Awareness of, and Attitudes Towards the Paradigm Shifts Among Library and Information Science (LIS) Faculty Staff in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The study is informed by the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The integrative theoretical approach allowed for methodological pluralism and enabled the researcher to discuss two distinct types of change, namely evolutionary change and revolutionary change. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed. The qualitative methodology was dominant, while the quantitative methodology was supplementary. The study integrated case study and survey research methods within a single research design. Respondents in the case study were surveyed using survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The population of the study comprises all LIS faculty staff, Deans/Heads of Departments (HODs) in higher education institutions (HEIs) offering LIS education in Zimbabwe. The study found that LIS faculty members have high awareness levels and optimism about paradigm shifts in the fields of library and information science. Despite this awareness, knowledge and optimism, LIS faculty staff are victims of paradigm effects and paradigm paralysis. This suggests that for any change initiatives to succeed, LIS faculty members need to break the chains of paradigm effects and paralysis. Until the chains are broken no meaningful evolutionary or revolutionary change can happen in LIS education and training in Zimbabwe. The findings provide fundamental information for decision makers at national and institutional levels. The information can be used for the purpose of analysis, advocacy and strategic planning for educational reforms.

Introduction and background

Organizations, like biological species exist for relatively long periods of equilibrium, punctuated by sudden revolutionary changes (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). The first LIS Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme was inaugurated in 1985 at Harare Polytechnic and later dispersed to Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru, and Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Polytechnic Colleges (Hikwa, 2010). The TVET LIS programmes offer three undergraduate qualifications: the National Certificate (NC), the National Diploma (ND), and the Higher National Diploma (HND). The overall regulatory body for Higher Education (HE) in the country is the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE, 2016). ZIMCHE promotes, coordinates, registers and authorizes education and training programmes provided in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Its major role is to control and maintain standards (teaching, examination, faculty qualifications) and enforce government policies and regulations (ZIMCHE, 2016). The TVET curriculum falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education's Curriculum Research and Development Unit (CRADU) and the Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO). The programmes use a common curriculum developed in collaboration with HEXCO, faculty staff and the LIS industry (Munyoro, 2014).

In 2000, LIS education and training was institutionalized in universities. The first university to offer LIS as an academic discipline was the National University of Science and Technology (NUST). In 2009, the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) followed suit. Vann (1961:24) suggests that education for librarians should be founded and entrenched on "theoretical teaching[s]…, the idea being that, given a right theory, the proper accommodation to circumstances can easily be made". University LIS education and training programmes in Zimbabwe heeded Vann's (1961) assertion and adopted a liberal education model. University programmes offer two levels of qualifications: undergraduate (Bachelor Degrees) and postgraduate (Postgraduate Diplomas, Masters and Doctoral Degrees), with the undergraduate degree or post graduate diploma becoming the standard acceptable professional entry qualification (Munyoro, 2014). Universities have great autonomy over their curriculum and are able to review and adjust it, provided funds and time permit. The mode of instruction in LIS education and training programmes is mainly contact (NUST and TVET) and distance/open learning (ZOU).

Since their inception in Higher Education (HE), LIS education programmes in Zimbabwe have had a period of stability (equilibrium). As the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory suggests, systems have a deep structure. Gersick (1991:14) defines the deep structure as "the set of fundamental 'choices' a system has made" consisting of; "i) the basic parts into which its units will be organized, and ii) the activity patterns and principles of interaction that will maintain its existence." During the equilibrium period, the components of the deep structure are re-inforced and consolidated with only incremental adaptations permitted, to offset internal and external perceived environmental demands without changing the deep structure (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). However, the LIS education programmes' equilibrium period has been punctuated by compact periods of qualitative, metamorphic changes that are revolutionary in nature. The revolutionary changes have been attributed to rapid and significant developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as to the socio-economic paradigm shift from the industrial era to the knowledge era. For more than two decades, LIS education programmes have been repeatedly called to redefine and position their programmes to respond to technological and socio-economic imperatives. Despite these calls, Twigg (1992), Blin and Munro (2008), and Kirschner (2012) suggest that very little has changed. Kirschner (2012) attributes the sluggish pace of change to negative attitudes based on deep rooted dogmas and fear of the unknown, while Twigg (1992) ascribes it to the phenomenon of paradigm effects and paralysis. Twigg (1992) describes paradigm effects as an unrelenting belief in an existing paradigm. O'Driscoll (2016) typifies paradigm paralysis as the inability or refusal to see beyond current models of thinking. Twigg (1992) suggests that paradigms have powerful and enduring effects on individuals and the society because the assumptions ingrained in a paradigm mold beliefs and determine how an individual or society perceives the world. If a belief in an existing paradigm is unrelenting, it results in paradigm effects that subsequently lead to paralysis (Twigg, 1992). Resisting change is, according to David Puttnam, "tragic because… should we fail to radically change our approach to education, the same cohort we're attempting to "protect" could find that their entire future is scuttled by our timidity," (Puttnam, 2012).

Review of literature

This section evaluates what research has been undertaken (mostly at the global level), into the topic of the current study with the aim of positioning the study in the existing body of knowledge and identifying research gaps that provide the rationale for the study. The literature is reviewed based on two themes: LIS faculty staff's awareness of, and LIS faculty staff's attitudes towards paradigm shifts, as derived from the specific questions of the study. A study by Giessner (2011) established that the way an individual reacts and responds to organizational change is crucial, as it determines its success or failure. Bouckenooghe (2009) and Giessner (2011) believe that change agents need to understand why employees respond favourably or unfavourably towards change. Choi (2011) suggests that there is an increasing need for studies on the effects of employees' attitudes towards organizational change as they are critical antecedents to the accomplishment of organizational change strategies. Rogers (1995) provides more details on the innovation antecedents such as: past experience, felt needs, the norms of a social system and individual innovativeness, all of which determine an organization's adoption of changes.

LIS faculty staff awareness of paradigm shifts

Kuhn (1996) describes a paradigm as a comprehensive model of understanding that provides a community of practice with viewpoints and rules on how to look at the field's problems and how to solve them. Kuhn (1996) posits that as long as a paradigm is successful at explaining observed phenomena and solving problems, it remains dominant.

However, as new trends emerge, anomalies which cannot be explained by the current paradigm are identified and the paradigm succumbs to increasing doubt. This has been exemplified in HE globally, as the current education paradigm that has controlled and informed HE for more than three hundred years has succumbed to increasing doubts and questions. HE is being called to radically transform and embrace a new paradigm of education that is qualitatively different from the current model of education designed to fulfil the requirements of the industrial era. Kuhn (1962, 1970:67), suggests that "awareness begins in the mind of the person. What we perceive, whether normal or meta-normal, conscious or unconscious, is subject to the limitations and distortions produced by our inherited and socially conditional nature." In the context of change, Rogers (1995) suggests that awareness knowledge represents the knowledge of the innovation's existence. Awareness knowledge motivates an individual or a social system to learn more about the innovation before adopting it. It is during the level of awareness when an individual seeks information on how to use an innovation correctly and how and why an innovation works (Rogers, 1995). Kirschner (2012), as well as Barber, Donnelly, and Rizvi (2013) suggest that there is a significant body of knowledge and scholarly discourse of change in HE. According to Rogers (1995), this suggests a wide common knowledge of the existence of innovations. The Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory infers that social systems have communication channels used for communication purposes within and outside the social system. The communication channels are considered to be the most effective way to raise awareness and influence individual adopters or a community of practice as regards their attitudes towards an innovation (Rogers, 2003).

Attitudes of LIS faculty towards the paradigm shifts

Tushman and Romanelli (1985), Gersick (1991), and Bouckenooghe (2009) suggest that organizational change is possible if staff members have positive attitudes towards change initiatives. Shurgaia (2015) states that the perceived outcomes of change influence staff members' attitudes towards change. Bouckenooghe (2009) suggests that favorable outcomes of change induce positive attitudes, while negative outcomes are likely to result in negative attitudes towards change. Hallgrimsson (2008) explains that the active participation and unwavering commitment of staff members are key components in successful organizational change. Fullan (2002) considers visionary, committed and competent leadership as a critical component of any successful organizational change process. This view is shared by Ely (1999), who notes that visionary, committed and competent leadership is central in organizational change processes, as such leadership will ensure that resources are allocated, while also endorsing, planning, leading, organizing, motivating and encouraging change. Mayasari (2010) asserts that during organizational change processes, organizations should have free flow of relevant information, "which helps staff members make sense of the change process, reduces uncertainty and shapes positive beliefs about the process" (Shurgaia, 2015:118).

Chandler (2013) avers that resistance to change can be attributed to distorted perceptions of change and vague change strategic priorities. Lane (2007) states that strong organizational cultures tend to resist change because organizational culture provides members of an organization with a strong sense of identity, clear behaviours, routines, practices and expectations that impede and limit change. This perspective is substantiated by Blin and Munro's (2008) findings which indicated that although many HEIs have adopted and invested significantly in ICTs, there is very little evidence of the use of ICTs in teaching and learning practices. Blin and Munro (2008) attribute this to established and entrenched organizational behaviours, routines, practices and expectations. Lane (2007), Chandler (2013) and Shurgaia (2015) concur that employees resist change as they consider it tedious to break old routines, values and practices and to engage in relearning. Khan, Hasan, and Clement (2012) and Unal and Ozturk (2012) explain