



COMPETENCIES FOR LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Technological change is the cutting edge route for all the professionals in this 21st century. Library and information professional are not exception to this change. To cope-up with technological challenges thrown by the digital world, the present and future library professionals must acquaint with a set of competencies to survive in the profession. This paper discuss the concept of competency and highlights the factors which made librarians to develop competencies in the digital era, besides some of important skills need to be develop.

KEYWORDS: Professional Competencies, LIS professionals, professional skills, Digital Environment.

INTRODUCTION :

The library and information sector has a distinctive area of knowledge and skills which is required for effective professional practice. Over the years, library professionals have successfully established practices and skills to handle the storage, retrieval and dissemina-



tion of information. The application of ICT, internet and WWW has a great impact on working condition of the libraries and demands the new knowledge and skills needed to be developed by the librarians in addition to the fundamental professional knowledge and traditional core skills. While the traditional skills such as classification, cataloguing, indexing, user education are relevant even in the present age, the library professionals should acquire competencies to satisfy the changing information needs of its users in the new electronic environment.[1-3]

Competency: Concept, Meaning and Definition

The term "Competence" was first used by Craig C. Lundberg in 1970 in his

article titled "Planning the Executive Development Program". The term gained popularity in 1973, when David McClelland, Ph.D. wrote a seminal paper entitled, "Testing for competence rather than for intelligence".

Some scholars use the term "competence" as a combination of knowledge, skills and behavior used to improve performance; or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role. Competencies are the characteristics of an employee that leads to demonstration and transfer of skills and knowledge, which results in effective performance within an occupational area.

The term 'Competency' is defined in various ways. A

decade ago, competency was considered in terms of personal characteristics and was judged in terms of character, virtue, innate abilities. In the present day, competence is considered more in terms of skill-oriented behavior and observable actions.

According to Wikipedia:

Competency (or Competence) is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. A competency is "a set of defined behaviors that provide a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviors in individual employees".⁴

According to Griffiths & King:

Competency is the generic knowledge, skills or attitude of a person, related to the effective behavior as demonstrated through performance. Knowledge is having information about knowing, understanding, being acquainted with, being aware of, having experience of, or being familiar with something, someone or how to do something. Skill is the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and attitude is a mental or emotional approach to

something or somebody.⁵

According to Council of Europe: Competency is “the set of knowledge and skills that enable an employee to orient easily in a working field and to solve problems that are linked with their professional role”

What made library professionals to develop competencies in digital environment?

The recent developments in ICT and Internet in general and WWW in particular have changed the very face of how knowledge is generated, stored and disseminated. The barriers of space and time in communication are zero-downed. These dazzling technologies have brought in enormous changes and radical transformation in functioning and management of libraries. The impact of ICT on information sources, information services, staff skill requirements and user's expectations of the library are immense. Therefore the success of a modern library is totally dependent on the competencies developed by the library professionals to make effective utilization of these new technologies. The factors which affected the library professionals to develop competencies in the present digital environment are:

- + Information Explosion i.e. availability of abundance information resources both in print and electronic form
- + Application and use of Computers in libraries
- + Digital Electronics and Telecommunications
- + CD-ROM Technology
- + Internet/WWW
- + Electronic Publishing:
 - E-Journals
 - E-books
 - E-mail Communication
 - Discussion forums
 - + Consortia Arrangements
 - + Online Information Sharing
 - + Digitization and Digital Archiving
 - + Institutional Repositories
 - + Open Source Initiatives
 - + Open Access Initiatives
 - + Networked Technology

LAN/WAN/Wi-Fi

- + Content Creation and Content Development
- + Development in Web2.0 technologies like –blogs, podcasts, wikis, social networks etc.,
- + Teaching and learning process has been shifting from conventional method to e-learning. In this changed learning environment the users expect digital content be delivered to their desktop and is thus the key driving force required academic libraries to change. ⁶
- + Impact of Barcode Technology, RFID and Biometrics.

Competencies for library professionals in digital environment:

In the present dynamic and vibrant digital environment, library professionals regardless to which generation they belong, must need to transform into technologically driven new generation librarianship and are expected to :

- + Manage hybrid libraries
- + Specialize in dealing with e-resources and e-databases of all types
- + Tackle Copyright/IPR problems
- + Develop and manage institutional repositories
- + Develop library website
- + Embrace Web2.0 technologies and explore weblogs and social networks tools
- + Impart ‘Information Literacy Skills’ to its users.
- + Create, organize and navigate web-based information
- + Customize information services to meet specific information needs of its clients.
- + Work as a partner with the colleagues in content creation and development of new tools and facilities for teaching, research and learning.

In order to meet the above expectations, library professionals are required to learn a great variety of professional competencies to accomplish the role of professional librarian in the constantly changing, challenging digital environment.

Some of the unique competencies need to be developed by the library professionals are:

Traditional LIS skills, extended to the electronic environment:

In the present digital environment, library professionals must develop competencies to perform the traditional library activities in electronic environment. They are:7

- + Collection development and acquisition
- + Conservation and preservation, digital preservation
- + Dealing with remote access users.
- + Evidence-based librarianship: must develop capabilities to act effectively as evidence locator, resource provider, information filterers, educators, disseminators, project leader, literature searcher, document supplier, data extractor, data synthesizer and report writer.
- + Information organization i.e., classification and cataloguing must have knowledge of resources/tools such as Metadata and MARC format.
- + Information searching and reference service: Capabilities to search electronic information sources, formulating effective information search strategies ,skills to make analysis, interpretation and presentation of information and integration and evaluation of information sources.
- + Internet knowledge / awareness
- + Understanding users and reference interview skills.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY –RELATED SKILLS

In the digital age library professionals must be aware of emerging technologies, and develop certain basic skills to understand new technologies. In the present scenario library professionals must have the knowledge of:

- + Computer knowledge
- + Database management, document management, content management and indexing and database technologies.
- + Imaging technologies such as OCR
- + User interface design
- + Network technology
- + Library software
- + Programming knowledge
- + Up-to-date IT skills
- + Continuous monitoring of emerging technologies
- + Web-based skills, Web technology.

TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Time management refers to a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals. It involves a wide range of activities such as planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of time spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing. According to fourth law of library science “save the time of users”, it has become essential for the librarians to develop the time management skills for providing effective services to the users on right time. Suppose if we do not provide desired information to a user on his/her required time, our whole effort to search that information would become useless.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

A Presentation is a fast and potentially effective method of getting things done through other people. Presentations are used as a formal method for bringing people together to plan, monitor and review its progress. Library professionals must develop highly effective presentation skills to perform various activities such as:

- + To implement new technology or service for users and to convey the management authority about it.
- + To market the library service.
- + To develop and practice reader’s advisory skills to promote reading habit.
- + To promote information literacy etc.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

It refers to the ability to convey somebody’s knowledge to other people effectively. Communication has a great importance in providing better services to users. Library professionals communicate the value of library service to decision makers, staff and users. When they provide information to the users, they must communicate clearly and respectfully with

them.⁸ They must always demonstrate active listening skills with customers and colleagues in his workplace. They must have good communication skills to negotiate effectively with publishers, users, management and vendors.

User Service

Now-a-days librarians should be user oriented. They can demonstrate a sincere commitment to user service. They are always required to try to observe their user needs and try to provide their desired information on time. They should be always confident and competent to deliver perfect customer services.

Evaluation and Assessment Skills

LIS Professionals need to understand how any changes in the way the library provides services will affect all stakeholders i.e., for users, staff and administrators. They should develop ability to continually analyzes, investigates and assesses the information service needs of the users and according to their stakeholders needs, design and deliver specialized value added information products and services.⁹ They should also able to evaluate the outcome of the use of library and information resources and services on time to time and conduct research to find solutions to the identified information management problems.

Managerial skills

It includes technical skills, human skills & conceptual skills.

- + Technical skills: It involves process or technique, knowledge and proficiency in a certain specialized field. These skills are more important for Librarians because they deal with more number of staff performing the organization's work. The technical skill involves the Librarian's understanding of the nature of job that people under him have to perform.
- + Human Skills: It refers to the ability to interact effectively with people. Librarian interacts and cooperates with employees and staff also. Librarians with good human skills were able to get best out of their people.
- + Conceptual Skills: It involves the formulation of ideas, conceptualization about abstract and Complex situations levels. It also refer to the ability of a librarians to take a broad and farsighted view of the organization and its future, ability to think in abstract, his ability to analyze the forces working in a situation, his creative and innovative ability and his ability to assess the environment and the changes taking place in it.¹⁰

Thus, technical skills deals with things, human skills concerned with the people, and conceptual-skills deals with the ideas.

KNOWLEDGE OF POLICIES, PROCEDURES, ISSUES AND STANDARDS

Library professionals are also needed to develop ability to:

- + Maintains current awareness of professional issues impacting libraries
- + Demonstrates knowledge of library policies, procedures and service standards

Knowledge of Information Sources & Services

- + Develop specialized subject knowledge about the purpose of the organization.
- + Identify materials appropriate to customers' requirements and their abilities.
- + Expert knowledge in the content of information resources and ability to critically evaluate and filter them.
- + Develop and deliver convenient, easily accessible and cost effective information services to the users.

Continuing Education and Life-Long Learning

Library professionals must involve in continuous professional development and must have commitment to develop life-long learning skills i.e.,

- + Take responsibility for the development of one's own professional career.
- + Remain knowledgeable in current events and technologies.
- + Pursues learning opportunities, personally or through formal training.
- + Flexible in adapting to new situations, systems, tools, environments.
- + Anticipates accepts, adapts and manages change effectively.

Other important Skills

- + Marketing and promotion of library services.
- + Teaching and training skills
- + Project management skills.
- + Digital rights management.
- + Knowledge management skills.
- + Research and consultancy

- + Competitive intelligence
- + Information literacy trainer.
- + Problem-solving skills
- + Ability to build partnership and alliances

CONCLUSION

The application of ICTs, internet and World Wide Web in libraries has brought tremendous change in the libraries and immediately requires development of different kinds of skills and knowledge among library professionals. The role of library professionals has to evolve in line with current and emerging technologies on one hand and user expectations on the other. Library professionals are needed to learn, improve and develop various professional skills, knowledge and competencies to cope up with the new challenges in the digital environment so that they can become more active participants and leaders to deliver information in the society.

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