Classics in Library and Information Science

Maurice B Line (1974), "Draft Definitions: Information and Library Needs, Wants, Demands and Uses", Aslib Proceedings, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 87-87

Some books become classics on the strength of their content, some because of their style and language and some for their impact on the profession. However, a few become known for being a blend of all the three above stated characteristics. Maurice B Line's writings belong to the third category. His writings are crystal clear with path-breaking ideas. Before introducing a classic by Maurice B Line, it is necessary to outline the profile of his career.

Maurice B Line had a long and successful career as University Librarian in the UK. At this time, he moved out of the university library sector to become the Librarian of the National Central Library (NCL). Then in 1971 Maurice became a member of the committee carrying out the planning for the functioning of British Library. He was also associated with a study of the potential for automation in the British Library. Maurice moved with the NCL, and from 1974 to 1985 he held the post of Director-General, British Library Lending Division (BLLD). From 1985 till 1988 he was Director-General of the British Library's Science, Technology and Industry Directorate, when he retired.

Now the classic to be showcased in this column is not a book but it is an article published in Aslib Proceedings in 1974. It is just a one-page paper. It is cited 245 times. That should be enough to justify why this article is a classic.

At the time when Maurice wrote this paper, the literature on 'user needs' was confusing owing to imprecise use of terms. To be more specific, studies have claimed to be concerned with 'needs' when



they have actually examined 'uses or demands'. The following is an attempt to establish definitions. Thus, many of the studies carried out during those days were misleading, to say the least.

The main objective of Maurice B Line was to make libraries much more user-focused. Over the years he had conducted many studies and led projects in his capacity as a senior professional librarian. He had noticed the prevailing confusion floating in the then LIS literature. All the path-breaking concepts presented by Line were built on the definitions presented in this paper.

As the title of the article suggests, it is to clear the cobweb among the definitions of the terms such as Needs, Wants, Demands and Uses in relation to library and information domain. Maurice's hair-splitting analytical definitions given in this 1974 paper can be considered as a classic because of the impact it had and it has even now on all later studies.

Readers are suggested to consider the following examples to appreciate the distinction among these terms in plain English. [These words are also used in the context of Marketing.]

- I **need** air, water, shelter and food to survive: These are basic physiological needs.
- I **want** a car: It is not essential for survival. One can survive without a car. These are beyond needs.
- I **demand** good health service from the Government: It is a matter of civil right. It also includes luxury items depending on the purchasing capacity. In case of demand the customer is willing to pay for goods and service.
- **Requirement** is a more general word.
- **Use** is what we do with the above list of confusable words.

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