

Competency in Profession : A Tool to Achieve for Survival

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Abstract

It is high time that the librarians make professional activities effective, and economic. To achieve this, certain skills and competencies are to be developed. The competencies can be professional and personal. The authors enumerate the characteristics that are required for these competencies. The competencies form the basis for the continued survival and growth of librarianship in the information age. Few general observations on the present state-of-affairs of the academic libraries are provided.

Introduction

Librarians face challenges on a daily basis that seem to be reaching volcanic proportions. Pressures have been increasing for years as newer, better, faster technology developments, services and operations. As if technology isn't enough, the bad weather still persist with efforts by the management / administrators towards reengineering, downsizing, and outsourcing proposals or threats.

Librarians are constantly being dragged into a more competitive environment, as they are encouraged, if not mandated, to operate their libraries "like a business". Now its high time we, the Librarians, have a brain storming for achieving the 3Es - Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Economy. We are not to our self determine just how effective our libraries are, but will have to see whether we are doing the 'right' things and also how efficiently we are doing. Efficiency introduces the need to examine work processes, find ways to streamline work, and improve personnel performance. This should also force us to know the need to measure productivity and to look outside our own libraries to external sources for 'best practices'.

The third E, which puts the Librarians in a bad position is the dealings with the economy. Its time for us to learn to price our products and

services, explain to upper management the rate of return on the rupees investment in our libraries and prove our value in realistic, hard-hitting terms.

Competencies and skills

To achieve the 3Es and to create a cost effective and a user friendly environment certain skills and competencies are to be developed. There are two main types of competencies : Professional Competencies and Personal Competencies.

Professional competencies

Professional competencies relate to the Library Professional's knowledge and skills in the area of information resources, information access, technology, management and research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services.

To attain the Professional competencies the Library Professionals should

1. have expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them,
2. have subject knowledge appropriate to the type of users / client he is supposed to cater,
3. develop and manage accessible and cost-effective information services that are aligned with the contents of the courses imported by the Department or the University he is serving,
4. provide excellent instruction and support for library and information services to the students / users,
5. assess information needs, accordingly designs and markets value added information services and products to meet the user needs, in other words repackaging of information,
6. use appropriate information technology to acquire, organise and disseminate information,
7. use appropriate business and management approaches to communicate the importance of Library & Information services to his / her higher authorities,
8. develop specialised information products for use inside or outside the organisation,
9. evaluate the results of the information use and conduct research related to the solution of information management problems,

10. continually improve information services in response to changing needs,
11. try to be an effective member of the senior management team and a consultant to the organisation on information issues.

Personal competencies

Personal competencies are the set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their career; demonstrate the value added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work.

To achieve Personal competencies the Library Professionals should

1. be committed to service excellence,
2. seek challenges and see new opportunities both inside and outside the library,
3. recognise that information-seeking and use are part of the creative process for individuals and organisations,
4. seek alliances with information technology professionals to optimise complementary knowledge and skills,
5. create an environment of mutual respect and trust,
6. have an effective communication skill,
7. be a good team member,
8. provide a leadership,
9. be committed to lifelong learning and personal career planning,
10. recognise the value of professional networking and solidarity,
11. be flexible and positive in a time of continuing change.

The academic and research librarians have their roots in the past, but they reach far into the future also. The competencies form the basis for the continued survival and growth of the Librarianship in the information age.

Attitudes perceived

In order to deliver the best possible, the decision makers have to provide a conducive environment. Though we discuss regarding the subject in each and every professional platform, it seems that it is limited to an area of discussion only. The following are the general observations in the academic libraries :

1. The over importance given to machine than the human has to be avoided. Machines are just the tools to make easier the task of a professional. It is the human factor which is more important.

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2. Libraries have always remained a low priority area to the funding agencies, where the decision makers are the academicians. In the changing environment the libraries are in need of more funds and manpower INFLIBNET as a funding agency fails to do justice in this regard, not to mention the State Government and the UGC.
3. Partial funding, like amount being sanctioned for hardware and not for software and so on. In such cases the libraries have to hunt out another source of funding, which is practically creating hassles.
4. Training and retraining is another area where adequate planning is required and should match with the accessibility of technology at the workplace. To make investment for the senior aged professionals in this regard should be considered as a luxury rather than a utility. This ultimately affects the young, promising professionals.
5. MB Line has rightly pointed out that the libraries have become a growing / muslin rather than a growing organism. This is so because, there is no clear cut policies for collection development in academic libraries.
6. Automation of libraries is a must. Can we really go for automation in the prevailing situation. What do we see in our Universities - the retainer, who is on special duty or on extension after almost putting 35 years plus of service and without much of the authorities in hand ends up his tenure as a spectator rather than a key role player. He is not to blame in any case.
7. In case of academics, institutions follow multi-standards in the appointment of academicians, whereas the appointment of librarians are done only on the basis of his / her experience ignoring the other important factors for holding an executive post.
8. The kind of professional education imparted in the area of library & information science are found primitive and not suitable for the so called high tech era and also library schools are found ill equipped to train the needy.
9. The curricula developers are the academicians, where they do not have the experience of the actual requirement of the profession. With the reason, there is a wide gap between the preaching and practising.
10. Ignorance is the worst enemy of all. We have to have enough exposure to the available high tech equipment and shed the fear from the library professionals in using the same.

Conclusion

The 'Chalta hei' concept is more prevalent in the Library Profession, because of this there is a lack of aptitude towards the profession. Year after year we have been discussing these at CALIBERs. We feel persistence is the means to achieve a respectable status to our profession. A quote of Gloria Dinerman, a library professional, (Coordinator, Library Management Division of Special Libraries Association) is as follows : "Persistence means to go on inspite of opposition. Patience is the partner of persistence. When the courage of your convictions is strong enough to defend against resistance, then you will experience the enthusiastic determination to develop a model strategy that, if carefully planned, will produce success !!!"