

Competencies for LIS Professionals in the Digital Information Environment: An Analysis

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Abstract

The term 'competency' has now become parallel to technological competency in Library and Information Science. However the norms for the competencies vary from institution to institution as per need due to the objectives, needs and purpose. Competency is very dynamic one. A person who is competent in a particular environment may not be competent everywhere or any other field. In the management of information tools and technologies, IT skills such as access to electronic resources to enhance computer skills must be considered. Due to the changing needs and growing technologies, without ICT skills, the librarians of the present day struggle to exist because the convergence of technology into libraries brought changes in the user's attitude and approach. However this situation is going to escalate further as the society is now becoming ICT literate and knowledge driven. In line with managing information organization, marketing and promotion, research skills/ project management and personnel management are seen as important.

Keywords: Competency, Information and Communication Technology, IT Skills, Library Professionals

Introduction

The role of librarians and libraries is changing rapidly because of the advancement of science and technology in all fields. In the past, the work of library professionals was limited to library boundaries, but it has now spread throughout the world called digital libraries/electronic libraries. In this age, it is difficult to manage and keep up to date with all the varied forms and documents for all kinds of charities using all the essential skills. Today, library professionals have to play different roles that require different skills, from the old culture to the new fashion.

In the current digital media environment, libraries and media centers (LIC) have undergone changes in consumer services, automation, social media promotion, methods used for scientific communication, rapid growth of mobile devices, and other applications. These changes have had a major impact on libraries and information science professionals working in this new digital environment. Libraries have changed dramatically from the arsenal of books to the power of knowledge since the mid-20th century. The information and communications technology (ICT) responsible for this revolution changed the design, management and functioning of modern libraries. Only the Library and Information Center (LICs) has the ability to effectively deal with current challenges focused on speed, cost and quality in this digital information



environment. Professionals working in such libraries need constant upbringing, acquiring basic skills and new skills, so they will never get old in this rapidly changing digital environment. To do this, they need to shift the focus from traditional library collections, processing, storage, and accessing information activities to provide customer information automation services created through the use of online/offline databases-resources, e-journals, networks and consortia, etc. Today, most libraries use the latest computer and IT tools to carry out various household tasks, such as purchasing, running and controlling the series, and providing various computer services to users. Technology is changing the world library at an unimaginable pace.

As traditional archivists, library professionals need to be aware of the impact of these changes and develop technical and managerial skills that enable them to use information effectively and meet the changing needs of their organization. Many library professionals lack the confidence to face a more ICT-focused environment. Therefore, it is essential to stay in touch with modern development and maintain an active approach to their work in the changing world of information. Today, we are leading a life in a world where information and knowledge are essential to social change and require more complex skills.

Changing Role of Library and Information Centres (LICs)

The Library and Information Center (LICs) are often referred to as a neural center for institutions as they are responsible for supporting teaching, research institutes and other academic programs. Now,

libraries and media centers are in the process of great change, influenced by the social, political, economic and technological developments that are taking place in society. The era ended when library professionals engaged in local housekeeping activities such as classification and cataloging etc. Now they have to act as a knowledge explorer and change facilitator to meet the client's professional needs. It is very important to use technique and technical tools. Current environmental pressures are forcing library professionals to focus on advancing technology, innovation, technical and social technical complexity, cost, risk, staff capacity and technology. Therefore, library professionals need to take active action to support education change in the 21st century.

Libraries in Knowledge Economy

Libraries are entering an era in which the future will be defined by people's ability to use the knowledge wisely. Knowledge-based economy focuses on disseminating and using information and knowledge as well as creation. In this new economy, libraries need to focus on preserving and raising knowledge capital to develop core competencies for survival. In the knowledge economy, the purpose of a society is shifting from meeting the basic need for comprehensive development to empowerment. Only those education systems that develop self-directed, informal and informal education with a focus on values, qualifications and quality will be encouraged. The need of the hour is that instead of a skill or a half-skill, the worker must be knowledgeable, self-sufficient, capable and flexible. In the future, instead of restructuring and pushing hardware, the

workloads will be less structured and software driven. Management forms will emphasize the delegates rather than the order. The impact on the environment and environment will be much lower than the industrial economy. Finally, the knowledge and knowledge gained by the institutions and industry will control the economy significantly. The emphasis in the knowledge society will be on sustainable development (calamities). In addition, Dr. Kalam pointed out that “what worked yesterday will not work today” and explained some excerpts from the book “Empire of the Mind” by Dennis Wiley, as follows:

- ❖ Yesterday - natural resources defined power
Today - knowledge is power. University will be a powerhouse for knowledge.
- ❖ Yesterday - shareholders came first;
Today -customers come first. Education should inculcate sensitivity to “customer” needs;
- ❖ Yesterday - employees took order
Today – teams make decision. University can inject team spirit;
- ❖ Yesterday - leaders commanded and controlled;
Today - leaders empower and coach;
- ❖ Potential Leaders will be empowered through exposure to the needs of sustainable development.

As society is moving towards knowledge economics, where knowledge is intellectual capital and the university is the power of knowledge, library professionals and their teams need to understand

tacit and explicit knowledge held by the Library and information centers, management techniques, relationships and skills that provides the organization a competitive advantage. They need to adapt as a group to geographical and organizational mobility. The academic library is an important center, so it plays a bigger role as a generator for storing and disseminating knowledge to make society more knowledgeable.

Library professionals are in general positive towards new technology and they believe that there is a high interest among users as well (**Kronqvist-Berg, 2014**). However, library professionals have difficulty finding time to develop new services and find the right balance between these and traditional work. In addition, they show a lack of confidence in their own skills, though most describe themselves as open and flexible with high computer experience.

Competency v/s Skills

The term skill and competency in literature have been used interchangeably but it is so important to distinguish them. Where Skill is practical ability, a facility in carrying out an action competency is often defined as the underlying attribute and mental ability that govern how an individual interact with the world.

Competency enables individuals to contribute positively to their organizations and the library profession. Skill can be seen in an action in the way someone carries out a task, competencies are hidden inside the person but influences how he uses his skills (**Clarkson 130**). **Larsen** also described competencies as “Combined theoretical knowledge and practical experience that makes individual able

and willing to take the right decisions in the daily working environment". Thus, competencies are the skills, technical knowledge and personal attributes that contribute to an individual's success in particular position, whereas skill is the capability acquired by a person through training to successfully complete a particular job.

Need for Competence and Skills among Library Professionals

Since the dawn of 21st Century, libraries are facing serious transition (**Raina, 211-216**) on account of the following three main reasons:

- ❖ The transition from paper to electronic media as the dominant form of information storage retrieval and dissemination. Convergence of different media, such as text, graphics, and sound, into multimedia resources, has direct impact on this transition;
- ❖ Increasing attention on accountability, with focus on quality customer services, performance;
- ❖ Measurement, bench marking and continuous improvement. In addition, shrinking financial resources have direct bearing on this shift;
- ❖ New forms of work organization such as end-user computing, work-teams, downsizing, reengineering, outsourcing etc.

Categories of Skills Required

Though various skills are required but the skill needs depend on role and context of the parent

organization. As all skills do not relate to everyone, a summarized set of skills under three broad categories of skills, i.e. generic, managerial and professional skills have been listed below in Table 1.1 (Fisher 2004).(Fouire 62-74) (Oldroyd 30:45-49:69:78:99; Sridhar 141-149); TFPL Skill Set):

Table 1: Skills Required for Electronic Environment

Generic Skills	Managerial Skills	Professional Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication skill 2. Flexibility 3. Adaptability 4. Assertiveness 5. Self-confidence 6. Creativity 7. Innovation 8. Analytical skills 9. Problem solving 10. Decision making 11. Service attitude 12. Customer relationship 13. Improving one's learning and experience 14. Presentation skills 15. Stress management 16. Time management 17. Interpersonal 18. Group skills 19. Working with difficult people 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local and global thinking 2. Planning and Organizational skills 3. Finance management Skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fund raising b. Skillful use of financial resources c. Accounting and auditing skills 4. Managing change 5. Team building 6. Decision making 7. Leadership 8. Negotiation skills 9. Consumer management Skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. User need analysis b. Information seeking c. Behavior analysis 10. Project management 11. People management 12. Stress management 13. Time management 14. Resource management 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information technology skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Hardware/ software and networking Skills b. MS-Office suite c. Presentation software's e.g. power point etc. d. Library automation e. Database creation f. Internet e.g. E-Mail management, Intricacies of internet search tools g. Intranet skill h. Scanning techniques i. Networking skills i. On-line search engines ii. On-line databases search j. Desktop publishing k. Content development l. Digitization m. Web based services n. Virtual learning 2. Information literacy 3. Technical professional skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Information resource management b. E-serial management c. Metadata standards e.g. Dublin core, MARC, TEI2, XML3 etc. d. Standards e.g. Z39.504 e. System development 4. Knowledge management 5. Traditional skills

Skills

Different kinds of skills which are imparted through different training programs for providing best services, achieving goals with success.

- ❖ **Professional Skills** - Are specific skills that are required in teaching, library programs, ICT Applications and Information Technology etc.,.
- ❖ **Technical Skills** - Deal with knowledge and abilities that need to accomplish ICT applications in libraries and related jobs and services;
- ❖ **Soft Skills:** Used to interact with users at work place. It helps to manage self-perception and reactions to adverse situations.

Required Skills for LIS Professionals:

The following are the soft skills which are important for a library professional to full fill the main purpose of the library;

- ❖ **Positive attitude** – Enthusiastic, optimistic, confident, happy, and encouraging;
- ❖ **Integrity** – High morals, honest ethics, and doing right things for organization;
- ❖ **Communication**– It includes printing, writing, listening, presenting, speaking;
- ❖ **Leadership Skills:** A person influences a group of people by motivation and inspiration to achieve goals & objectives;
- ❖ **Flexibility** – Wiling to change, lifelong learner, adaptability, accepts new things;
- ❖ **Interpersonal skills: Friendly**, nice sense of humour, self-controlled, down to earth;

- ❖ **Responsibility** – Reliable, accountable, resourceful, self-disciplined, Conscientious;
- ❖ **Work ethics** – Hard working, willing to work, initiative, selfmotivated,punctual;
- ❖ **Patrons Services** - Given by means of books, journals, and other documents or services such as CAS, SDI;
- ❖ **Bargaining Skills** – Sort of negotiation skills in which buyer or seller dispute the exact prices which are paid for goods;
- ❖ **Teamwork:** Helpful, supportive collaborative, cooperative;
- ❖ **IT Skills:** It is an ability to use and carried out the work from technology based devices like computers. laptops, tablets, mobiles including RFID systems;
- ❖ **Courtesy** – It covers etiquette, manners, respect, gracious;
- ❖ **Writing Skills: Writing** is a process of using letters, words, symbols to express a thought, idea, and views in written or print format;
- ❖ **Listening Skills:** listening skill is key ability to receive message correctly and paraphrasing it to avoid misunderstanding;
- ❖ **Presentation Skills:** presentation skill helps to deliver effective communication and services to a variety of library users;
- ❖ **Building Rapport:** Building Rapport is a state of amiable understanding of different kinds of persons that enable to establish better and easier communication;

- ❖ **Teaching Skills** it is library professionals who will teach and guide new and existing library users to what, when, where and how resources can be accessed available inside and outside of the library.
- ❖ **Library Etiquettes:** library etiquettes deals with our good behaviour, positive attitude, manners, respect and library ethics.

the skills and abilities and must also use the equipment. Abilities can be developed through formal training, attending seminars / conferences, visiting training programs and workshops from informal and peer groups, online training tools, short courses and self-study. They need to use those technology tools that consumers are comfortable with in maintaining a customer-centric market. They need to be equipped



Conclusion

Library and information services face many challenges due to the tremendous development of Information Technology. Library information professionals must recognize the growing technology and professional challenges they face in the modern world and be aware of the professionalism required to adapt and manage the changing technology. Change is the only constant in this universe. If library professionals want to survive in this age where user's expectations are rising and more technologists are challenging them, they must become tech savvy. Since there are no physical boundaries in the digital world, it is difficult for these information professionals to meet the needs of consumers/users. Professionals must have

with the basic capabilities and new skills needed to provide services in an electronic information environment. But today, changes in consumer perception and advances in technology have forced academic libraries to introduce new services based on consumer interest. Therefore, it has become necessary to have common skills in addition to accessing traditional capabilities and IT needs to be updated regularly to meet the changing needs of service delivery mechanisms. Thus, adequate IT knowledge and practice in libraries with a positive attitude can make the difference between practical and desirable situations. Management and work in modern academic libraries has become a highly specialized work that requires active behavior in the exchange and renewal of competence among

professionals. Traditional linear workflows and top-down controls are not sufficient, but are gradually being replaced by new organizational design and new management techniques such as management by objectives.

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