

Unit 6: Reference Service

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- Information is the product of human brain in action. It remains as one of the essential components of good communication process.
- A piece of information is not any individuals' but a national resource.
- It becomes common property resulting in an increased usage of information.
- More the utilization more is the production of information.

Need for Information Centre

- Information Centre acts as an agent of information transfer by streaming the available right information to the right users at the right time.
- Hence, any centre which acquires, organizes and distributes information to the user community is termed as 'information centre'.
- Thus, an information centre is an 'organization of people, materials and machines that serve to facilitate the transfer of information from one person to another.

Need for Information Service

- According to UNESCO, information service is defined as 'a service aiming at the actual information of its users.
- In other words, it is a service provided to an individual or institutions by an information centre, which draws attention to information possessed in its department in anticipation.

The factors which influence the need for information service are categorized as follows:

- Growth of literature (information explosion)
- Different forms of publication (traditional books, modern, micro forms)
- Language of publication / escalating prices of documents
- Growth of user population
- Information awareness
- Forms of communication (formal and informal)
- Communication barriers (time, cost, geography / distance, etc.)

Reference Service

- The dissemination of information is the basic objective of any information centre. And it can only be achieved by establishing a contact with the users.
- This kind of service-in-action is generally known as “Reference Service”. In other words, the reference service is the personalized assistance rendered by the library staff to the users in finding information regarding their study and research.
- In modern special libraries, this service is also known as ‘Information Service’. This service ranges from helping users in finding simple facts, tracing books, keeping users informed of current literature in specialized subject fields and finding specialized information.
- The object of reference service is to assist readers on all levels by serving as guide, interpreter and information agency.

- According to Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, Reference Service is, 'the process of establishing right contact between the right reader and the right book at the right time and in the right manner.
- It is a personal service to each reader in helping him to find the documents answering his interest at the moment, pin pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously'.
- It was Dr. S. R. Ranganathan who on the basis of time factor distinguished two different aspects of reference service. They are:
 - Ready Reference Service; and
 - Long Range Reference Service

Ready Reference Service

- The ready reference service refers to a reference work which is concerned with question of a factual nature which can be answered readily, generally from quick reference books which in many libraries have been shelved together with standard reference books.
- To Ranganathan, the ready reference service is more or less fact finding service which normally consumes not more than five minutes.
- Hence, the concept of ready reference service is based on the duration of time taken.

- As this service involves a very short time, it is also known as fact finding service or short range reference service. For example questions like:
 - What does UNESCO stands for?
 - What is the name of instrument which measures earthquakes?
- Can be answered in a minute or two.
- The answers to these questions can be provide by ready reference service since they normally involve short time and can be answered by referring to the books available in a library such as the: Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Directories, year Books, Handbooks, Biographical sources, Bibliographies etc.

- These reference sources should be supplemented by the files and records maintained in the reference section.
- It is true that the success of ready reference service largely depends upon the ability of the reference staff.

Long Range of Reference Service

- Long range reference service is rather a new phenomenon and an offshoot of special library service.
- As implied by its very name, there can be no question of giving immediate response in long range reference service. The long range reference service normally takes longer time.

This is mainly due to the following three influencing factors.

- Time involved
- Sources of information
- The nature of information sought

- In the long range reference service, immediate satisfaction cannot be provided.
- As it involves time, the exact time factor cannot be ascertained. While referring about the long range reference service, Dr. S. R. Ranganathan says, 'few long range reference questions take less than half an hour, while some may take a whole day or even weeks.'
- The sources of information as far as the ready reference service is concerned are restricted to reference books like dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, directories, etc.

- But in the long range reference service, the research starts with the sources of ready reference and is continued into books, periodicals, informal sources, non-book mater
- The search may continue by taking help from other libraries national or international.
- Besides, the reference librarian must be a capable person.
- He should know the development and trends in the universe of knowledge.

- In the ready reference service, the nature of information is concerned with facts.
- On the other hand, the long range reference service is concerned with a prolonged search where the factual information has no value.
- In other word, the information sought may involve exposition of a problem from a particular point of view, e.g. 'the role of centre in eradicating illiteracy,' 'World Bank's assistant to promote water bases', etc.

The following is the nature of information as far as long range reference services are concerned.

- The information sought may be too specialized e.g. information seeking behavior of researchers in economics.
- The information sought may involve an opinion on a particular area. E.g. the role of cinema in escalating crimes.
- The information sought may be too recent and could be available only in recent newspapers and periodicals. E.g. the reservation policy.
- The information sought might be available in foreign language and it requires translation service.
- The information sought might have appeared in a journal and not available in the library. The same may be borrowed by inter library loan.

- For the long range reference service to be successful, it is essential that the reference librarian possess good mastery of bibliographical organization and also familiarity with growth and development of the universe of subjects.

Information Alerting Services

Current Awareness Services (CAS)

- A current awareness service is ‘a service which provides users with the latest information, or published literature, on their particular subject of interest.’
- Current awareness may be defined as ‘Knowledge of recent developments.’
- The main aim of this service is to alert users for the new publications.
- These are generally selective, and some special libraries bring out the contents of the latest issues of the periodicals and circulate them among the users privately.

- The lists of monthly new additions brought out by different libraries also serve a similar purpose.
- As research activities in many fields in India depend upon the information sources of Western origin which normally take a considerable time in reaching them, the current awareness service is found very effective for the dissemination of latest nascent information.

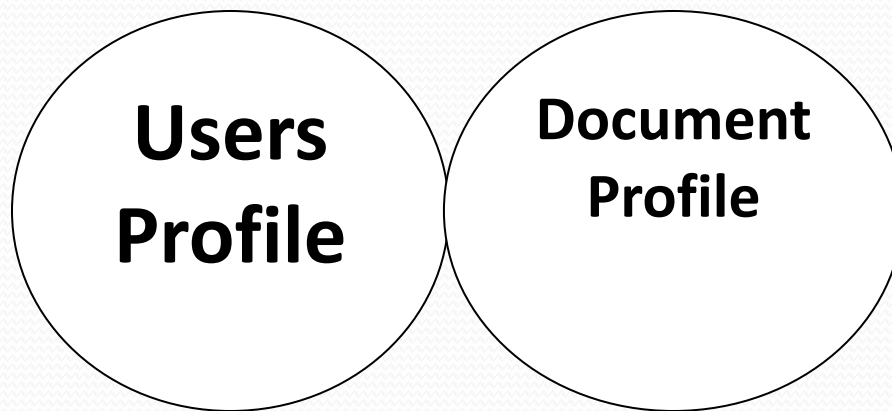
- Hence, a current awareness service is a device of the information centre through which the users of information can be informed promptly after the publication, but before absorption into the comprehensive secondary sources of current literature on a broad subject field.
- e.g. Circulating Accession List, Bulletin Board Service

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)

- Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) is a service which continually disseminates documents, references, abstracts or data selected according to the interest profiles of the users.
- The SDI is a current awareness service geared towards the individuals, unlike CAS which is meant for groups. It is also known as ‘personalized service.’

- The CAS tailored to the interests of individual's scientists and research scholars are a recent innovation which the computer has made possible.
- The processes involved in production of such personalized bibliographies are generally referred to as SDI system.
- The SDI has become the most advanced machine based information service.
- Progress has been rapid because SDI systems handle relatively small volumes of citations and also because they are able rely on a continuous stream of new input data for some years now.

Matching of Profile



e.g. Document Delivery Service and Electronic Document Delivery