

Libraries and Productivity; a Report to the Governor's Conference on Libraries and Information Services, 1990

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Demands of the Information Age industry in the United States over the past few decades has gradually evolved from a manufacturing to a service and information-driven environment. At the same time, productivity in U.S. industry has not increased as much as desired. Competition from other nations and the inability of employees to keep up with an increasingly technical workplace have had an impact. In earlier days, a 'strong back' was the major attribute sought in employees. Today the major attribute is knowledge and the ability to keep pace with the changing demands wrought by the Information Age.

Knowledge during the last few decades has become the central capital, the cost center, and the crucial resource of the economy. New knowledge, rather than capital or labor, now produces productivity.

Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity*

tion service providers; (2) information professionals to locate, evaluate, and synthesize information; (3) linkages to global information through state, national, and international networks; (4) cost-effective services, particularly for small businesses; (5) interfaces between businesses and expert consultants; (6) expert knowledge of information technology; (7) solutions to business problems; and (8) up-to-date information on competitors, both foreign and domestic.

There is a relationship between productivity and economic growth. The relationship between information and productivity is far more difficult to measure because the nature of

Libraries for Productive Businesses

Today's business literature is replete with exhortations on the value of using information strategically in order to improve the competitive positioning of a company and the United States in the global marketplace. In order to use information strategically, business and industry need access to information resources. It is not financially feasible or productive for each business to acquire and maintain all the needed resources. Many of the information resources and much of the human expertise exist in libraries and information centers.

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information use differs from that of consumable goods, but recent studies have begun to validate the relationship. King Associates studies have found a number of effects of information use on productivity. Their research results report that productivity is positively correlated with the amount of reading. Professionals who read a great deal produced more formal records of reports, made more oral presentations, received higher salaries, and were consulted more times. The studies also found that the use of information resulted in savings in time and use of equipment, activities were completed faster and with greater quality, and more new activities were initiated. Robert Hayes and Harold Borko found that

industries with a high level of information expenditures per employee are those with high productivity rates. Studies in process are revealing the linkages between information use, user productivity, corporate profitability, and national productivity.

Thus, as providers of information, libraries are energetic and creative participants in economic development.

There are many ways in which libraries are participating in economic development. They are providing: (1) linkages between businesses and informa-

Fact: In 1990 and 91 Training workshops were conducted for better business services in libraries. These workshops were the outcome of joint planning with business leaders and chambers of commerce and were funded by LSCA.

Studies undertaken by the Special Library Association's President's Task Force on the Value of the Information Professional found that the use of information professionals often saved time and money, and thus made the users of this information more productive and/or the company more profitable. One example revealed that an \$11 database search saved a company over 200 hours of laboratory work. Another example told of a company which had invested \$500,000 in research and development costs which could have been avoided by spending \$300 to do a patent search. Another business found that in one year the return on its investment in libraries' services was over 500 percent.

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business be more productive. This involvement is as old as American business. The earliest instances of libraries serving the needs of business were those libraries, traditionally called special libraries, which were established by the companies themselves. Libraries were established in the chemical, medicinal, engineering, investment banking, and insurance industries during the 1800's. Eli Lilly established a library during the 1880's. The history of special library development followed the history of industrial development. As an example, libraries in automotive companies followed soon after the development of the automobile industry.

At the turn of this century, large public libraries developed technical and business collections to serve not only the general public, but also the business and industrial community. Municipal reference libraries were also established in larger cities to serve professionals, such as lawyers. The earliest technical collection in a public library was established in Pittsburgh in 1895. The Newark Public Library opened a library in the downtown area in 1904 specifically designed to serve

the business community rather than the general public. Service to business and industry by academic libraries has been a comparatively recent event.

Libraries for Productive Workers

Productive businesses need productive employees. Productive output is measured not only by the number of pieces or products manufactured in a given time period, but also by an employee's ability to learn new knowledge needed to assume new jobs or to work with new technologies. American business and governments are

spending billions of dollars annually on retraining, yet their goals are not being realized fully. Numerous citizens are unemployed because their

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knowledge and job skills are not adequate for today's workplace.

Libraries have not played as vital a role as they can in creating more productive citizens. Many public libraries have been active in providing information to job seekers such as occupational outlook handbooks, guides to studying for job educational equivalency examinations, career information, resume preparation seminars, and access to job information banks. This is an area where libraries can assume a more vital role by providing: (1) skills assessment centers; (2) tutorial services; (3) customized information packets; (4) sites for traditional classes, particularly in areas geographically remote from education institutions; (5) sites for distance learning opportunities for citizens who can't afford an investment in the necessary equipment; (6) information on job training programs; (7) information on prospective employers; (8) counseling support; (9) alternate educational opportunities; (10) linkages to job data banks nationwide.

Libraries continue to play a vital role in the provision of information to industry, and hence play an

important part in the productivity of American businesses and economic growth and development. Many more corporate libraries have been established, many more public libraries have special services for industry, and recently more academic libraries are involved in such services.

Indiana Libraries and Service to Businesses

In Indiana as well as across the nation, libraries are providing services to business and industry. Special libraries in Indiana continue to serve the needs of companies and contribute to the productivity of their employees and ultimately, the profitability of the companies. Public and academic libraries are also important. The examples below are a fraction of those available.

The Vigo County Public Library offers research services to businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies in Vigo County. The library specializes in getting the actual information not merely in providing a book in which the information may be contained. As an added benefit to businesses, the actual connect time fees charged by database vendors are paid by the library rather than passed along to the business. To help the individual, the library has put together packets of career information and how to go about getting jobs and writing resumes. The library was also involved in an out-placement workshop for individuals involved in a company closing. Most importantly, the library is already working towards setting up alliances with educational institutions and businesses to develop

worker re-education programs in order to improve citizens' abilities to be productive in a changing society.

The Lake County Public Library functions as a research arm of the business community in northwest Indiana, publishing a newsletter on business topics, a human services directory which lists the service agencies and organizations in the area, and "Doing Business with the Federal Government." Every other month, the library sponsors a workshop with the Service Core of Retired Executives (SCORE). Topics of interest to business executives and those aspiring to own their own busi-

nesses are presented. The library also provides space for this organization to provide one-on-one counseling services. Programs are also sponsored in cooperation with such agencies as the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, the Internal Revenue Service, and the

The next decade will see a complete reversal of what has occurred in the past. There will be a movement toward a new localism. Solutions to problems will be worked out locally because the state and federal governments will not help.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the changes that are taking place involve three strategic resources: economic intelligence, human intelligence, and time intelligence. Libraries and information systems can affect these resources by adding value to their services and focusing on the mission to bring out the learner in everyone and to create learning environments for businesses, government, and not-for-profit organizations.

Graham Toft, Executive Director, Indiana Economic Development Council

Social Security Administration. They also hold "Breakfasts for Business", at which guest speakers present current topical information. A special service is a "small business table" where materials of interest to small businesses are kept. About Lake County Public Library's services, the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center says, "The library saves us time in counseling our clients on business start-up and planning because we're able to send clients to the library first."

Purdue University Libraries opened its Technical Information Services (TIS) in 1987 for the express purpose of providing Indiana business decision makers with a fast, comprehensive information service specializing in business and technical topics. The service functions as the information resource for small businesses that cannot

afford such services as an on-site corporate library. For larger companies having special libraries and information centers, the fee-based service functions as the "library's library." Clients are provided a wide range of services from supplying copies and information from resources in the Purdue Libraries to ordering those items not in the collections to obtain verbal information from other experts. TIS works in conjunction with the Technical Assistance Program (TAP) in the Schools of Engineering. Requests which cannot be answered with existing information are referred to TAP personnel who can create the information through its consultation program. Additionally, the 'expert consultants' in the TAP program can also evaluate and synthesize information found through TIS.

What Should We Do?

While it is evident that libraries have a long and illustrious history of playing a vital role in the productivity and economic development of this nation, this role can be enhanced. The future demands the existence of an environment in which citizens, information profes-

sionals, the business community, and government are cooperating to develop, deliver, and maintain the programs needed for a more productive Indiana. The following components are offered as the elements such an environment might typically include.

Recognition of the current and potential role of libraries in economic development and productivity.

Recognition of the importance, role, and value of the properly educated information professional.

Recognition that information has a tangible value add therefore an economic "cost" which must be paid.

Improved communication among the business community, libraries of all kinds, and educational institutions/organizations to define the skills and knowledge needed by the productive employee, and cooperation to deliver planned services.

Recognition of the importance of information in decision-making.

Library wins award for aiding unemployed

The Muncie Public Library has received the American Library Association's first presentation of the John Sessions Award for Service to the labor community.

Library director Art Meyers accepted a plaque at the organization's national conference in San Francisco.

The library's Muncie Unemployment Community Information Effort (MUNCIE) was a key to earning the award.

The MUNCIE project was designed to meet the information needs of the growing number of unemployed persons in the spring and summer of 1980. It provided a center for walk-in and telephone information for the unemployed, particularly those laid off. Library personnel prepared a brochure on job hunting which was distributed at that site.

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