

COMPETENCIES FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT: ANALYSIS AND DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

The term 'competency' had now become parallel to technological competency in Library and Information Science. However the norms for the competencies vary from institution to institution 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. This is 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. As the technologies are fast changing, the personnel should be up to up-to-date about the changes happening around his environment. This article examines skills and competencies required for the ICT professionals in the contemporary and various aspects of competencies.

Keywords: Competency, LIS Competencies, Competency-based Appraisal and Pay.

1. INTRODUCTION

The libraries have transformed drastically from the storehouses of books to the powerhouses of knowledge, since the middle of 20th century. The information and communication technology (ICT), which is responsible for this revolution has changed the organization, management and functioning of modern libraries. As the traditional custodians of information, librarians need to be aware of the implications of these changes and develop technological and managerial skills, which will enable them to make effective use of information and to meet their organization's changing information needs. Many librarians lack confidence to face increasingly ICT oriented environments. So it is vital that they keep in touch with modern developments and maintain a proactive approach to their work in an ever-changing information world. Today we lead our lives in a world where information and knowledge are momentous force in shaping society and require more sophisticated skills (Kannappanavar and Chidananda Swamy, 2005).

2. COMPETENCY v/s SKILLS

Competency is not the techie version of skills. Generally professionals perceive competency and skills synonymous to each other. But competency and skills are different entities. Skills are specific in its purpose and it is the knowledge of using technologies. Competency is the ability of the professional to use these tools in accomplishing their professional task.

3. COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS OF LIS PROFESSIONALS

Staff development is a significant issue in a changing library environment as well-equipped professional librarians are key resources to developing and maintaining a high quality library. To ensure the maximum exploitation of staff skills, efforts need to be made to determine ways of assessing skill level requirements and performance and training effectiveness. All of these developments will have their ultimate aims, that is to enhance library staff's ability to deliver a more responsive and effective service to the direct benefit of library users. Librarians in the digital age has now become as 'Cybrarian'.

Competencies relate to the minimum level of performance expected of staff members to carry out their work role or designated tasks effectively and efficiently. These competencies maybe acquired through programmes of education, training and other vocational learning or through experiential activities. Over the years, librarians have successfully established practices and skills to handle the storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. While the traditional skills such as classification, cataloguing, indexing, user education are relevant even in the present age, the library professionals should acquire skills to deal with information in the new electronic environment.

According to Dictionary of Management(2006), Competence is a "state or quality of being able to take specified action without referring to other people, or without gaining special authorization, or without violating rules about who may take this action."

In an environment in flux, the librarian imagines, designs, and implements solutions that ensure that library values are sustained in the digital age. The human resources thus become less visible but more important in the higher education landscape. Implicitly and explicitly, they act as a broker across boundaries of intellectual communities. He cultivates a close relationship with users, helping them understand his role. Librarians need to collaborate closely not only as a profession (as they always have) but with partners in other areas of higher education and cognate fields such as computer science, information architecture, and instructional design. Their leadership must create a coherent environment for engaging with scholarly information in all its forms. While professional values have become largely institutionalized in the traditional library, this is not the case in the networked digital environment. For this reason it is crucial that librarians work to make their values explicit and realize them in a new environment. It is imperative that librarians in the two states be properly trained to acquire computer skills. The training becomes necessary as most libraries in the two states are making pre-computerization arrangements for the automation of their libraries (Ademodi and Adepoju, 2009).

The National Knowledge Commission (2007) recommends the minimum skills required for LIS professionals are: (i) Library and information-handling skills; (ii) Service orientation; (iii) ICT knowledge skills; (iv) Communication and training skills; (v) Marketing and presentation skills; (vi) Understanding of cultural diversity; and (vii) Knowledge mapping skills.

At one hand this change is providing a lot of opportunities to its readers in finding the relevant information in short time, but on another hand it is creating the challenges for existing library staff. The basic competencies of library professional can develop in an incremental way through refresher courses, in house training, participation in seminars, workshops, conferences etc. All these includes activities include staff training programme which is the part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). So the basic library management skills required for a library professional can be summarised as follows: (i) Effective communication skills; (ii) Resource building skills, (iii) Technical skills, (iv) Leadership skills, (v) Decision making skills, (vi) Time management skills, (vii) Public relations skills, (viii) Preservation skills, and (ix) Information and Communication Skills,.

4. ICT SKILLS FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

The environment in which library and information services have to perform is changing significantly due to the advent of ICT. Today we live in a knowledge driven society. Application of ICTs in library institutions has been proliferating in recent years. Besides mechanisation, still there is unbalance in providing these benefits to the clients mainly due to the lack of unskilled man power. As the role of information professionals have been challenging, the portfolio or the designation of librarian demands not a ‘Cybrarian’ but a “librarian 2.0” and in due course it will develop as “librarian 3.0”. The communication and networking technologies eclipsed the physical and geographical boundaries of knowledge.

New generation ICT skills required for ICT professionals		
Word processing skills	Trouble shooting and maintenance competencies	Web navigation skills File management skills Virtual reference service
Presentation skills	Digital library competencies	
Automation skills	Web 2.0 competencies	Knowledge on storage devices
Database creation	Knowledge management skills	Deep web knowledge
LMS software skills	Developing digital content	Digital archival management
Web page creation	Video conferencing	Knowledge on scanner & PDA
Networking competencies	Installation of software & OSS	RFID
Internet competencies	Develop consortia	Inter Library Loan
Computer hardware competencies	IPR and copyright	E- Book readers
Internet protocols & VOIP	Spread sheet skills	Online metadata schemas
Institutional repositories	Information retrieval Competencies	Photo editing/digital imaging
Security competencies		

Table 1: ICT skills required for ICT professionals

5. COMPETENCIES

Competencies are the set of abilities needed to perform a role in the organisation.

Organisations usually use core competencies to meet the following objectives (Thompson, 2009).

- (i) To define job descriptions, classifications and hiring criteria.
- (ii) Establish employee orientation and performance evaluation standards.
- (iii) Develop training and professional development programmes.
- (iv) Improve or change library services.
- (v) Improve or change the technology support structure.

Competencies refer to inputs which help to achieve successful performance at work (Fletcher, 1997). Being competent means the ability to control and operate the things in the environment and the environment itself. Competencies required for a post are identified through job analysis or task analysis, using techniques such as the critical incident technique, work diaries, and work sampling (Robinson, 2010).

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) introduced nomenclature for the levels of competence in competency development. The five levels proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus were:

- i) **Novice:** Rule-based behaviour, strongly limited and inflexible.
- ii) **Experienced Beginner:** Incorporates aspects of the situation.
- iii) **Practitioner:** Acting consciously from long-term goals and plans.
- iv) **Knowledgeable practitioner:** Sees the situation as a whole and acts from
 - a. personal conviction.
- v) **Expert:** Has an intuitive understanding of the situation and zooms in on the central aspects.

The four general areas of competency are:

- i) **Meaning Competency:** The person assessed must be able to identify with the purpose of the organization or community and act from the preferred future in accordance with the values of the organization or community.
- ii) **Relation Competency:** The ability to create and nurture connections to the stakeholders of the primary tasks must be shown.
- iii) **Learning Competency:** The person assessed must be able to create and look for situations that make it possible to experiment with the set of solutions that make it possible to complete the primary tasks and reflect on the experience.
- iv) **Change Competency:** The person assessed must be able to act in new ways when it will promote the purpose of the organization or community and make the preferred future come to life.

6. CORE AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES

Core competency is the fundamental knowledge or the ability related to a specific subject or skill set. The core part of the term refers to the underlying understanding from which an

individual can built specific abilities related to a task or job. Competency implies that this understanding goes beyond a basic ability to being well qualified or proficient at the task, although some experts assert that competencies should simply define the abilities to adequately perform the role.

Technology competency refers to those abilities that either requires the use of digital technology to accomplish a task or an in depth understanding of the technology itself in order to support systems.

7. WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES

Web 2.0 tools and techniques have strong features and potentials to spread out and reshape the entire process of teaching and learning. It also have the feature for creating personalized web services, self-publishing on the web, real time communication etc. Today, Web 2.0 has emerged as the most powerful medium for information retrieval, entertainment, learning and much more.

Web 2.0 states (Bradely, 2007) that the term refers to a perceived or proposed second generation of internet based services such as Social Networking Sites, Wikis, communication tools and folksonomies that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users. Web 2.0is (Harinarayana and Raju, 2010) “a space that allows anyone to create and share information online – a space for collaboration, conversation, and interaction; a space that is highly dynamic, flexible, and adaptable.Such technologies as are listed below serve as the emerging foundation for web. 2.0:

1. RSS (really simple syndication)
2. wikis
3. new, simple and revised programming methods like AJAX, J2EE, widgets, gadgets, Mashups, and API's
4. blogs and blogging
5. advanced portals and portlets
6. commentary and comments functionality – everywhere
7. personalisation and 'my profile' features
8. personal media such as podcasting and MP3 files
9. streaming media audio and video formats
10. reviews and user-driven ratings
11. personalised alerts
12. web services for enhancement and data mining
13. instant messaging and virtual reference including co-browsing
14. folksonomies, tagging and tag clouds
15. photos (e.g. Flickr, Picasa)
16. social networking software
17. open access, open source, open content
18. socially driven content
19. social bookmarking (such as del.icio.us)

20. It is the web generation learners who are likely to be most attracted to these development and to improve the quality of the content of the library websites in collaborative age and active way to use the web 2.0 tools:
21. Flickr enable users to contribute, organize, share, and discuss photos;
22. Facebook as a tool for sharing digital media;

23. Podcasting and blogs to alert patrons to new library acquisitions, database updates, events, book readings and other services etc.;
24. Social networks enable messaging, blogging, streaming media, and tagging;
25. Website like Library Thing' enables users to catalog their books and view other users share those books;
26. RSS feeds and other related technologies provide users a way to syndicate and republish content on the Web;
27. Tagging essentially enables users to create subject headings for the object at hand;
28. Library wiki as a service can enable social interaction among librarians and patrons, essentially moving the study group room online, etc.

8. LEVELS OF COMPETENCE

One of the major problems in our learning process is that we don't know what we don't know. It is termed as **unconsciously incompetence** (Wiltsher,1999).Being a part in the working environment is the methodology or in accident we will be aware that what we does not possess. This is said to be **conscious incompetence**. To overcome our incompetence we generally try to learn new skills such as learning the application of new software. This is said to be **conscious competence**. The next step is **unconscious competence** in which we are deeply involved in performing the skill and we are not aware that we are performing that.

9. COMPETENCE AND COMPETENCE RELATED PAY

Competence and competence related pay is one of the major approaches used by many organization in deciding the salary, perks and incentives of the employees. Roberts (1997) links competences to the initial stages of the recruitment and selection process, the suggested approaches includes:

- (i) Definition of key competencies-personal attributes knowledge, experience, skills, and values to meet the organization's long-term needs.
- (ii) Combining a range of selection techniques and methods to obtain reliable data on all core competences.
- (iii) Feeding the information gained into the induction, appraisal and development of employees.

Competence related pay approach also have its own pros and corns. Honey (1997) identifies that *Competencies also have the potential to aid learning and development, but only if they are integrated into other key processes such as recruitment and selection, feedback and appraisal, coaching and mentoring and pay. Without this integration there is a real danger that competencies are related to meaningless lists of words with no real impact.*

10. COMPETENCY-BASED APPRAISAL

For competency related pay there should be competency based appraisal so that we can quantify the competence of the employee. The important features of competency based appraisal (Cattell, 1999) are:

- I). Setting targets for the roles as specific objectives.
- II). Behavioral descriptions of the standards expected.
- III). Developmental plan towards achieving targets and competences

- IV). Periodic review on targets and achievement of competences.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The major advantages of competency based appraisal are listed below. They include:

- i) Development oriented.
- ii) Directs attention towards improvement of skills.
- iii) Does not deal with performance
- iv) Concentrates on long term achievement rather than short term goals.
- v) Competency based appraisal has some demerits also. The major ones are
- vi) The nature and quality of the competence statements and fit with their organizational initiatives.
- vii) The expectation of employees and the relationship between competence achievement and perks.

11. CONCLUSION

Library and Information Services are facing many challenges due to the massive development of ICT. Library information professionals have to recognize the expanding nature of the technological changes and professional challenges that they face in the modern world and realize to improve the range of professional competencies required to adapt and manage the changing technology successfully. Change is the only constant in this universe. If the library professionals want to survive in this age where user expectations are growing and a lot of other agencies are challenging them, they have to become technology friendly. It is important to acknowledge that "Librarians have always had two overriding imperatives: knowledge of the users they serve and knowledge of recorded knowledge domains" (Griffiths, 1999). As there is no physical boundary exists in the digital world, it is quite challenging these information professionals to satisfy the user needs. The professional should be competent with skills and abilities and also well versed with the tools. Competency can be developed through formal training, participation of seminars/symposia and conferences, attending training programmes and workshops, from informal groups and peers, online learning tools, refresher courses, short term courses and by self-learning.

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