

Chapter 2

Culture, Tradition and Technology: The Role of Library and Information Science Schools as Integrative Forces

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ABSTRACT

In both developed and developing countries culture, tradition and technology are key issues that affect the dialogue relating to how the three elements can be integrated in socio-economic development programs. This chapter examines the extent to which culture and technology has an influence in the integration of technology in socio-economic development in Africa. It also inquires about the extent to which technology influences culture and traditions in developed countries. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the degree to which culture and traditions are receptive to the integration of technology within the socio-economic fabric of the society. The chapter concludes that school libraries should develop a curriculum that is relevant to the information needs of the community, especially those in rural areas. It is imperative to engage communities in developing programs that help to elevate communities without compromising on fundamental and internationally recognized standards. If local conditions are taken into cognizance programs to integrate culture, tradition and technology will be successful.

INTRODUCTION

The Library and Information Sector is dynamic due to rapid advancements in technology and this inevitably stimulates the growing need to adapt services to meet new demands; this is achieved

through continuous professional training and the ability to channel expertise into innovative ways of working. Libraries are a pivotal part of stable and viable societies because of their ability to provide access to social learning spaces whereby people can access information and knowledge.

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However, the rapid advances in technology due to Information and Communication Technologies are forcing librarians to become more innovative as they grapple with the drive to integrate culture and technology to meet the information demand of the new millennium. In Africa, culture and tradition has an impact on the integration of new technology because many projects have faltered because of a failure to merge the differences between interests of designers of technology and those of the recipients. However, culture is not the only factor because there are other social, economic, political, geographical, and educational variables of equal importance. UNESCO (1998) noted that today's children are entering a dynamic world whereby there is rapid change in science, technology, politics, economics, and socio-cultural life, and this presents challenges for libraries and educational institutions in preparing the young for the future.

Every human society – whatever its level of technical evolution – devotes considerable attention to transmitting its cultural heritage to the young. This trans-generational transmission of culture has helped to cement human solidarity and to ensure the continued survival of societies over the ages. (Obanyi, 2005)

CULTURE AND TRADITION AND DIGESTION OF TECHNOLOGY

Palvia et al. (1992, p. 4) note that culture, economic stability, and social priorities influence the extent to which a country or any organization adapts new technology. The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (2000) defines culture as the social heritage of a community comprising the total body of material artifacts and non-material collective mental and spiritual artifacts knowingly and unconsciously created by people in their ongoing activities and transmitted from one culture to another. Culture is changed through internal

or external factors; for example, innovation and diffusion have transformed the world into what it is today. The adaptation of technology is dependent upon a number of cultural factors; for example, power differences, individualism versus collectivism gender and sex, attitude towards time, and monochronism versus polychronism. Hall (1976) noted that generally, people in the developing world have a polychronistic culture since there is relatively general conformity in doing a number of things as long as this does not undermine interpersonal relations; for example, multitasking through ICTs. The concept of collectivism goes well with interactive social media like Web 2.0, online chats, and blogging, which promotes collaborations.

Rogers (1995) highlights the extent to which people resist particular innovations and culture is viewed as one of the barriers that any innovation must cross before it is accepted. The greatest of these barriers is organizational culture, mental promptness and psychological resilience of the members which determine how individuals decide what is valuable and what is not. In organizations like libraries there are those old guards or laggards or idea killers who are skeptical of any new innovation from idea generators and feel threatened and are comfortable to preserve and perpetuate the status quo even at the expense of quality service delivery. Kumar (1999) notes laggards represent tradition and a source of stability because they bring positive results through their dissonant acts. The integration of culture, tradition and technology in adapting library technology has been premised on maintaining equilibrium between stability and change, resulting in consensus between those who want change and promote new innovations and those against change as both interact with each other. Culture determines the technology that people will build and accept. "...any culture is a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and other men...cultures produce needs as well as provide a means for fulfilling them" Shoremi (1999).

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