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THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE: REVIEW OF SELECTED CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

Entrepreneurs and small businesses are widely understood to be engines of economic growth and innovation. Less well-known is how libraries advance entrepreneurship. Libraries meet the needs of aspiring entrepreneurs of all backgrounds, in every part of our nation. Regardless of past experience, an individual seeking to launch an enterprise can use library resources, technologies and staff expertise to engage in business planning, perform market research, seek capital investments, explore community connections, learn about intellectual property practicalities, prototype products and conduct day-to-day operations. Libraries and the public and private sector actors engaged in advancing entrepreneurship should collaborate more to create new opportunities for learning, discovery, growth and innovation across the economy. Library professionals are doing many social activities to promote peace, tolerance, and the public good. Therefore, librarians essentially are social activists to bring social change.

Keywords

Library; Librarian; Entrepreneurship; Social change

INTRODUCTION

Social institutions (institution consists of a group of people who have come together for a common purpose) today look enormously dissimilar than they were doing in recent decades. A variety of forces, most specifically economic changes and technological developments, have reshaped and redefined our notions of what constitutes a university, bank, a service station, business center or a bookstore. Libraries are not immune to the societal forces re-shaping other institutions.

1. The role of libraries in modern society

The information society development demands to re-define the position and objectives of all the Institutions which work with information, knowledge, and culture. Libraries have been

identified as one of the key elements for open access to information, which is crucial to democratic information society development. Libraries are especially important now when the whole idea of education is stressing more and more independent learning and acting.

Today's libraries are dynamic community cornerstones. The answer to the question "What do libraries do?" has more answers than ever before. Libraries, with the expert assistance of library professionals, enable Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement what we can refer to as "The E's of Libraries". The explicit focus of this white paper is the Entrepreneurship "E". Small business development and entrepreneurship is an area in which library services are robust and expanding. Libraries provide expertise, physical and digital re-sources, community intelligence, and more to assist entrepreneurs at every stage of launching and operating a business. The following discussion and analysis highlights library leadership in these areas, and under-scores opportunities for public, private and non-profit decision makers to leverage libraries to further advance the innovation economy. It is assumed that the libraries are widespread, open to all and are very powerful tools for stimulating entrepreneurship, creativity and collaboration. We support the creation of incubation spaces, fabrication laboratories, co-working areas, and ideation libraries around the world. We imagine a future where all the libraries existing in the world are incubator of social entrepreneurship.

The strategic objectives to achieve the above mentioned future libraries are (a) creating economically sustainable models of libraries with a high social impact for communities in need, (b) redesigning the role of librarians as representatives of social change and social entrepreneurship and (c) adopting an entrepreneurial spirit through the use of libraries as breeding place for social change.

In this context, entrepreneurship is becoming very much essential in libraries. The meaning of entrepreneurship has become all but synonymous with the implementation of computer/digital technology and purely market-driven initiatives, in the expectation that this will solve library service problems and somehow, generate money or justify funding. Short-sightedness and simplistic thinking displaces any consideration of long-term initiatives which might better ensure the credibility and survival of libraries.

Long gone are the days when libraries were physical spaces to house tangible books, a place where noise was considered a taboo because libraries were a serious place for serious people but not for hanging out. As we look around today, we slowly realize that libraries have changed to accommodate themselves in this digital age. Librarians work in collaboration with their community and partners to build a central hub of information for everyone. "Everyone" includes the small business community as well. Entrepreneurs play a huge part in driving the economy and libraries are recognizing the need to promote and sustain entrepreneurship. Librarians apply a lot of Library Science to the work they do. Today's libraries can directly address some of the most pressing issues in digital age such as services to older adults, new immigrants, children, homeless people, teenagers, technology training, job readiness etc. Libraries are providing small businesses with startup resources and training as well as providing competitive intelligence to entrepreneurs.

2. Knowledge creation

Libraries are a center for knowledge. Both public and academic libraries have a broad range of sources for your entrepreneurial information needs. We are living in a knowledge based economy and secondary research is crucial in order to gain a competitive advantage. Librarians are skilled in knowing where to find resources, which saves entrepreneurs time and even potentially exposes them to some new useful information that they may not have been seeking in the first place. Some of the business resources librarians can direct an entrepreneur to include (a) lists of competitors, (b) library sources such as business databases, business plans and (c) industry research sources.

While it is widely known that public libraries serve the whole community, it's important to note that

business academic libraries do not limit their services to the students and faculty within their program, but often extend their support to society users as well.

3. Customization

Google is a wonderful invention and it has become so embedded in our lives that it's become a transitive verb in the English language! However, as powerful it may seem, Google still has its limitations. When you do a conventional search, results usually range from millions of results. As entrepreneurs, the last thing on your to-do list is to spend hours skimming these articles for information that your business can use. Fortunately, librarians are trained to be expert searchers, having learned efficient strategies and are able to customize and curate the content according to your query, narrowed down to your essentials.

4. Networked within the society

Most, if not all, libraries have created environments that foster entrepreneurship. These are not limited to entrepreneurship training seminars, experiential learning and sharing of resources. Being public institutions, libraries make partnerships with reputable organizations or other fellow entrepreneurs that might be of help to your business. For example, as a start-up, you might consider connecting with an organization that specializes in funding support. There are many funding options available you won't be able to find with just a Google search, librarians can help you boil down what your best options are. Though library professionals are not responsible for giving advice, they can connect you to the appropriate organizations that can give you further assistance on your query or direct you to a library contact in their network.

5. Develop a workshop program

Library professionals can develop focused learning workshops or summer programs with a set time period (6–12 weeks) in partnership with local businesses, a local university campus, or chamber of commerce with the local government economic development officer. Key topics of interest at this workshop can be social media marketing, managing cash flow, and business models, marketing your startup and how to develop your pitch. Each of these lunchbox forums can be

developed with very minimum budget and are free to attend with all speakers.

6. Help to raise the entrepreneurial spirit

Since the time of budding entrepreneurs are very precious, they certainly don't have the time to be sifting through thousands of pages of data looking for information that may or may not help them with their research goals. Librarians, with their knowledge of tapping into the right resources, are always there to help identify your best options quickly and efficiently so you can focus on building your business.

Librarians have been leaders in navigating the copyright landscape during the digital transformation of the publishing industries over the last two decades. Library professionals are therefore well suited to provide entrepreneurs with first-hand advice concerning how to manage their copyrights and licenses in the digital age.

7. Libraries and Entrepreneurs

While delightedly exploring a book 'The Library of the Future' published in 1936, it is marveling at how issues facing public libraries remain the same. One of the core chapters deals with public libraries and its services to business at the local level and how a successful economy depends on relevant information being available for the local businessman. In 2018, the economic landscape and the very nature of work and business are changing at a rapid rate. Startups, Social impact business models, the sharing economy and entrepreneurship are all being promoted as the new ways to generate new nature of work to library professionals. Public libraries can play a core support role for their communities in this new innovation space. The new business world is not all about technology, but it is about tailored design, human centered services and high end products are all part of the new startup world.

8. Librarians and Social Activism

As we are entering the election season, we are reminded the daily issues of politics. As public servants, librarians must be apolitical in their work life in terms of candidates and parties. But at the same time, librarianship in many ways is a highly politicized occupation. In fact, regardless of location, the librarian can wield a great deal of social power and influence. Like it or not, intended

or not, the librarian can bring about and effect social change. Daily in our choices of collection development, readers' advisory, display creation and programming, we expose the public to ideas and issues. Many make conscious choices to include a wide range of perspectives. We focus on issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Often these are intentional decisions designed to inform and educate. Further, when we intentionally choose materials that represent a wide range of perspectives or a multicultural tale for story time, we implicitly are doing this to bring about social change. Our goal may be to have the library be more inclusive, to reach out to a less dominant population, or to promote intellectual freedom and democracy. The definition of social activism is an intentional action with the goal of bringing about social change. It is doubtful that any would say directly that we are doing the above activities to promote social change, but we do at times say we are doing this to promote peace, tolerance, and the public good. Therefore, librarians inherently are social activists.

9. Librarians as agents of social change

Speaking at Internet Librarian International 2011, about the role of libraries in a post conflict society, FedjaKulenovic told his audience that "war is the opposite of libraries". This seemingly extraordinary statement makes absolute sense when you consider that times of conflict bring disinformation, loss of trust, cessation of conversations and, sometimes, destruction of physical resources. The Turkish invaders set blaze and destroyed the huge library of the Nalanda University, millions of titles were lost in the conflict, in Bosnia & Herzegovina and the national library was destroyed etc. There is so much potential for librarians to make a real difference in 'turbulent times'. Fedja outlined the role of librarians in providing inspiration, creative spaces, and creating opportunities for healthy and positive dialogues between different populations. They can rebuild the information landscape too, helping society move away from misinformation to clarity and balance. Speaking at the same session, Maria Cotera reminded the audience that there are many people in the world who are information poor. Maria Cotera volunteers for a charity that seeks to bring library services, and literacy support, to prisoners in Africa. Such services can be completely transformational to marginalized populations.

Case Study 1: Dallas Public Library

The case study of Dallas public library can be considered to validate the above statement. The Dallas public library hopes to achieve its goal of building an inclusive entrepreneurial community because of its vision and resources. According to the survey taken by the Pew Research Center, 87% of participants in US believe that the libraries should definitely or maybe offer programs and services to help small businesses too rather than limiting themselves to academic fraternity. Hence, Dallas public library created a small business center called Dallas BRAIN (Business Resource and Information Network) in 2014. The center occupied a prominent place in the business and technology division and in 2015, the OED (Office of Economic Development) proposed a partnership that to combine OED business support resources with the library's physical assets. This collaboration helped them to introduce new programming and provided small business customer support. Both departments realized the importance of creating a center for small businesses in library. Library personnel are also a vital asset in supporting small businesses. Library professionals have extensive experience helping people, articulate their learning needs and they facilitate access to the necessary information. Libraries traditionally have been places of self-guided, continuing education and perform as open universities. The culture of collaboration and learning their support is a natural fit for supporting an inclusive, entrepreneurial community. The libraries are in every neighborhood, they are open and free to all residents, have training and meeting spaces and they have a skilled staff who are experts at information discovery. Hence, librarians can be your personal information business consultant in your present and future ventures.

Case Study 2: MapStory of Dream Lab

The trajectory of MapStory's growth from a kitchen table hobby to a flourishing storytelling platform represents a classic dream-to-reality story. The story begins in New York City in the late 1990s, where Chris Tucker, a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University, was studying the relationship between geography and technological change. In the process, he was struck with an idea: to create a research database for space and time. Harnessing the power of geographic information systems (GIS), he could build an open platform for the

creation and sharing of interactive maps that told the stories of cultural landmarks, historical events, demographic trends, and more. He thought that the interactive and collaborative nature of this platform would animate the learning process. Tucker worked independently to realize his vision for years, until he caught a break in late 2012: the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) – the backer of the first-ever GIS project – supported Tucker's work with a grant. With ACE's cash infusion, Tucker hired Jonathan Marino as a full-time content and strategy guru. One afternoon, while taking a walk to clear his head in the midst of a difficult workday, Marino wandered into the MLK library. While casually scanning the literature in MLK's Information Commons, Marino came across a brochure for the library's new "Dream Lab" co-working facility. In short order, MapStory was accepted as the Dream Lab's first member. By 2014, the start-up was operating out of the Dream Lab full-time. The open and collaborative culture of the Dream Lab makes it the perfect setting for MapStory's day-to-day operations. Marino touts the facility's informational resources, internet access and community connections as crucial to MapStory's work. "When I walk through the door, I'm surrounded by business, culture and community information," explains Marino. The facility has helped Tucker, Marino and their team cultivate local relationships that bolster MapStory's profile and public service mission.

The Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Central Library in Washington, D.C. offers a co-working space known as the Dream Lab. The facility boasts 3D printers, SMART boards (digital whiteboards), videoconference rooms and other workplace tools. One start-up that calls the Dream Lab home is MapStory, an interactive and collaborative tool for mapping change over time. The goal of MapStory is to allow people to harness open geospatial data to better understand the world. Maps generated through this tool include a depiction of the territorial claims of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from July 2014 to April 2015; an illustration of air strikes carried out by the countries allied with South Vietnam during the Vietnam War between 1970 and 1973; and an illustration of the progression of Lewis and Clark's discovery expedition to the Pacific Coast. Jonathan Marino, MapStory's Director, credits library resources with helping him to get his venture off the ground. As of last summer, the MLK Central

Library had helped MapStory digitize and upload approximately 8,000 maps and allowed Marino to hold informal focus groups with patrons.

Case Study 3: Entrepreneurship in libraries with toys

A toy is a child's best companion. But buying new toys every month gets hard on one's pocket. Catch a glimpse of toy libraries that offer toys on rent even as the concept is a rewarding business proposition at a low investment. This concept of toy library was conceived with the help of academic/public library concept wherein this plan was strengthened by adding the suggestions offered by library professionals. Here books are replaced by toys and the concepts of libraries remain same. The collection includes myriad colorful toys, building blocks, puzzles, board games, dolls and soft toys, video games, DVDs, CDs and many more. Some children are fumbling to choose their favorite toy from the racks, while some are riding on the wooden horses with a pride and poise anyone would feel sitting on the real one. Well, this is not a description of a toy shop or a nursery classroom but of a toy library where kids come in as its members and get their favorite toys on rent. Toy libraries are the only solution to the concern of such parents where their children could be exposed to different sorts of games and toys as per their age, requirement, ability and skills. Toy libraries are equivalent to book libraries where toys could be taken on rent for a week preferably by children who are the main decision makers with regard to buying toys.

Though the concept of toy libraries has its roots in the west, it has gained quick popularity in tier-I and tier-II cities. But the concept is witnessing growth, especially in the last few years. The Indian toy industry that caters to about all age groups of kids witnessed a robust rise in the recent times mainly due to increasing disposable incomes of parents and rise in the demand for educational toys. Educational toys and other learning aids are also gaining popularity among educated working parents who feel that toys perform an essential role in their children's development. But purchasing toys every time according to the aptitude of the child and the right age is a way too steep for parents when their kids have just learned to identify colors and shapes.

Chandigarh-based Davinder Malhotra, who has 15 years of experience in the field of education, started

her franchise business of toy library by the name of Rent Me Toy. She says: "I saw parents buying toys and then carrying them from place to place. Also many times parents felt that though they could buy toys, it's of no use as their child played with them only for a week and thereafter these toys became junk. That was the point when I decided to open a toy library to cater to the needs of kids from birth to 8 years of age." Manisha Shah, Founder, Air Buddies, believes: "With the rising inflation every year, parents cannot fulfill the demands of their growing children for toys and games. The idea of fulfilling the demand for the right toy for the right age of children gave me the inspiration to commence a toy library franchise. Our libraries provide membership to parents after which they can get toys on rent for a week or two and can get it exchanged with others. The concept of renting toys gives them the options for a variety of toys while helping in the development of their children without any additional monthly burden on their pockets."

Another brand Kids Gurukul is among the early players in this sector. According to the brand, the rising prices of toys and the lack of storage space in apartments are two of the main reasons behind the popularity of toy libraries. Kids Gurukul has libraries in Delhi and NCR and is set to spread its footprints all across India via franchising.

However, Neeta Verma, Founder of online toy library Rentoy.in feels: "Franchising is a complete hassle-free way to get started faster on an entrepreneurial journey in a structured way. At Rentoy.in, we empower our franchise partners in multiple ways to make it convenient and focused by standardizing operating procedure. We offer both online and offline models, which make it convenient for housewives too depending on their availability."

CONCLUSION

While analyzing the influence of the environmental changes, we can make a conclusion, that different roles of the libraries can be important for different members of society. Libraries have a unique role to play in disseminating knowledge and offers new possibilities to do this. The role of the library professionals is very vital in information literacy skills development, technological changes, economic changes, political changes, libraries and citizen empowerment, democracy and e-government. Thus librarians really can contribute to transformation of individuals and society.

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