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# UNIT 14 HUMAN RESOURCES AND REFERRAL SYSTEMS

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## Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Human Resources - What and Why ?
- 14.3 Categories of Human Expertise
- 14.4 Human Resources as Reference Source
- 14.5 Referral Systems - Genesis and Growth
- 14.6 Referral Functions
- 14.7 Referral Centres
- 14.8 Summary
- 14.9 Answers to Self Check Exercises
- 14.10 Key Words
- 14.11 References and Further Reading

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## 14.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- perceive human experts as potential reference sources;
- grasp their expertise as sources of high reference value;
- identify human expertise operating in different contexts;
- cultivate and pick up skills to exploit the use of human resources;
- recognise the institutional mechanisms available for this purpose;
- assimilate referral functions; and
- attempt a compilation of referral tools.

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## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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We have learnt about a variety of documentary reference sources and their effective use in reference service. There are also many non-documentary reference sources that have high reference value. These sources are not the type of conventional reference materials with which we are familiar. One of these kinds of non-documentary sources is human experts operating in different contexts. This is a unique and invaluable source, carrying expert knowledge/skills, that can very often be the only source of information for responding to certain types of enquiries. This Unit deals with this type of non-documentary resources, and their different aspects to enable optimum use of them.

An institutional mechanism that has grown in the last two or three decades, to deal with enquiries for information that could be answered through non-documentary sources, is generally known as referral centre. The functions of these centres are distinctly different from institutions offering reference services. Referral systems function to provide only sources of information and not information *per se* or documents that carry the required information, as is usually offered in reference service. These sources may pertain to human experts and their expertise, institutions of a highly specialised nature and such others. Abstruse enquiries that may not fall within the range or scope of conventional reference materials for answers, often require the help and guidance of referral centres.





Such individual expertise may occasionally be available within the parent organisation of the libraries. Sometimes it may be necessary to seek the services of other institutions or even freelancers.

Keeping in view these reference requirements, it has become practice to build up institutional mechanisms to specialise in directing enquiries to right sources, necessitating compilation of referral tools.

While any expert or professional could be deemed to be a potential source of Information, it is not practical to identify every such person and seek the person's skill or knowledge. Such expert persons may or may not always be available for such help or guidance, even after identifying the right person.

The task has to be, therefore, entrusted to institutions specialising in collecting and compiling referral tools, such as directories of experts in different disciplines/professions, institutions, on-going research projects, testing centres and thereby develop other appropriate databases for services.

We shall first pay attention o human resources and later to referral centres.

### Self Check Exercise

2) Why do we need to use human resources such as experts, specialists?

**Note:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 14.3 CATEGORIES OF HUMAN EXPERTISE

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There are certain categories of persons functioning in different institutions whose nature of work is associated with information or knowledge, in one way or the other. We shall broadly identify such groups and the specialised nature of information support they may be able to offer. The list given below is merely illustrative and not exhaustive and these are not mutually exclusive either. Their roles are interchangeable, depending upon the nature of work they undertake. However, by and large, they may be classified in accordance with their primary nature of work.

- Information Generators;
- Information Gatherers;
- Information Processors;
- Information Recorders;
- Information Disseminators;



- Information Retrievers;
- Information Technologists.

### **Information Generators**

This group includes researchers, inventors, innovators, authors, writers, planners, policy makers, executives, and such others who have an assigned role to generate knowledge or create information. These persons are involved in different kinds of activities. The knowledge or information, arising out of these activities, may be made available in the form of books, journal articles and such others. These persons possess expert knowledge of their area of specialisation and hence constitute a very valuable source of information, particularly when they don't make their information available in any published form.

### **Information Gatherers**

There is a group of persons whose jobs require the gathering of information and report them through appropriate channels. Such groups include newspaper reporters, correspondents, journalists, compilers of reference sources such as bibliographers, encyclopaedists, lexicographers, etc. These persons do not generate knowledge or information, but gather information for various purposes and organise the collected information for a given purpose. By virtue of their deep involvement in the nature of collection they gather, they very often constitute a very useful source to tap for enquiries for which an answer may not be found anywhere else.

### **Information Processors**

Editors, software documentation specialists, and persons who are involved in giving a shape to collected information for ease of use is another category of specialists. Newspaper editors, editors in publishing houses, journal editors, and such others involved in transforming a draft into a fine reading material are very often invaluable sources of information. Software documentation specialists transform information collected in a highly user friendly fashion, for example, user manuals of software packages.

### **Information Recorders**

Persons who engage themselves in activities such as translation work, printing, publishing, data entry operators, etc. and have useful knowledge of the information they re-record, are also sometimes excellent sources of information. Technical translators, who are involved in recording commercial transactions in business houses, language interpreters may have information which is not recorded anywhere. Competent data entry operators possess special skills in advising the use of software packages. These types of skills/expertise get nowhere recorded and would never be available in any published sources.

### **Information Disseminators**

Publishers, library professionals, documentalists, information specialists, extension workers, teachers, sales persons, consultants, advertisers, etc. are persons who are involved in disseminating information or knowledge, already collected and available in some form, each one having a particular purpose. They play an intermediary role in dealing with information already available in some form. They may be involved in dealing directly with various categories of users or involved in some publication activity. Here again their skills and knowledge may be a very useful source of information for certain types of enquiries.

Extension workers play a very important role in disseminating knowledge to agricultural farmers, low-cost housing in rural areas, family planning and health care to rural people; social health persons, social welfare workers and such others are also specialists not only in their subjects but also in carrying information with them to be passed to the relevant groups in a most useful manner, using all forms of personal communication techniques.

Teachers and educators have been the most traditional and conventional disseminators of knowledge and information. These persons deal with persons in different age groups, cater to different categories of professionals and even experts. They are also the persons who are always most willing to assist.





subject and also keep themselves updated with what is currently happening in their discipline. Therefore the nature of queries they may be in a position to respond would be relating to:

- new developments in a given discipline where the literature has not come out sufficiently;
- innovative skills that have been developed;
- new product development;
- new fields for aspiring entrepreneurs; and
- similar others pieces of information.

**Information Gatherers** operate mostly in the designing and production of secondary information. They will, therefore, be knowledgeable in information already published or available with them. They may possibly answer questions on .

- current events and activities
- definitions and meanings of new words, technical terms or subjects;
- persons of eminence in any given field; and so on.

**Information Processor's** acquaintance with information collected should provide clues to the type of enquiries they could answer. These may be relating to :

- analytical information on current activities;
- technical problems relating to software documentation;
- and so on.

**Information Recorders** may be useful in dealing with queries relating to:

- names of language experts available for interpretation work;
- problems of technical translation;
- technical skills to be picked up for data entry operations;
- similar others.

**Information Disseminators** constitute a large group. Each one of these groups may be approached for information pertaining to their specialisation.

Library and information professionals may be consulted whenever there is a possibility of identifying a bibliographic reference, historical and geographical information for which there are answers that could be obtained only from their personal knowledge or reference sources.

Extension workers render direct assistance to agricultural farmers with reference to various problems-cultivation of crops, such as the choice of high yielding variety of a seed, the duration of the crop and nature of water required, etc. and such other related issues.

Social welfare persons would be able to answer questions relating to their experiences in dealing with a special health problem of slum dwellers.

Banking persons could be useful for securing loans, travel agents for tour planning and ticketing or passports.

**Information Retrievers** may help in identifying a technical thesaurus which has not been published, automatic indexing, standards for abstracts for an abstruse subject in philosophy and so on.

**Information Technologists** may be useful in dealing with the various aspects of computer system selection for a particular set of activities, software selection and local or wide area networks and a number of related issues.

There are indeed many groups of consultants, information brokers, intermediaries and others who specialise in offering their services at a price, of course, to deal with the many enquiries mentioned above. Even so, to identify the right source of information may be a problem.

It is here that we need to approach referral centres who specialise in gathering such information and create the appropriate tools, including computer databases.



**Self Check Exercise**

4) What type of information could be obtained from Extension workers and Social workers.

- Note:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.  
 ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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**14.5 REFERRAL SYSTEMS-GENESIS AND GROWTH**

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We have already mentioned that libraries have been providing reference services using reference collections built up internally and offer services through borrowed materials that are not available in their stock. Reference service also includes occasional resort to identifying institutions other than libraries or persons which have the required knowledge to answer specific questions. But with the increasing complexity of human activities and their expanding dimensions, such specialized services of identifying experts who could serve as resources, or institutions in a discipline or work, has not been possible for most libraries, to build up this kind of facilities within their own premises. Preparation of names of individual experts, specialised institutions, various kinds of specialised activities, etc., require a great deal of time, effort, money. It also calls for special compiling techniques and skilled manpower to use them judiciously to provide referral services.

Therefore, in recent decades, referral services have been taken over by referral centres whose functions are to locate Sources of information with all the details of information required. This permits information seekers to get in touch with institutions or individuals to get what-ever information they require.

Referral services directs enquirers to a source of information which may be either a directory an organisation or an individual expert. To distinguish referral service from reference service, we should note that reference service is provided in libraries, directing the enquirer to a document available in the library. Often the information sought could be supplied, in addition to the document that may carry the required information. Referral service, on the other hand, provides only sources to information and no more.

Formal definitions, as given in Harrod's *Librarian's Glossary* is, that a Referral Centre is

- 1) "an organisation for directing researchers for information and data to appropriate sources, such as libraries, information evaluation centres, documents and documentation centres and individuals". *A referral centre does not supply date or documents that carry the required information.*
- 2) "is some sort of an **Information Desk** for the scientific and technical community which does not provide enquirers directly with the information they need, but suggest sources (organisation, facility, individual) likely to satisfy clients."
- 3) "is an organisation for the indication of sources (of persons, institutions and publications) from which scientific information may be obtained on a given subject."

The versatility of access to sources have greatly increased with global and national computer networks of referral databases.

The basic purpose of referral is to ease the stress on a single in n institution whose functions have enormously increased in recent decades.







### Self Check Exercise

6) What functions do referral centres perform?

**Note:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 14.7 REFERRAL CENTRES

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Referral centres have been established at international, regional, national and local levels.

The United Nations Environmental Programmes (UNEP) was established to provide referral service globally, for all sources of environmental information.

The Global Information Referral System of the United Nations Development Programme, provides comprehensive and up-to-date information of skills and capabilities available in developing countries.

The National Referral Centre(in USA) for science and technology of the Library of Congress, although primarily a national service, is of considerable value for other countries as well. An information source is defined by the LC Centre as "any organisation, facility or individual willing to and able to give authoritative response to scientific and technical enquiries out of an existing store of knowledge of expertise."

This centre maintain a file of over 9000 experts, containing details of names, addresses and a brief description of the information source.

With the advent of computers and communication technology, referral databases have been either created or supported by UNESCO.

No exclusive referral centres have been operating in India. Many of the national documentation and information centres such as the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), The National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), Defence Science Information and Documentation Centre (DESIDOC), the National Documentation Centre of the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, the Agricultural Research Information Centre, the Library and Information Services of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, The Small Enterprises National Documentation Centre (SENDOC) do provide referral services, in addition to their other services.

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## 14.8 SUMMARY

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This Unit deals with one of the important non-documentary information sources, namely human resources as experts, specialists.



Human expertise is available from a variety of institutions. Many of the experts functioning in various institutions, may be willing to share their knowledge and expertise with others or provide guidance and assistance to those who seek their services. These persons can be identified and useful reference tools could be compiled for accessing this type of valuable sources. Libraries usually do not compile such specialised tools. Therefore, these tasks have been entrusted to new institutions called referral centres.

Several categories of experts are identified and their reference value has been explained in this Unit.

Referral *services* perform these types of functions as distinguished from the usual library and reference services.

Some of the activities of referral centres, which enable them to perform their referral functions have been explained.

Some examples of referral centres at the international, national, regional and local levels have been cited.

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## 14.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

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- 1) There are human beings who have the necessary qualifications, training and expert knowledge obtained/acquired through research and experience, in their fields of specialisation. This expertise of persons may also be supplemented through their knowledge of literature sources, peers, institutions, historical development of the field, significant landmarks in the growth of the subject, including reference sources pertaining to a given field. These kinds of persons operate in different types of institutions (not necessarily always) at different levels with various responsibilities. They may also be willing to share their knowledge and skills with others, offer help or guidance to those who seek assistance. Such, persons called experts/specialists constitute a very valuable resource.
- 2) In libraries and information institutions, there are often enquiries on persons, institutions, intricate subjects at micro levels, training facilities, rules and regulations for various entrepreneurial activities, say, manufacturing diagnostic equipment's for various medical tests, and many others. The conventional reference sources stocked in the host institutions may not have the right resources to answer such enquiries and hence may have to be collected from other libraries and information centres. But it is also likely that the libraries from where the information is sought, may not also have the right and appropriate information sources. Under such circumstances, experts may be a source where such information can be usefully sought.
- 3) The following lists the categories of human experts.
  - Information Generators;
  - Information Gatherers;
  - Information Processors;
  - Information Recorders;
  - Information Disseminators;
  - Information Retrievers;
  - Information Technologists.

The problems of using these categories of experts as sources are.

- It is not easy to identify them and their locations, and
  - All such experts may not be available for consultation; sometimes they may have their own constraints.
- 4) Extension workers render direct assistance to agricultural farmers with reference to various problems regarding cultivation of crops, such as the choice of high yielding variety of



a seed, the duration of the crop and nature of water required, etc. and all other related issues.

Social workers would be able to answer questions relating to their experiences in dealing with a special health problem of slum dwellers.

- 5) With the increasing complexity of human activities and their expanding dimensions, specialised services of identifying experts who could serve as resources, or institutions specialising in a discipline or work, it has not been possible for most libraries, to build up this kind of facilities within their own premises. Preparation of names of individual experts, specialised institutions, various kinds of specialised activities, etc. from where information may be available, require a great deal of times effort, money; also call for special compiling techniques and skilled manpower to use them judiciously to provide referral services.
- 6) To perform the functions, referral centres constantly keep in touch with subjects experts in them and stock all significant information relevant to its activities and subjects; compile directories of information sources, adding new information/data, modifying wherever necessary and updating during regular intervals; analyse the compiled databases in terms of their frequency of use, types of information sought and persons seeking referral services and others to tune the activities for maximum use.

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#### 14.10 KEY WORDS

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<b>Abstruse</b>	:	Whose meaning is hidden, hard to understand, difficult.
<b>Experts</b>	:	Persons with special knowledge, skill or training in a particular field.
<b>Specialists</b>	:	Persons who is an expert in a special branch of work or study.
<b>Peers</b>	:	Persons who is equal to another in rank, status or merit.

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#### 14.11 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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