

**COMPETENCIES AND SOFT SKILLS FOR LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN
INFORMATION ERA**

SHANKAR REDDY KOLLE

Assistant Librarian
University of Horticultural Sciences
Bagalkot

PARMESHWAR S.

Post Doctoral Fellow
Dept of Library and Information science
Gulbarga University, Gulbarga

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the professional skills and soft skills required by the library professionals to be effective in rendering service to the user's community. Further it deliberates, the competencies required by the professionals such user's needs assessment, application of new technology and development the print and non-print collection and also discusses the soft skills one should have to serve the users effectively such as communication skills, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, presentation skills etc.

Keyword: Library professionals, Soft Skills, competencies, Communication skills, Leadership skills.

INTRODUCTION:

The role of libraries and librarians changed from storehouse of information and care taker to actual learning center and information manger and at the same time the forms and distribution of information also took new shape and way. This is due to advancement in information and communication technology. Due to this change, library professionals job also require some of the special skills and competencies apart from the basic skills and practices of librarianship. The libraries experiencing tremendous change, the electronic information has occupied huge place in the publishing industry during current days. New type of information transfer channels have come in existence, such as e-books, blogs, information gateways etc.

According to Sarrafzadeh (2005), if LIS professionals remain reluctant to gain new skills, they will become irrelevant to their organization and will probably lose out in competition for employment to people of other fields like scientists, engineers and IT professionals. Thus, LIS professionals must encounter rapidly changing environments that require diverse skills, new thinking and broader perspectives and must be prepared to develop innovative ideas for the capture, process and sharing of knowledge and demonstrate good management practices if they want to remain relevant in the emerging knowledge age (Smythe, 1999).

Hence, the present day library professionals apart from their educational based practices, required different types of soft skills and competency to provide right information to right user at right time. This paper will elaborate the soft skills and competencies required for the library professional to increase visibility and effectiveness of the libraries in the 21st century.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Competencies are defined as the descriptions of skills; know-how, abilities and personal qualities acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts to smoothly and adaptively perform a particular role and carry out complex activities or job functions successfully (Todd and Southon, 2001). 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 aptitude in the areas of technical work, administrative work and also in providing user oriented services along with soft skills. Like any other profession, the soft skills are required in day-to-day working for carrying out routine jobs more effectively. Some of the soft skills and competencies which are required by the library professionals to fulfill the core objective of the library and information centers discussed below.

Information Needs: The library professionals must able to understand the information needs of the users and also need to know the how to fulfill the needs and also while planning the new service, he should able to maintain the balance in serving the users community. But the needs of the users keep changing, hence, the librarians must able cope up with situation.

Conversation of traditional services into web based: The advancement in communication technology, the new way of information transfer and communication has come up. Hence the library professionals must able to provide traditional library services in effective way with the help of new technology available and developed for it and also have ability to design and develop web-based content for online use and ability to build digital library, develop and manage in house database etc.

Building print and non- print collection: The earlier days the libraries were filled with only print material, but now a days due to advancement technology, the new type of communication media taken place such e books, e journals, etc hence the librarians should be able to develop well balanced print and non-print collection, so that users can be satisfied in efficient manner.

Self Evaluation of service: Library professionals must able to evaluate and question himself about the services which are provided to the user's community. This self evaluation technique will help to understand and find out loop holes in the services and also lead to modification of services which could able to attract the users community, in turn it will help to achieve the maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Comparison of technologies: The librarians must use the new technology to provide effective and timely service to user community but in the market different types of technologies are available for the same purpose. Hence, the library professionals must be able to compare the software and other technical equipments and buy good one among the available in the market

Attraction of users towards library: The library professional must be able to attract the users toward the library. The librarians must use different kinds of techniques to attract the users (orientation and extension) and maximize the usage of information resources and services of the library.

Ready to embrace change: Due to advancement in technology, to serve the users effectively, libraries should use latest technology; Marmion also (1998) stated that one of the

biggest technology challenges facing the library profession today is preparing employees to use technology effectively. Hence, the library professionals must be able to embrace change.

Learn and use of new technologies: Aschroft (2004) stated the need for the skills, roles and characteristics of the LIS professionals to change in order to cope with the change in technology and. The library professionals must be able to learn new technology, which would be very useful in the effective rendering of the services.

Listening skills: Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Therefore, Librarians must have good listening skills, this is very much required while providing services and answering queries raised by the user's community.

Communication skills: Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, whether this be vocally (using voice), written (using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, websites or emails), visually (using logos, maps, charts or graphs) or non-verbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). The library professionals must have good communication skills; it is very much needed while interacting with users, management, vendors, publishers and suppliers.

Interpersonal skills: Interpersonal skills are fundamental to successful relationships at home, at school, at work and socially. This interpersonal skills self-assessment questionnaire will help you to understand how well developed your interpersonal skills are and identify areas that you can practice and improve. The library professionals must be able to build good interpersonal skills among the fellow workers, users and others with whom they work closely.

Presentation skills: Presenting information clearly and effectively is a key skill to get your message or opinion across and, today, presentation skills are required in almost every field. Presentation skills would become useful during interaction of library professionals with users, management, publishers and vendor etc.

Leadership skills: The ability to lead effectively is based on a number of key skills. These skills are highly sought after by employers as they involve dealing with people in such a way as to motivate, enthuse and build respect. Therefore, Library professionals must have leadership skills.

Writing Skills: Writing skills are an important part of communication. Good writing skills allow you to communicate your message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face-to-face or telephone conversations. The writing skills play a very important role for library professionals during the course of written communication with users, management and publishers and suppliers.

Marketing skills: Wee (2003) stated that in this information age, marketing and promotion of our services are pivotal to our survival and also Martey (2000) implied that libraries must survive and thrive because they still have a role to play in the community. Librarians like all other professionals should adapt to and cope with the changes taking place in the environment in which they operate. Therefore, library professionals must have marketing skills, which would in turn, help to increase the image of the library and information centers and serve the users effectively.

CONCLUSION:

Libraries have great role in dissemination of information to the users, due to emergence of information technology and management techniques, the librarianship also facing challenge to cope up with the situation. To manage the situation, librarian professionals should have some of the important competencies and soft skills which are very much required to satisfy the user's community are discussed in the paper.

REFERENCES:

1. Ashcroft, Linda. "Developing competencies, critical analysis and personal transferable skills in future information professionals." *Library Review* 53.2 (2004): 82-88.
2. Marmion, D. "Facing the challenge: technology training in libraries". *Information Technology and Libraries* 17.4 (1998): 216-18.
3. Martey, A. K.. "Marketing Products and Services of Academic Libraries in Ghana." *Libri* 50.4 (2000): 261-268.
4. Sarrafzadeh, M. "The implications of knowledge management for the library and information professions". *act KM Online Journal of Knowledge Management* 2.1 (2005): 92-102.
5. Satpathy, Sunil Kumar and Maharana, Rabindra K. "ICT Skills of LIS Professionals in Engineering Institutions of Orissa, India: A Case Study". *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal) (2011). Paper 627.<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/627>.
6. Smythe, D. "Facing the future: preparing new information professionals". *The Information Management Journal* 33.2 (1999): 44-48.
7. Todd, R.J. and Southon, G. "Educating for a knowledge management future: perceptions of library and information professionals". *The Australian Library Journal* 50 .4 (2001): 313-326.
8. Wee, J. "Marketing and promotion of library services". *National Library Board* (2003). Retrieved March 2, 2008 from <http://www.elsevier.com>