers, students, Ministry of Education officials, etc. In special libraries at government agencies or private companies, there may be problems with access to confidential information like pricing of commodities, marketing policies, marketing research results, etc. In Malaysia, these are a few successful agencies undertaking KM. From their experience, it can be said that the success of KM depends on the support of the management of the organization while the main problem is that colleagues are not cooperative and not forthcoming with information, especially the tacit information.

- ii) The library can create primary “live” information contained of dealing with “passive information” which is often secondhand, outdated, irrelevant and insignificant.
- iii) Staff must be trained or retrained in certain areas in order to function effectively.  
The ability to interview effectively, the ability to relate to people without either intimidating them or being intimidated by them, knowledgeable in relevant subject areas, proficient at handling ICT information delivery systems, etc.
- iv) Allows library to be creative because “there is neither a universal approach to KM not a best way of implementation”.
- v) Recognition that information is an important commodity but like any other product needs good marketing strategies. If the library wants to function as an information centre it has to convince its own market and society at large of the importance of its role as information provider.

### **2.35 NATIONAL POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES**

All countries have long-term strategic plans. In Malaysia, it is a 25-year plan (the Vision 2020) which forms the basis for national development till 2020. Briefly, the V2020's aim is to make Malaysia an industrialized nation by the year 2020. In order to achieve this aim, 9 thrust areas were identified to drive the V2020. One of the thrust areas is to make the Malaysian society a knowledge society.

In this case of Malaysia, not only is the public sector committed to achieving the strategic objectives of V2020 but the private sector as well. Knowing where the

nation is heading for and the role played by each sector of society is important to the library and although the role of libraries is more indirect than direct, (serving the Ministry of Education and the university, etc.) libraries do have in their custody the nation's intellectual wealth which should be optimized in the development of the knowledge society.

### **2.36 THREAT**

A recent development is the establishment of companies and agencies that provide information via Internet. They may impose charges for the information but the information is current. How can libraries compete when the collections available at libraries are mainly secondary information found in print and electronic media.

At the recent International Conferences of Asian Digital Libraries, held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2003, it was remarkable to listen to ICT specialist who have devised systems for information delivery. The focus was systems rather than the content but it gives a good indication of what is to come in the near future. Much as librarians were awed about the current developments, it also gave the impression that unless libraries takes on a more pro-active approach, libraries will be by-passed as information centres.

### **2.37 GLOBALISATION**

There are 2 aspects in globalization – the positive and the negative, depending on how one views it. On pages 6 and 7, we have given positive insight into what can happen with globalization. We mentioned 2 potentials:

- i. Ability to outsource certain aspects of library functions such as acquisitions, cataloguing and information sources.
- ii. Provide information services beyond homeshores. It will be a daunting task there will be a need to upgrade staff expertise but we have to explore the possibility.

From the negative point of view, it will spell the end of library services as we know it now, specifically with regard to information delivery. The library will remain the centre for loans and reference, using print and electronic resources. These materials can be accessed on-site or from the home or office. But the critical issue is currency and variety of information that cannot be supplied by libraries. Globalisation will then take away from the library its information delivery function because in speed and variety libraries will not be able to compete with information centres worldwide despite the cost.

### 3.0 ACCOUNTABILITY IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

Having defined the environment (internal & external) it is obvious that while in the internal environment there are more weaknesses than strengths, in the external environment there are more opportunities than threats. How then can libraries take advantage of the opportunities that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to offer when library resources are inadequate and their role more peripheral than integral?

The answer is to strategise. – through well-designed strategic plans, efficient organization, capable leadership and effective control measures.

It is only when these management tools and strategies are in place can libraries ensure the achievement of their goals and objectives. The onus therefore lies with the libraries to maximise their opportunities and be accountable for the success of their performance. Seen in this light, **accountability therefore is the key factor to whether or not they can meet the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

#### 1. Strategic Plan

A well-designed plan would provide directions, minimise uncertainty and impact of changes, reduce waste and establish standards for goal achievements. The planning process incorporates the following steps:

1. Setting of goals and objectives
2. Formulating strategies
3. Developing action plans
4. Coordinating activities
5. Monitoring accomplishment of goals
6. Review/ revise plan

For the library, it is crucial that it understands what its core business is -> SERVICES. Its core business has to be integral to the core business of its organisation. In designing the strategies, the library has to first determine a strategic focus which will be incorporated in its (i) vision (ii) mission and (iii) objectives statements

eg. Vision – To be the leader and innovator in open learning

eg. Mission

- To be the leading contributor in democratizing education
- To develop quality education through multimode learning technologies
- To develop and enhance learning experiences towards the development of knowledge-based society

eg. Goals

- To be the forefront of knowledge
- To produce graduates of high quality
- To develop a permanent pool of excellent scholars
- To contribute to nation-building and the well being of the people
- To promote universal human values
- To develop an efficient, innovative and committed management

eg. Objectives

Goal: To be in the forefront of knowledge

- Objectives:
- (1) to increase Science & Technology courses to 60% in all faculties
  - (2) 40% of General studies courses to be reduced and combined with science course
  - (3) to increase the research vote by 20% by the year 2004

eg. strategic plan

Strategic Goals (UNIVERSITY)

- Upgrade academic achievement of weak students
- Upgrade opportunities & facilities for research for academic staff

↓ ↓

- >Implement collection development policies for teaching and learning
- >Library as first stop research centre
- >Improve user education programmes
- >Develop IT

Where does the issue of accountability come in the formulation of strategic plan? It is in the quantitative methods used to measure the accomplishment of goals and objectives, in the time frames given to accomplish each activity and in the quality measures used such as monitoring. Setting standards (ISO) and benchmarking. But however brilliant the plan, unless implemented, it is useless.

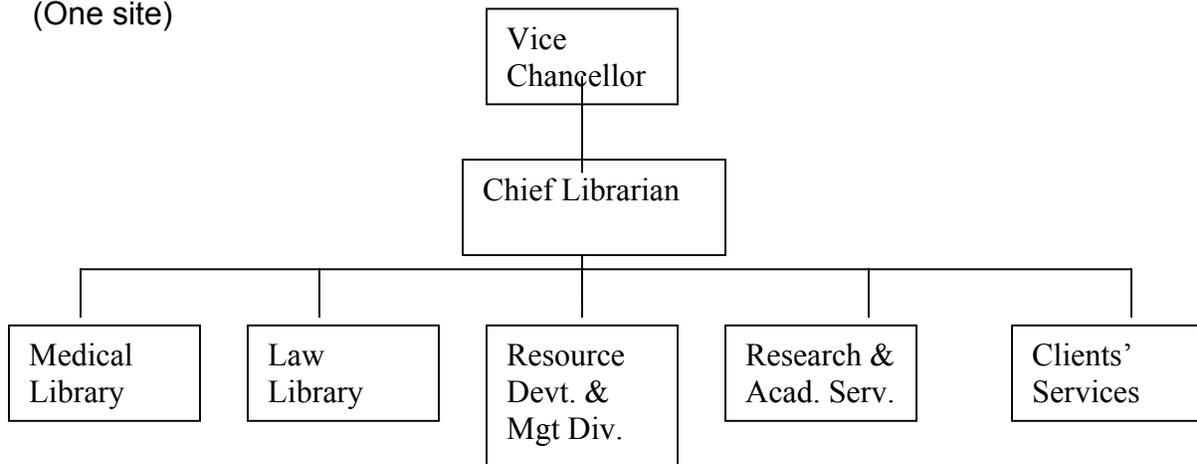
### 3.1 ORGANISING

The organisation structure should facilitate the achievement of goals so it is important that the organisation structure is designed to facilitate work flow (whether via function, specialisation or process), show the chain of command (whether hierarchical, flat, etc.) span of control (the wider the less effective), centralisation vs. decentralisation.

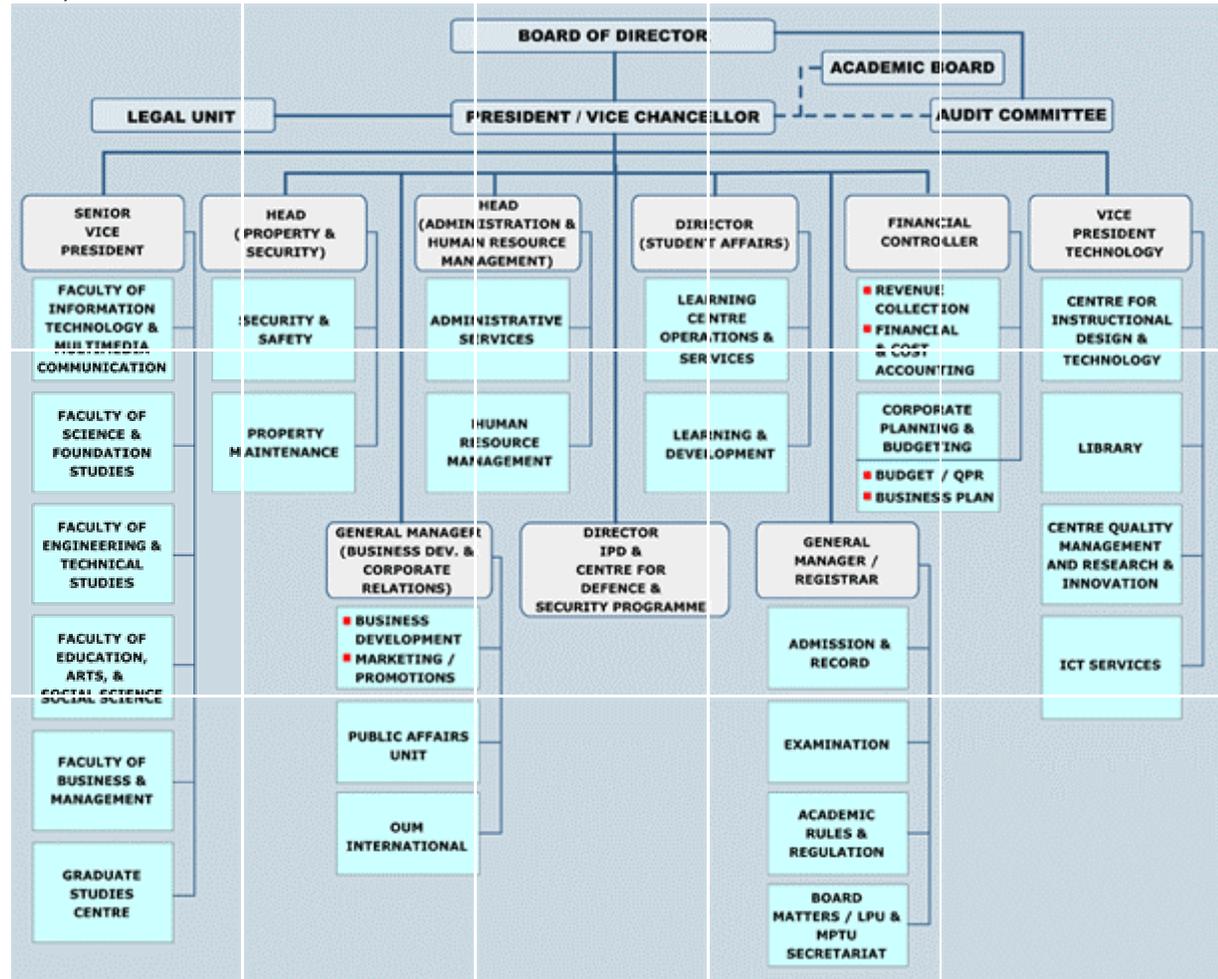
The library management would have to structure the organization such as to this & ensure that the organisation structure facilitates rather than hinder the achievement of goals. The library management is therefore accountable in this aspect.

Example of organization structure

(One site)



Eg. Organisation Struture  
(multiple sites)



### 3.2 LEADING

Leading is to influence staff towards the achievements of goals. There are different types of leaderships (autocratic, democratic, transformational, etc.) but the basic characteristics are:

Leadership does not mean just the Chief Librarian or the Library Director but applies to all levels. Leaders are managers but not all managers are leaders. The quality of human resource in any organization depends on the quality of leadership. In this way, the library manager should be held accountable if staff cannot perform and goals cannot be achieved. To ensure quality staff, the library manager should institute measures to develop the staff so that they can help to face the demands and challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century such as below:

- i) staff-development plans
- ii) motivation of staff
- iii) competency training
- iv) leadership training

### **3.3 CONTROL**

Control measures must be in place to monitor activities and ensure that goals are achieved. The effectiveness of any control system depends on how effectively it can facilitate the achievement of goals.

Why is a control system important?

- i) It is a means of measuring whether goals are met and if not why. You can have well-formulated strategic plans, well-designed organization structure, highly motivated staff but without control there is no measure of goals achievement.
- ii) It is a management tool that can be used to monitor and measure activities (financial, performance, etc.) with greater objectivity.

An efficient and effective control system shows accountability.

### **CONCLUSION**

The demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should serve as a catalyst for reviewing the library's relevance to its organisation but unless it is held accountable for its performance vis-à-vis the organisation, it will remain ineffective and peripheral.

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