

Reference, Information and Referral Services in LIS

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Abstract

Right document Reference Service is the contact established between the reader and the right document there must be of use to him. To provide the right document there must be an intimate communication between the reader and the librarian, when the user asks for help, there should be the personal involvement of the reference librarian right from the beginning to the last moment when he gets all his documents. Therefore, reference service is essentially a personal service.

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INTRODUCTION

Reference Service

The term 'Reference Service' has been defined by Wyer as; 'the sympathetic and informed personal aid in interpreting library collection for study and research'. Margaret Hutchins, on the other hand, defines it as; 'a service that includes the direct personal aid within a library to persons in search of information for whatever purpose, and also various library activities especially aimed at making information as easily available as possible'. A similar definition is given by Dr. Ranganathan, who states that 'Reference Service' is the process of establishing right content between a reader and his document in a personal way. Thus succinctly stated reference service is the contact established between the reader and the right document at the appropriate time in the best manner possible.

The Reference Process

According to Dennis Grogan, it is a serious error to think that reference work is simply a matter of answering questions. Experienced librarians can quote many examples of questions taken at their face value and answered in a perfectly adequate manner, but which still left the reader far from satisfied. It is far better thought of as problem-solving,

with the actual identification of the reader's problem being just as important as hunting for the solution [1]. It is also a mistake to think there is a reference 'method' which can be applied in all cases where information is sought. Only in certain clearly defined fields it is possible to suggest a step-by-step line of approach in searching: some areas of chemistry, for example, or of law, are so fully documented that procedures for literature searches have been laid down with some success.

This absence of a method does not mean that the librarian proceeds solely by inspiration, or even by rule-of-thumb. As Margaret Hutchins has said: 'Answering reference question is a reasoning process... it should be thought through before a step is taken or a hand lifted towards a book'. It is possible, for example, to distinguish various stages in finding information for readers which in sum make up the reference process. It is true there are a very large number of variables in this process, and the stages frequently overlap. We must agree that it is by no means an exact science, but it is susceptible of a systematic approach [2]. Dr. Ranganathan started this new type of Reference Service in madras University Library in 1926. He differentiated the old and

new reference service by the time factor; he called old reference service the 'Ready Reference Service', and new one 'Long Range Reference Service'.

This was around the 40's when the concept of 'Ready Reference and Long range reference Service' means searching for the documents necessary for the specialist reader inside the library or outside the library or in the locality, or in the country, or occasionally even in any other country. It also includes searching for micro documents i.e., articles in periodicals and sections in books. Slowly the scope of 'Long Range Reference Service' started expanding. Now Bibliographical service, Referral service, Translation service etc. are considered as 'Long Range Reference Service' [3].

Stage in Reference Service

To quote Mr. Denis Grogan again there are four stages in reference interview.

STAGE ONE: THE REFERENCE INTERVIEW

Just as the doctor's first task is diagnosis, the first stage of the reference process is determining the reader's problem, and this, as R.L. collision reminds us, is 'half the battle'. The field over which this battle is fought is the 'reference interview', or as it is sometimes more aptly described, the 'reference encounter'. This is where the librarian must ensure, firstly, that there is no misunderstanding over the meaning of the question; secondly, that this question does in fact represent precisely what the reader wants; and thirdly, that what the reader wants will in fact solve the problem.

This an area of professional endeavour demanding tact and patience, since the reader will only rarely provide all pertinent information without some prompting, the most common idiosyncrasy librarians have to prepare for this request for material on a large subject when what is needed is a precise factual point within that subject. Enquirers will ask for 'the poetry books' when they want Chesterton's poem on courtesy, for Africa when they want apartheid, for books on pets when they want the quarantine regulations [4].

STAGE TWO: ANALYSING THE SUBJECT

Having determined precisely what the reader requires, the librarian will then often find it necessary to make a detailed analysis of the subject of the question. It is essential to place the topic in its correct spot on the map of knowledge. A powerful weapon in reaching the heart of a problem, and one which falls particularly comfortably to the hand of the librarian is classification. The analysis of a subject, which classification demands, not only allows the librarian to see it more clearly in its context but often suggests keywords to search in bibliographies and indexes. Facet analysis in particular enables the librarian speedily to break down any problem, however, complex [5].

STAGE THREE: THE SEARCH STRATEGY

Time spent on deep analysis of multifaceted problems is usually well repaid at the third stage of the reference process, the determination of a search strategy. Basically, this means deciding on the order in which each of the various sources available will be consulted. Of course, a step-by-step check through all of them (even in random order) will eventually produce the answer, if it is available, but the experienced librarian uses short cuts. The actual point of entry and the subsequent path are determined by the analysis of the question and previous knowledge of the sources [6]. This is the heart of the reference process.

Experienced workers will tell you that this is the area where a librarian's flair is seen. Defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'selective instinct', it will often lead along the most likely path to the goal almost without the searcher realizing it. Few would doubt that there is this instinctive element in much reference work, but as F.S. Stych has pointed out, even those intuitive leaps and irrational hunches which can often lead to a problem's solution are 'probably the result of a rapid, subconscious review of stored knowledge'.

STAGE FOUR: THE SEARCH

The search proper, which makes up the fourth stage, comprises the actual examination of the available sources of information as determined

by the search strategy. Obviously these sources will vary considerably from library to library: in some industrial libraries, correspondence files are a major source to be included in the routine of any exhaustive search, but in many university libraries such files play practically no part at all. With unpublished university theses, the converse is true.

Four libraries lacking experience of reference work, and not yet sure that they possess this flair, deciding on the point at which they break into this circle of information sources is perhaps the most difficult professional decision they will have to face. And little can be offered to them by way of advice. There is no standard search method that can be followed. If their knowledge of the sources does not suggest a place to look, and if the obvious starting point, the catalogue, is either inappropriate or has failed them, there are two courses open to them. Firstly, they can follow the old reference librarian's maxim: 'The encyclopedia is the place to look if you can't think of a place to look'. They will be pleasantly surprised how often the great general encyclopedias will prove helpful, even if they do no more than give a lead. This is particularly so with fact finding enquiries.

FUNCTIONS OF THE REFERENCE SERVICE DEPARTMENT

The following functions are involved in Reference Service:

- 1) Answering the queries received from readers, either in person or over the phone or through correspondence.
- 2) Assisting readers in using library tools viz. catalogues and other references tools.
- 3) Preparing reading lists and ad hoc bibliographies on request or in anticipation.
- 4) Preparing guides to use the library and its collections.
- 5) Preparing special indexes and maintaining special files (e.g., pamphlets, newspaper Clippings etc.).
- 6) Providing selective dissemination of information to users.
- 7) Making arrangements for Inter-Library, loans, and if necessary inter-state or international borrowing.

- 8) Providing abstracting service.
- 9) Providing translation service.
- 10) Providing duplicating or copying facilities.

INFORMATION SERVICES

It is advantageous to discuss information services on the basis of information units. Here the traditional units- libraries are excluded. However, it is to be noted that these units do provide information services looking to the nature of users and nature of the parent unit.

Documentation Units

The main purposes served by these units are:

- (1) To identify as accurately as possible all information of potential interest to users;
- (2) To see that they receive the information;
- (3) To help them find the primary documents; and
- (4) To answer their queries.

On theory they could simply build-up files of bibliographies and contents descriptions without looking the primary documents themselves. But, in practice the specialized units at least provide library service in addition.

DOCUMENTATION CENTRES

Small Documentation units: To begin with there are small documentation units run by single professional document list and one or two other staff. They work for organizations of various sizes serving generally small groups of highly specialized scientists or professional staff.

Large Documentation Centres: various organizations both in private and public have started establishing documentation Centres. They operate exclusively for the members of the organization to which they belong, for the members of the organization to which they belong, except occasionally in the case of public undertakings: Some of these centres have acquired a large measure of autonomy and even full independence and end up by working for all specialist in their particular field both in the country concerned and abroad. This is particularly true of access service (indexing and abstracting) in a frequently broad field (like chemistry, biology,

engineering, etc.). In fact, these are run on commercial basis. National Documentation Centres: these are state institutions covering a specific subject (like small scale industries) or group of subjects (like sciences, social sciences, etc.). These centres also supply copies of documents, mostly at a price. Some of the national documentation centres by nature of their coverage, comprehension and service have attained the status of international organizations.

Information Centres

There are a wide variety of forms of information centres.

- (1) Clearing Houses;
- (2) Referral Services;
- (3) Information Analysis Centres;
- (4) Data Centres and Data Banks; and
- (5) Liaison Services.

Clearing Houses: These units try to provide a single point of access to documents originating from a number of sources, from different places, in different languages. These units are organized either on a cooperative basis or by an international or national agency. They perform a number of complex functions of both primary and secondary nature. The producers of the documents inform the clearing house the bibliographical details of the documents inform the clearing house the bibliographical details of the document and usually send them a copy. The clearing houses circulate the description of the documents to the organizations that are interested in the field and to the participating organizations. They may provide a copy of the document as well on request if available [7].

The difference between a documentation centre and a clearing house is that the former deals with conventional documents; whereas, the latter deals with nonconventional documents like conference proceedings, scientific reports, documents of limited circulation, etc.

Referral Services: These do not provide the user with the documents. Instead, they refer them to the source from where they can get the data or documents. Usually to secondary publications, information centres, houses and individual scientists. They maintain files of

sources, directories, etc. They may even bring out such documents. This may be one of the activities of a documentation centre and it is difficult to find units performing this function exclusively. Such a service provider has to keep a close touch with their sources as well as users to gauge the effectiveness of their services.

Information Analysis Centres: These are advanced form of information centres. These centres have to closely monitor the literature produced in the field; evaluate the utility of each piece of information so gathered; and communicate to the users the information in a directly usable form. The results of analysis are communicated either through a regular publication or by way of sporadic reports. It is very much essential that these centres should verify the information so gathered with regard to the validity, reliability and accuracy before dissemination. The reports of these analysis centres play an important role in strengthening research, pinpointing gaps in knowledge or shortcomings.

Data Centres and Data Banks: Data centres try to collect, arrange and store numerical data pertaining to a specific subject field or to answer specific queries. Data centres activities are anticipatory operations planned keeping in view the requirements of its users. An even more advanced form of this type of information units are the data consolidation and evaluation centres which check systematically all available data and organize them into a number of categories for the purpose of showing the current state of knowledge together with comments on the precision or reliability of the data in regard to the various aspects of a product or phenomenon [8].

Data banks are usually concerned with a broader field. They use very precise grids to extract the raw data from data collections and the relevant literature which they arrange in structured files so as to be ready for subsequent processing to answer user queries. Services of these units can directly be used for decision-making or furtherance of research obviating the need to consult primary documents or other sources of information. There is a new trend to broaden their scope by

linking them with systems designed to stimulate they give are no longer focused on the initial situation but on the possible consequences of the intended course of action. Liaison Services are organized by specialist in information management. They go to the users to identify the problems encountered by them in the course of their activities; analyse their information needs; put them in touch with the information sources or services. Sometimes, these officers themselves collect the information and provide an appropriate solution to the problems of the users on their behalf.

Information Networks

Information networks are comprised of a group of individuals or organizations that exchanging information in various forms but on a regular and organized basis. Inter-personal and inter-organizational networks grew out of the need to obtain, communicate and check information; in short, the need for exchange. Information networks will help to share tasks by pooling resources. There should be a formal agreement between members of the network and establish common produce. It is inevitable for the units in the network to exchange information.

There are different structures or configuration of networks decentralized (where all members communicate with each other directly); Centralised (where the members communicate through a centre); and Mixed networks (where certain functions are centralised and certain are decentralized) [9].

Basing on the functions of the network- there may be occasional collaboration (reciprocal access to each other's services); or full integration of the participating units in a single information system (covering all documentary functions and sharing all costs). Certain networks are based on a particular territorial unit- a city, region or country. There exist certain networks specialized in a particular

discipline or branch of activity. As a result of the development of telecommunication networks for data transmission, an increasing number of information networks (suppliers of services) are linking up with the suppliers of these networks, particularly national and international ones.

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