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Attitudes and roles of librarians in the modern era (an ethical and cultural approach)

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This article is a report of a study about the attitudes of librarians in the modern era. The study was conducted based on an ethical and cultural approach with librarians who attended seminars and workshops as its participants. Additionally, the study lasted from January to March 2016, and a case-study with qualitative research approach was employed. The results of the study show that: (1) the librarians carry out their duties maximally; (2) the librarians maintain and enhance their competencies; (3) the librarians collaborate each other to enhance their professional competencies; (4) the librarians enrich their knowledge and professional development through trainings and workshops; and (5) the librarians organize trainings and workshops that are congruent with local wisdoms.

Key words: Librarians’ roles, librarian’s ethical code, organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

The facial expression of a librarian is very often the target of criticism of many library visitors. Seminars, workshops, and trainings have been extensively organized with one of the goals is to enhance librarians’ professionalism, yet visitors’ complaints about librarians’ unfriendly attitudes are frequently heard. Librarians’ cold face when they are interacting with visitors remains a sensitive issue to be discussed among them.

The situation above can get even worse when there is a lack of communication between librarians and visitors. The only communication that possibly happens is when a visitor needs an aid from a librarian. This situation indicates that visitors have not perceived library as a favorite place to go, and librarians have not become an important figure that can help visitors to be literate. This is an actual homework for every library management to place library and its librarians in the heart of its visitors.

Nowadays, librarians are demanded to be capable of doing multiple tasks. Not only do the tasks include librarians’ technical jobs, but also they encompass non-technical jobs such as library and librarian development. There exists an ethical code of librarians that becomes the foundation for librarians’ acts and professionalism. The ethical code of librarians issued by the Indonesian Librarians Association (IPI) insists upon librarians’ professionalism in keeping their work ethics and dedication in completing their duties. Based on this background, the researcher was interested to investigate how far librarians in Central Java acted and got involved in this modern era based on an ethical and cultural approach.
approach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach because the investigated variables needed an in-depth explanation through direct verifications with the participants. A qualitative research approach is perceived as a process to dig information that is treated as data about events, facts, and observed phenomena.

An event can be clearly clarified if it is investigated closely and deeply. Gorman and Clayton (2005) contend that the key assumption made by qualitative researches is that the meaning of events, occurrences, and interactions can be understood only through the eyes of actual participants in specific situations. Thus, the key of qualitative researches lies on how to interpret events, phenomena, occurrences, and interactions through direct observations in specific situations.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews with librarians who attended trainings and workshops, and they were randomly chosen. The data analyses were done by giving interpretations to the obtained data, that is, interviews, comments, critics, and suggestions, objectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational culture

The situations that offend the role of librarians as illustrated previously given an opportunity to further study the existing patterns of organizational culture in the specific context of library. It is assumed that this culture is responsible for an emerging phenomenon that overlooks the role of librarians. These librarians have tried their best to highlight their roles and receive good assessments from majority of people.

There are some factors that influence the emergence of organizational culture, such as first the influence of a dominant leader. A leader who is charismatic and influential to his subordinates will bring a unique color into his organization that includes how to behave, act, and perform within the organization.

The second factor is company history and tradition, wherein an organizational culture is likely formed influenced by existing history and tradition. The following factor that influences organizational culture is the development of technology, product, and service. Industry and its competitor is the next factor. Industry along with its products and competitors can form an organizational culture that is practiced by all members of the organization in order to survive and compete with other competitive organizations. The specific cultural values needed in this competitive industrial context include discipline, carefulness, and quality assurance dealing with customer service. The fifth factor is customers. Customers’ demands for the improvement of service quality and the organization’s efforts to keep their existence are influential in the formation of organizational culture. The sixth factor is company expectations that come from the company leaders, managements, employees, and colleagues. The next factor is information and control. The multidirectional flow of information, vertically, horizontally, and diagonally, in respect to managements’ authorities can create certain working patterns that eventually become organizational culture. Legislation and company environment is the eight factors on the list. Legislations in the form of laws and government policies are the source of organizational culture. The ninth factor is procedure and policies. Both internal and external procedure and policies are influential factor of organizational culture. External procedure and policies determined, for instance, by the government, the United Nations, and World Trade Organization will reinforce the law-abiding culture. The consequence of breaking this culture is the termination of business, for example a company is not allowed to export their products. The last factor that influences organizational culture is reward system and measurement. Rewards given to outstanding employees can inspire hard-work and competition among employees themselves. Seeing a colleague getting an award will drive other employees to work harder and to achieve their highest targets (Andrew, 1998).

Librarians’ ethical code as the defining drive of organizational culture

Harold’s Librarian’s Glossary and Reference Books (Harold, 1995: 518) defines ethical code as “a document setting out the norms of professional conduct and behavior required of members of a professional association”. Additionally, Hermawan and Zen, (2006) p. 10 contends that ethical code is a system of norms, values, and regulations written explicitly to state which one is professionally correct and incorrect. Ethical code further regulates what a professional must obey and avoid.

Based on the two definitions above, ethical code can be understood as a set of behavioral standards or norms created by a professional organization in which these standards become guidelines for its members in conducting their professional roles and duties in the society. In other words, librarians’ ethical code is a set of regulations or norms that must be followed by librarians in doing their professional duties. Additionally, in drafting ethical code one should follow the Code of Professional Ethics (American Psychological Association, 2002) that includes principles such as:

1. Respect for rights and dignity of the person
2. Competences, skills and qualifications that match with the types of specific jobs
3. Responsibility
4. Integrity, which means that rights and obligations are interrelated. In other words, there is a balance between rights and obligations in every duty.

These principles of professional ethics are viewed as
standards that are possible to be followed by each member of an organization in order to avoid unprofessional conducts. Thus, the American Library Association (ALA) proposes competency standards in their ethical code. The ethical code implies an important message that will lead librarians to achieve the following aspects:

1. Professional competencies that have to be maintained and improved
2. Collaboration, honesty, fairness, and respect
3. Working professionally by separating personal needs and professional obligations, as well as giving optimum service and information
4. Respecting others' rights, admitting others' works, and acknowledging others' status and value (ALA, 2007)

The implementation of librarians' ethical code

The implementation of librarians' ethical code is demonstrated by actualizing standardized values and norms in actual attitudes and behaviors. The findings of this study reveal actual attitudes and behaviors of observed librarians that are aligned with the Librarians' Ethical Code, which include:

1. Librarians' efforts to carry out their duties that meet the expectations of people in general and the needs of library users in particular: An inquiry on how respondents perceive the role and function of librarians shows that librarians are regarded as public services. This finding indicates that librarians' performances and all process within the library have to be user oriented.

   In correspondence with this finding, during an International Seminar at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Salatiga, Kujur (2016), the Head of Chancery/Secretary on Education of the Indian Embassy in Indonesia, states that the key to successful library service nowadays is the ability of librarians to listen to their users' needs. He adds that the value of library lies on good service. In line with Kujur, most participants of the seminar agree that good service is what library users want because they deserve librarians' appreciation, respect, and attention.

2. Librarians' efforts to maintain and enhance their competencies to cope with global development: The librarians' ethical code of Indonesia urges all librarians to improve and expand their knowledge, abilities, and professionalism (Hermawan and Zen, 2006) in order to carry out their duties effectively. This professional development can be done both formally and informally, individually and collectively.

   An inquiry on how participants improve their competencies reveals that in light of librarians' professional development, they actively participate in seminars, trainings, and workshops. In addition, most of the participants also directly apply their knowledge through teaching and sharing either in educational events or library supervisions in local libraries.

3. Librarians' attempts to cooperate with other librarians as an effort to improve their professionalism as either individuals or groups: In response to an inquiry on how librarians further expand their competencies, most respondents state that librarians from different institutions need to collaborate each other as a concrete strategy to share information and knowledge and maintain relationship.

4. Librarians' responsibility for library development through innovative ideas: One of the five Ranganathan's principles of library, as quoted by Cochrane (1992), states that library is a growing organism. This infers that a library is like a living thing that needs nutrients in the form of concrete activities. Librarians are the backbones of the living library. Thus, librarians are required to maintain their performances, enhance their skills, and expand their knowledge. This self-improvement is a real challenge for librarians in the future.

   In response to an inquiry on who is responsible for the development of library and how the development is done, most participants agree that the responsibility to develop library starts with the elaboration of innovative ideas based on librarians' experiences that is oriented on users' needs.

5. Librarians' efforts to provide trainings and workshops that correspond with societal development and needs: Librarians are part of society and culture. They are expected to understand cultural values in the society in order to adjust and blend with them. MacKellar (2008) contends that librarians have a role of becoming the instructors for their users.

Addressing on an inquiry on what librarians do pertinent to their contributions to cultural values in the society, most participants answer that librarians organize competitions, art performances during the independent day, storytelling, dance class, smart houses, and special service. All of these are done to show that library is the house of knowledge and the basis for the development of a culture.

Conclusion

This article concludes that librarians' attitudes in the modern era that are relevant with ethical norms and cultural values encompass fulfilling duties maximally, maintaining and enhancing competencies, collaborating with other librarians to expand their professional competencies, enriching ideas for library development as part of professional responsibility, and providing trainings and workshops that correspond with the existing culture in the society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.
REFERENCES


