

ASSESSMENT OF LIBRARY CODE OF CONDUCT: THE PROSPECT AND CONSTRAINTS IN REAL LIFE SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the library code of conduct, the prospect and constraints in a real-life situation. Libraries, as gateways to knowledge and culture, play a fundamental role in society. The resources and services it offers create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives that are central to a creative and innovative society. Library science is the field of study that teaches how to manage books and other information, particularly through collecting, preserving, and organising books and other materials in libraries. The Library Code of Conduct was established to ensure that the library environment is maintained and applies to all areas of the Concordia Library, including stack areas, study spaces, classrooms, group study rooms, meeting rooms, stairwells, and washrooms. Access to the library is permitted only for the purpose of using library resources or for the purpose of academic study. The study concluded that the Library Conduct Code affirms a commitment to protecting an environment conducive to intellectual pursuits. Such an environment is characterised by respect for the rights of others, respect for the library's resources, and respect for appropriate conduct in a public forum. Also, that the libraries seek to provide a safe and secure learning environment where diverse experiences and perspectives are honored. One of the recommendations in the study was that all the rules that concern the library code of conduct should be posted in conspicuous places within the library environment for users' enlightenment.

KEYWORDS: Library, Code of Conduct, Prospect, Constraints, and Situation

Introduction

One of the basic requirements of any responsible profession is a code of conduct to regulate the activities of its members and bring honour to the profession. Library and information professionals are usually the essential links between information users and the information they require, and they therefore occupy a privileged position that carries corresponding responsibilities (CILIP, 2012). Basic moral values that define the professional mission of librarians and information professionals involve the protection of intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of access to knowledge, information, and culture, and compliance with the principle of ideological, political, and religious neutrality. Hoffman (2005), retrospectively amplifying the importance of professional ethics and librarianship, posited that professional ethics are the principles of conduct that govern an individual or a group. And that the American Library Association formally adopted its first code of ethics in 1939. The code of conduct for librarians and information professionals defines basic principles that all libraries must follow and identifies their social mission and ethical responsibility in all settings. Some codes of conduct are tied to specific types of libraries, and some are more general, usually upheld by national library associations.

Concept of Library

A library is a collection of resources in a variety of formats that are organised by information professionals or other experts who provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and offer targeted services and programmes with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole (ALA 2010). A library is a collection of materials, books, or media that are easily accessible for use and not just for display purposes (Wikipedia 2021). It is responsible for housing updated information in order to meet the user's needs on a daily basis. The library has become a centre for information access and distribution, learning and teaching activities, presentations and exhibitions, and social networking connections. The main purposes of a library are to disseminate books and information for free or close to free, to archive information, and to provide a community space for people to interact around information. Therefore, give people the tools necessary to manage information in a sensible way. Institutional libraries, organised to facilitate access by a specific clientele, are staffed by librarians and other personnel trained to provide services to meet user needs. By extension, the room, building, or facility that houses such a collection is usually, but not necessarily, built for that purpose. Rubin (2010) states that the library is now a part of a complex and dynamic educational, recreational, and informational infrastructure. Libraries, as

gateways to knowledge and culture, play a fundamental role in society. The resources and services it offers create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives that are central to a creative and innovative society.

Concept of Library Science

Library science is the field of study that teaches how to manage books and other information, particularly through collecting, preserving, and organising books and other materials in libraries. According to Harris (2005), information resources are organised to serve the needs of selected user groups; how people interact with classification systems and technology; how information is acquired, evaluated, and applied by people in and outside libraries as well as cross-culturally; how people are trained and educated for careers in libraries; the ethics that guide library service and organization; the legal status of libraries and information resources; and the applied science of computer technology used in documentation and records management. According to Hu (2013), the evolution of the library sciences maintains its mission of access, equity, and community space, as well as the new means for information retrieval called information literacy skills. All catalogues, databases, and a growing number of books are all available on the Internet. In addition, the expanding free access to open-source journals and sources such as Wikipedia has fundamentally impacted how information is accessed. Information literacy is the ability to: determine the extent of information needed; access the needed information effectively and efficiently; evaluate information and its sources critically; incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base; use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information; and access and use information ethically and legally (Information Literacy, 2016). Mobile devices and applications with wireless networking, high-speed computers and networks, and the computing cloud have deeply impacted and developed information science and information services (Rubin 2010).

Concept of Library Code of Conduct

The Library's Conduct Code affirms a commitment to protecting an environment conducive to intellectual pursuits. Such an environment is characterised by respect for the rights of others, respect for the library's resources, and respect for appropriate conduct in a public forum. A code of ethics underlines the values that govern the conduct and behaviour of people in reference to issues of rightness and wrongness, virtuousness and viciousness (Ocholor, 2011). Some codes of conduct are tied to specific types of libraries, and some are more general, usually upheld by national library associations. In order to create an environment that is

conducive to teaching, learning, and research, members are expected to adhere to the following code of conduct:

- The needs of others for a quiet study environment must be observed and noise levels must be kept to a minimum.
- Keeping library items beyond the due date is inconsiderate to other library users.
- Smoking, eating and drinking is prohibited in the University's venues of instruction and libraries.
- Cell phones must be put on silent or vibrate mode upon entering the library.
- The library is not responsible for any loss, theft or damage to the property of users.
- Anybody found in the library after closing, will be deemed to be trespassing and subject to disciplinary action.
- No re-arrangement of furniture in the library will be allow

The libraries seek to provide a safe and secure learning environment where diverse experiences and perspectives are honored. Library users are expected to respect the rights of others, the integrity of library resources, and the scholarly mission of the libraries (UW Libraries 2015). The Code of Conduct details the rules in place and acts as a general statement of the conduct we expect from users of library facilities and services. The Code of Conduct is endorsed by the Director of Library Services, the Library Committee, and the Students' Union President. Acceptance of this code is confirmed when signing the university's regulations as part of student registration (City University London 2018). It is an individual's responsibility to be familiar with the code and observe it. The Code ensures that users of the libraries find themselves in an environment that will enable them to achieve their educational objectives (NYU 2015). Also, the Library Code of Conduct was established to ensure that the library environment is maintained and applies to all areas of the Concordia Library, including stack areas, study spaces, classrooms, group study rooms, meeting rooms, stairwells, and washrooms. Access to the library is permitted only for the purpose of using library resources or for the purpose of academic study. Loitering is not permitted. Soliciting is not permitted. Audio recording, videotaping, photography, and other audio-visual recordings are not permitted except where expressly authorised by the librarian (Concordia Library 2016). Every individual in the library must be prepared to provide valid personal identification if asked by a librarian or security personnel. Users are reminded that ID cards are not transferable and should behave in a civil and quiet manner at all times.

The Code of conduct also acknowledges that the library fulfils an important educational function in the university, such as educational settings, unlike other public forums.

Prospect of Library Code of Conduct

A code of professional conduct is a necessary component of any profession to maintain standards for the individuals within that profession to adhere to. It brings about accountability, responsibility, and trust for the individuals that the profession serves. The library profession assumes an obligation to maintain ethical standards of behaviour in relation to the governing authority under which they work, to the library constituency, to the library as an institution, and to fellow workers, colleagues, and society in general. IFLA (2011) posits that the core mission of library and information professionals is to facilitate access to information for all and to personal development, education, cultural enrichment, economic activity, informed participation, and enhancement of democracy. Through the presence of a code of conduct, a professional association signals to its members' competence and integrity, and it provides social legitimization to its members (Farrell & Cobbin, 2000; Froehlich, 2007). Another function of a professional code of ethics is to serve as a means for professional socialization. One way to understand the function of a professional code of conduct is based on the social contract theory, manifested through the relationship between the profession and society as a whole (Farrell & Cobbin, 2000). Each profession receives benefits from and has responsibilities to society, and the code of conduct assures that the members of the profession are aware of this social contract and stick to it. There are three types of codes of ethics: aspirational (inspirational), regulatory (prescriptive), and educational (Farrell & Cobbin, 2000; Frankel, 2009; and Froehlich, 2007). Inspirational codes are intended to empower individuals to be ethical; they present an ideal that individuals should attempt to reach. These codes address the values and principles that users of a library should consider appropriate to apply while accessing information. Codes of conduct assume that individuals are predisposed to being ethical. Thus, codes of this type provide merely an enunciation of values; they do not advance to the application stage, consider stakeholders' interests, or attempt to use a moral philosophical rationale to derive ethical solutions such as rules or prescriptions. On the relevance of principles to framing codes of conduct, Fisher and Lovell (2006) assert that there are a number of principles that are common to most codes of conduct.

The Constraints to Library Code of Conduct

Weak supervision and monitoring and undue societal pressure on bureaucrats were among the factors constraining the effective

implementation of the code of conduct in the various libraries in Nigeria. Esse (2014) observed that library users all over the world face various challenges, which to an extent affect the way library resources are put to maximum and effective use. Most libraries face severe budget constraints and sometimes suffer neglect in most developing countries like Nigeria. The library survey showed that for most libraries, their highest budgetary priorities did not specifically include a focus on providing resources and information for health information and service development (Omotosho & Okiki, 2012). As observed by Garba (2004), the significance of the library in the academic life of students lies in the degree of effective and efficient use of the library and its resources. The following are some of the major constraints to the library code of conduct.

- **Professional Quality:** Today's insistence on quality assurance has been a major concern for those involved in every human activity. Consumers' societies have been asserting their right to have quality in whatever they buy and seek legal protection in consumer courts to ensure quality. Library and information products and services also have to face this problem sooner or later, as pricing for library and information services is on the anvil.
- **New Entrants:** Library and information activities are attracting people with different educational and professional backgrounds and qualifications. People with different professional experiences are migrating to the library and information fields with varied convictions, faith, world views, and political influences. All these affect professional conduct and behavior.
- **Professional Image:** The image of the library profession, particularly in Nigeria, is not very high in society as library and information work is considered an auxiliary to education, research, industrial or business development etc. As a result, librarians and information workers constitute a group of specialists in their respective parental organizations, and their independent image does not get the proper focus in the eyes of the public. It is only a small group of users that get a high quality library and information service that appreciates the support given to the activities. Such a limited appreciation does not contribute to the image of the profession in society as a whole.

The Strategies to Alleviate the Constraints to Library Code of Conduct

The strategies to alleviate the constraints of the library code of conduct are built on the core principles outlined to provide a set of suggestions on the conduct of library users. IFLA (2011) asserted that whilst these core principles should remain at the heart of any such code, the specifics of codes will necessarily vary according to the particular society, community

of practice, or virtual community. Code of conduct making is an essential function of an institution, just as ethical reflection is a necessity for all professions.

Open access and intellectual property: Librarians and other information workers' interests are to provide the best possible access for library users to information and ideas in any medium or format. This includes support for the principles of open access, open source, and open licenses. Their aim is to provide fair, fast, economical, and effective access to information for users because a librarian has a professional duty to advocate for exceptions and limitations to copyright restrictions for libraries.

Privacy, secrecy and transparency: Librarians and other information workers respect personal privacy and the protection of personal data, which is necessarily shared between individuals and institutions. The relationship between the library and the user is one of confidentiality, and librarians and other information workers will take appropriate measures to ensure that user data is not shared beyond the original transaction. They also recognise that it is in the public interest that misconduct, corruption, and crime be exposed by what constitutes breaches of confidentiality by so-called "whistleblowers."

Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills: Librarians and other information workers are strictly committed to neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access, and service. Neutrality results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information achievable. They strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing their knowledge and skills. They aim for the highest standards of service quality and thus promote the positive reputation of the libraries.

Responsibilities towards individuals and society: In order to promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination, librarians and other information workers ensure that the right to access information is not denied and that equitable services are provided for everyone, whatever their age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental ability, gender identity, marital status, origin, race or religion.

Conclusion

The paper concluded that the Library Conduct Code affirms a commitment to protecting an environment conducive to intellectual pursuits. Such an environment is characterised by respect for the rights of others, respect for the library's resources, and respect for appropriate conduct in a public forum. Also, that the libraries seek to provide a safe and secure learning environment where diverse experiences and perspectives are honored.

Library users are expected to respect the rights of others, the integrity of the library's resources, and the scholarly mission of the libraries. Equally, most libraries face severe budget constraints and sometimes suffer neglect in most developing countries, like Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. All the rules that concern the library code of conduct should be posted in conspicuous places within the library environment for users' enlightenment.
2. The library authority should affirm its willingness to prosecute in case of any crime committed against its users or property.
3. The librarian should pay attention to the constraint of library code of conduct, therefore, maintaining the strategies to alleviate limitations to the library code of conduct.

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