

Skills and Competencies Needed for Today's Librarians

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Abstract: - *The working environment is becoming challenging for librarians day by day. Digital technologies and new information sources are becoming increasingly complex. Librarians constantly have to update their knowledge and services. This paper reviews the skills, competencies and knowledge needed by librarians and information professionals to survive in the new era. It also discusses the skills which help librarians to give better services to faculty and researchers, giving examples from their own institution.*

Keywords: Soft skills, Competencies, Library Professionals

Introduction:

Competence is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. The Online Business Dictionary defines it as a cluster of related activities, commitments, knowledge and skills that enable a person to act effectively in a job or situation. Competence indicates sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations. Because each level of responsibility has its own requirements, competence can occur in any period of a person's life or at any stage of his or her career.

For today's librarians having professional degrees in library and information science is not sufficient unlike in the past. There is demand for librarians

having multidimensional aptitudes and competencies in the areas of technical work, administrative work and also in providing user oriented services along with soft skills.

Library professionals need different kinds of skills which are imparted through different training programmes for providing best services

- Professional Skills - Are specific skills that are required in teaching, library programmes, ICT Applications etc.
- Technical Skills - Deal with knowledge and abilities that need to accomplish ICT applications in libraries and related jobs.

- **Soft Skills:** Used to interact with users at work. They help to manage self-perception and our reactions to adverse situations.

ALA's document on Core Competences of Librarianship (2009) defines the basic knowledge to be possessed by all persons graduating from an ALA-accredited master's program in library and information studies. The first three competencies are the professional competencies/ skills that they should possess.

- **Foundations of the Profession**

The ethics, values, and foundational principles of the library and information profession. The role of library and information professionals in the promotion of democratic principles and intellectual freedom (including freedom of expression, thought, and conscience). Current types of library (school, public, academic, special, etc.) and closely related information agencies. National and international social, public, information, economic and cultural policies and trends of significance to the library and information profession. The legal framework within which libraries and information agencies operate. That framework includes laws relating to copyright, privacy, and freedom of expression, equal rights and intellectual property. Certification and/or licensure requirements of specialized areas of the profession.

- **Information Resources**

Concepts and issues related to the lifecycle of recorded knowledge and information, from creation through various stages of use to disposition. Concepts, issues, and methods related to the acquisition and disposition of resources, including evaluation, selection, purchasing, processing, storing, and deselection. Concepts, issues, and methods related to the management of various collections. Concepts, issues, and methods related to the maintenance of collections, including preservation and conservation.

- **Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information**

The principles involved in the organization and representation of recorded knowledge and information. The developmental, descriptive, and evaluative skills needed to organize recorded knowledge and information resources. The systems of cataloguing, metadata, indexing, and classification standards and methods used to organize recorded knowledge and information.

- **Reference and User Services**

The concepts, principles, and techniques of reference and user services that provide access to relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information to individuals of all ages and groups. Techniques used to retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources for use by individuals of all ages and groups. The methods used to interact successfully with

individuals of all ages and groups to provide consultation, mediation, and guidance in their use of recorded knowledge and information. Information literacy/information competence techniques and methods, numerical literacy, and statistical literacy. The principles and methods of advocacy used to reach specific audiences to promote and explain concepts and services. The principles of assessment and response to diversity in user needs, user communities, and user preferences. The principles and methods used to assess the impact of current and emerging situations or circumstances on the design and implementation of appropriate services or resource development.

- Administration and Management

The principles of planning and budgeting in libraries and other information agencies. The principles of effective personnel practices and human resource development. The concepts behind, and methods for, assessment and evaluation of library services and their outcomes. The concepts behind, and methods for, developing partnerships, collaborations, networks, and other structures with all stakeholders and within communities served. The concepts behind, issues relating to, and methods for, principled, transformational leadership. (ALA, 2008)

The role of a librarian has to constantly evolve to meet social and technological needs. Today's librarian has to deal with acquisition and

maintenance of information in many formats, including: books; electronic resources; magazines; newspapers; audio and video recordings; maps; manuscripts; photographs and other graphic material; bibliographic databases; and web-based and digital resources. A librarian also has to offer other information services, including information literacy instruction; computer provision and training; coordination to host public programs. Traditional skills are still in demand, but they have to be expanded to handle new digital formats and the online environment.

This brings us to the second important set of skills / competencies

- Technological Knowledge and Skills

Information, communication, assistive, and related technologies as they affect the resources, service delivery, and uses of libraries and other information agencies. The application of information, communication, assistive, and related technology and tools consistent with professional ethics and prevailing service norms and applications. The methods of assessing and evaluating the specifications, efficacy, and cost efficiency of technology-based products and services. The principles and techniques necessary to identify and analyze emerging technologies and innovations in order to recognize and implement relevant technological improvements.

Some of the basic technology competencies important for an academic librarian are

- Knowledge about relevant developments in information technology like e-mail and Internet, web search strategies.
- Skills in basic computer hardware, troubleshooting and networking.
- Knowledge about software applications operating systems .
- Automation of library services and its management.
- Familiarity with web tools like blogs, social networking RSS feeds, etc. (Mathew, 2010)

This is the one area where many LIS professionals lag behind and need to continuously update themselves. The necessity of continuing professional development of practitioners in libraries and other information agencies cannot be emphasized enough.

At the SNTD Women's University Knowledge Resource Centre, this is an aspect taken seriously. Staff are encouraged to learn, re-learn and share what they have learned with others. Whenever any staff member attends any seminar or conference, after coming back there is discussion about new ideas, which were learnt in the conference. Once in a fortnight one of our professionals reads an article on a new / current concept and makes a presentation about this which helps others remain informed.

The third set of skills is that of soft skills. Skills needed here are

Listening skills: The library professionals must have good listening skills as he/she has to interact with different types of users all the time. By carefully listening to users' he/she can identify the exact requirement and then provide the service accordingly.

Communications skills: Command on language will improve the communication. Good communication skills also require understanding people, self-confidence.

Interpersonal skills: Librarians have to deal with all levels of people like Management, users, colleagues in library, vendors etc. To deal with each one on them in an effective manner requires interpersonal skills. When you work in a large organization, it is most important to build rapport with all departments, which helps in managing the library and providing better services to everyone.

Public relations: One needs to use PR very effectively to attract users in libraries through various ways. It helps to bond with users and vendors too. Also gives ability to work with other professionals. The Granthotsav programme celebrated on a yearly basis is very popular among students, since we organise a number of competitions on reading.

Customer service: The customer is the library user and to satisfy his/her information needs is customer service. The librarians always give attention to their users and provide services through CAS, SDI or other specialized services. The customer service emphasizes the customer satisfaction, which guarantees that the user will always come back to the library. For the last five years, there is a Department Quality Assurance Committee at the SNTDWU library. Faculty members from all colleges and student representatives are members of this committee. This helps us build a rapport with faculty and students. A suggestion box has also been kept for readers. They can give the suggestions through it, or they can discuss their problems with the staff any time.

Leadership skills & Teamwork: Library management especially in a big library is a team exercise. Hence it is required to have leadership skills to manage and guiding the team time to time, as every staff member is important for carrying out their work efficiently for smooth running of the library. The monthly meetings of all staff, that is held at the SNTDWU library, helps to discuss needs, problems and achievements of all staff. Suggestions are always welcome in this meeting. This helps to share information and cooperation among the staff members

Negotiating skills: These skills are required on special occasions such as handling bulk

purchases, specialized databases subscription with vendors etc. Also sometimes in delicate situations like library committee meetings or avoiding undue requirements from arrogant users etc.

Writing skills: The librarians are sometimes asked to submit/help in writing a research proposal/ business proposal/project report, which requires good writing skills. Today there are many library professionals who are contributing to various publications even in-house or even by blogging for sharing their experiences and helping users.

As stated by Ammons-Stephens (2009) the development of competencies, competency lists, or competency models has become a popular way to assess the strengths, needs, and potential contributions of individuals in an organization. The success of libraries as organizations is determined by the actions of the individuals who work in those libraries.

Conclusion:

It appears that to be an effective library and information professional, one has to be a superman or superwoman—a multi-talented expert-of-all-trades, with high IQ and EQ. A person with such attributes probably wouldn't have chosen to be a librarian!. Fortunately, one does not need all these competencies to be an effective information professional—just some

competencies from each category. (Christopher, 2005)

Different competencies may become important for different types of information centres and libraries. Librarians working in corporate organizations and corporate libraries will probably need more value-adding skills, entrepreneurial skills and domain knowledge. Professionals working in academic libraries probably require skills that are more traditional. As the work environment changes, librarians need to assess occasionally what new skills they need to learn and what skills they need to un-learn or re-learn.

In addition to continuing education, it is important for information professionals to network with other professionals, and to be active in the library associations. Library schools have to impart a wide range of competencies to its students. Collaboration among library schools, sharing of teaching materials, and student and staff and exchange programs can be employed to make a wider range of competencies. Library associations can collaborate with library schools to make short courses and continuing education available to information professionals. Most importantly more information and knowledge sharing is needed in the information profession!

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