



Innovative Library Services for Information and Knowledge-based Parliament: Case study of the Parliamentary Information Centre



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Abstract

The 21st Century is rightly characterised as the age of information and knowledge simply because the global economy has shifted from industry based to information and knowledge based economy. Globally competitive libraries of the 21st century are more than just repositories for books and information resources. There is a growing demand for Parliamentary libraries in particular to evolve and become more dynamic and responsive to the information needs of Parliaments. The proliferation of the availability of information and accompanying changes in its storage and dissemination demanded that the Parliamentary Information Centre should seek innovative ways of improving and facilitating the provision and dissemination of information and knowledge. The

Centre realised that it must ensure that its services are soundly based on the needs and expectation of its clients [Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff]. This paper seeks to provide an insight to some of the technology enhanced library services that are implemented at the South African Parliamentary Information Centre. It highlights how the Parliamentary Information Centre is leveraging innovative technologies to meet the information needs of Parliament. The paper concludes that innovative technologies and responsive library services can play a pivotal role in meeting the information and knowledge needs of Members of Parliament.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

The title of my paper is *“Innovative Library Services for Information and Knowledge Based Parliament: Case study of the Parliamentary Information Centre”* The paper is divided into four sub-themes:

1. An overview and introduction to the Parliamentary Information Centre,
2. The repositioning and rebranding of the Parliamentary Information Centre,
3. Technology Enhanced Library Service Project.

The fourth theme of the paper is the powerpoint presentation of the two of the strategic priority areas from the “Technology Enhanced Library Project, namely the Integrated Library Management System and the Digital Content Delivery sub-projects and the sub-theme is:

4. Digital Platforms and Resources

Overview and Introduction to the Parliamentary Information Centre

Since its inception in 1885, the Library of Parliament has built a huge collection to meet the information needs of Members of Parliament. The initial collection was expanded when the mining magnate, Sidney Mendelssohn donated his Africana Collection to the Library of Parliament. This collection was to form the nucleus of the existing Africana collection housed

in the Library of Parliament. A sum of money was also left for the development and maintenance of the collection and the money is currently kept under various investment accounts. In 1927, the collection was again expanded when 15,000 items belonging to the collection of Major William Jardine was purchased by the Library of Parliament. The Copyright Act No 22 of 1950 gave the Library of Parliament copyright privileges, and as such received a copy of all material published in South Africa. The current collection comprise a variety of formats including e-publications (books and journals), maps, microfilms, photographs, atlases, videos, CD's, DVD's, slides, online databases and links to internet resources.

For over a century, the Library of Parliament has continued to provide significant support to the overall functioning of Parliament. In order to succeed in the 21st century, the Library of Parliament needed to exploit the benefits and opportunities of the networked world and embrace new ways of delivering content and reaching out to Members of Parliament. The digital revolution has also changed the relationship between the library and Members of Parliament, many of whom do not use the physical library. The Library of Parliament embarked on a dynamic and ongoing process of reinvention, beginning with an intentional effort to design, develop and implement new ways to serve and connect with Members of Parliament.

The Library of Parliament has, like many other parliamentary libraries in the world, come a long way from being a gentlemen's library, that is, a place of leisure, to a vibrant Parliamentary Information Centre, with its finger on the pulse of activities and events taking place in Parliament. It is one of the oldest existing libraries in South Africa and can be traced back to the Parliament of the Cape of Good Hope in 1854. The Cape Legislative Council (Senate) and the Cape Legislative Assembly (National Assembly) met in two separate buildings and two separate library collections were established for each house. The Cape Legislative Council sat in the Council chamber of the Old Cape Supreme Court building (Slave Lodge) at the top of Adderley Street while the Cape Legislative Assembly sat at this hired Chamber.

In July 1854, a Select Committee was appointed to consider the matter of the establishment of a library for the Cape Legislative Council. Three years later, the Cape Legislative Assembly also appointed a Select Committee to consider the establishment of a library for its House. A fortnight later the Committee reported and recommended that there should be a joint library

for the use of Members of Parliament of both Houses. The Select Committee also recommended that the House of Assembly should acquire a certain number of standard works of reference for its own use.

When the new Houses of Parliament were completed in 1885, the collections from the two libraries were merged to form a joint library called the Library of Parliament. The library is conveniently situated between the two Houses of Parliament, the Old Assembly building and Senate Building currently known as the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) building.

The repositioning and rebranding of the Parliamentary Information Centre

The success of any Parliament in undertaking the functions of passing the laws, scrutinizing the executive functions and generally holding the government to account is highly dependable upon the effective provision of research, information and library services. It is widely recognized that information and knowledge are the critical asset for Parliament to succeed in its functions. Information and knowledge therefore becomes the lifeblood of Parliament but they are often neglected in favour of material assets. Can you imagine a Parliament without a Library or Research Department? Parliamentary democracy would be impossible under such polity. Like the human body cannot live without blood, Parliament cannot function without information and knowledge.

The availability of information and communication technologies is allowing people, anywhere in the world, to access reliable and accurate information and knowledge almost instantaneously. In most cases where there are very limited information and communication technologies, innovative services and products might not be possible.

In 2008, the Information Communication Technology Forum in Parliament conducted a survey on the use of technology. Responses and comments were solicited from 105 Members of Parliament on the benefits of ICT in supporting the basic values of transparency, accessibility, effectiveness and oversight. The report findings also indicated a future vision of the Library of Parliament that is remotely accessible 24 hours and seven days a week. The library at that time was faced a particular ongoing challenge in presenting its value in Parliament primarily because of its traditional role. We recognised that while we needed to break out of the

traditional mould, we also needed to deconstruct the perception that the library was just a repository for books and information resources. There was a growing need for the Library of Parliament to evolve and become more dynamic and responsive to the information needs of Parliament.

Talking about innovative library services, information professionals have this ability to easily adapt to the changing technological environment. In libraries, these innovative efforts tend to evolve around the improvement of services and products. With this in mind, what is called innovative library services in our context may be a normal service in your context. The services or products might not be a new idea but it is implemented in a new context or for a new purpose. It is the way in which we integrate the technology to yield greater benefits to the Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff.

The second stage of that transformation was to do with rebranding of the library, which removed the term library and replaced it with information. It was important for us to rebrand in order to continuously justify our existence. Dropping the name library was part of moving the library into 21st Century web based services. We are in the business of information and information is more than just books. We were of the opinion that Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff will put up with the change of name if it brings new improved information and library services. It was not the question old wines in new bottles. The name Library of Parliament was also no longer effective in communicating the new priorities and services. The transition from the Library of Parliament to Parliamentary Information Centre was therefore to reflect the 21st century digital services that were envisaged. Seaton (2005), the Head of Research and Information Services at the Scottish Parliament made similar comments when she spoke about the Scottish Parliamentary Information Centre experiences:

“Those of us who were planning the research and information service...made a number of crucial decisions...First of all, we decided not to call it a library. The emphasis was on speed, service, and innovation. We needed a brand; we needed to make an impact, and we needed to capture the imagination” (Seaton, p2)

The change to Parliamentary Information Centre refers to the emerging model of digital services that emphasize the new technologies and the new knowledge management role in the Division.

Technology Enhanced Library Service Project

The information explosion and the need for Members of Parliament to be aware of many changes and developments in the local and world affairs demands that the Library of Parliament should constantly seek ways to improve and facilitate the provision and dissemination of information. The Library of Parliament supports Parliament's legislative and oversight functions by providing timely high quality information services that enable Members of Parliament to understand problems, consider solutions and influence improvement strategies. The monumental aspect of the library architecture has limited the library's use of technology, that is, the building was not planned with appropriate technological amenities in mind.

The Speaker's office made a request to the senior management of Parliament for the transformation of the Library into an ultra-modern 21st century information and knowledge hub that will respond to the needs of Parliament. The Library of Parliament launched and implemented a project called *"Technology Enhanced Library Service: Enhancing Democracy in the Digital Age"*. The aim of the project is to create a more dynamic and focused library and information service that will keep up with the technological developments in the sector. In order to technologically enhance the services and products of the Library, the following six deliverables were envisaged:

1. Integrated Digital Library Management System sub-project

Members of Parliament need current, accurate and high quality information resources to perform their legislative and oversight functions. While internet has opened a vast world of information, much of the most valuable information is not readily available and the systems used were not efficient when it comes to management, provision and dissemination of information. This sub-projects entailed seeking to identify and appoint a service provider that will supply, configure and install an integrated library management system.

2. Library security system and disaster management plan sub-project

This entails the installation of the security system, stock management system, book return self-service using radio frequency identification tags and development of disaster management policy.

3. Digital Content Delivery sub-project

This entails the implementations of iPads as a media device, implementation of digital signage displays (touch screens), facilitating outside access to the Parliamentary Information Centre digital content, implementation of Library Web 2 tools such as blogs, RSS feeds, social bookmarking or tagging and social media.

The touch screens will also exhibit some of the Parliamentary Information Centre special collections in a way that attracts and engages the Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff, while protecting the physical material

4. Refurbishment of Library book stores sub-project

This sub-project entails the installation of high density compact mobile shelving and filing cabinets to the library stores. It also entails the installation of computer based automated climate control system, water detection and flood sensors.

5. Digitization sub-project

The sub-project entails the outsourcing of the digitization of parliamentary official publications and some of Parliament's Africana publications. The Parliamentary Information Centre is increasingly looking to digital imaging to enhance its information dissemination services and to provide greater access to many types of information. The second aspect of the digitization sub-project is the purchase of mass digitization scanners and software to convert printed documents to digital surrogates in order to create digital collections, increase access to collections and preserve rare and fragile resources.

6. Capacity development, change management and organizational development sub-project

The sub-project entails looking at the impact of the Project on the structure of the Parliamentary Information Centre, new processes, job descriptions, roles and change management. A management consulting firm was contracted to the Parliamentary Information Centre to provide expertise within the scope of change management in order to achieve the successful implementation of the Project.

Conclusion

For over a century, the Parliamentary Information Centre has continued to provide significant support to the overall functioning of Parliament as an institution and the democratic process. With this, comes the responsibility to always review the information services provided and to reflect on whether the Parliamentary Information Centre is evolving with new technology; how innovative and flexible the Centre is in the delivery of information and knowledge services. As new technologies continue to emerge and find their places in the provision of information services and products there is no escape to introduce the corresponding transformation and restructuring of methods of service delivery.

Technology has made it unnecessary to a certain extent for users to visit the Library and we hope we could use the same technology to attract Members and Parliamentary staff back to the physical Parliamentary Information Centre, even if they do not need to come for access to resources.

A big challenge for the Parliamentary Information Centre is to communicate to both Members of Parliament and senior management how it is transforming and adopting the new technologies. Should the traditional perceptions persist, there is a danger that the development of new services and products will be put at risk. Cokie Roberts, a political commentator for ABC News was said *"...journalists depend on libraries...for information and facts. The library of today might be in your cell phone instead of going to the building..."* (American Libraries, May 2009)

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