

NEW CHALLENGING PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT FOR LIBRARIANS

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INTRODUCTION

India is one of the few countries that has chosen the path of science and technology for its economic development as a policy. The industrial revolution took two centuries to run its course, the information revolution has done the job in just decades. Due to sustained support over the last fifty years from UGC after it was established in 1953, India today can be proud of a strong and viable infrastructure for higher education and scientific research. It is no wonder that not only Indian students and professionals are in great demand across the globe but also many multinational companies are considering India as a preferred place to locate and establish their research and development centers. The information technology and globalization concepts are adding strengths to our India's higher education and professionalisation of librarians.

Library and Information professionals need to see themselves and their libraries as providing bridges to the past and gateways to the future. They need to establish partnerships, coalitions and technological connections to ensure a key role in the twenty first century. In this challenging and transition period, library professionals should be seen as part of the solution contributing to quality education, they need to be bold and imaginative in defining their role and decision in acting upon it. They should be visionaries in conceiving the present and imagining the future, library professionals should be willing to take the risks inherent in translating their vision into the real action and implementation. There is not only a need for reshaping of traditional services but also a requirement for the development of entirely new services in the emerging networked information environment.

Furthermore, information technology has created a sense of urgency and has created new possibilities for the development of new products and variety of latest services to the user community. Due to the proliferation of literature and the development and use of the internet across the globe on wide aspects of knowledge in this information age, the library literature in a variety of context phrases such as virtual library, information super highway, and global information economy, etc., are appearing with considerable frequency. The stage has come to the library professionals to rethink that the traditional type of library system is fast becoming obsolete and meaningless, incapable of coping with the mass of knowledge.

The success of any information center in any type of environment is mainly attributed to its human resource. Human resources are in turn evaluated in terms of their competencies. They are tied to a position, role, job, function, etc. Competencies expected of a professional are referred to as professional competencies. The professional competencies help the librarians to know areas where they need to develop as well as, to evaluate themselves.

PROFESSION

Profession in general is defined as: “Concerned with the specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes, standards and values which together contribution to competence in the conduct of our vocation.”

A profession, therefore, must have a solid foundation consisting of a recognized body essential to the well-being of society. *Herben Blunter* says “professionalization seeks to clothe a given area with standards of excellence, to establish rules of conduct to develop a sense of responsibility to set criteria for recruitment and training to ensure a measure of protection of members, to establish collective control over the area elevate to a position of dignity and social standing in the society.

The concept of a profession is therefore characterized by several commitments, according to *Ramansu Lahiri*

- Associating with specialized work of noble cause;
- Undergoing through rigorous and specialized preparations;
- Agreeing to work along with the guidelines of ‘code of conduct’;
- Performing the duties and freedom, responsibility and accountability.

Most of the definitions on profession reveal reasonable importance to specialized knowledge and regular improvement of specialized skills. The professionals in library and information science should therefore, inculcate the habit of learning new knowledge and develop skills of IT from time to time to catch the trend.

IMPACT OF I T ON LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS:

The explosion of information and developments taking place in technology is replacing the old methods of information collection, storage and retrieval in Library and Information Centres. This process has great effect on libraries and library professionals and it is at rapid speed, which is bringing drastic positive changes in library profession. Thus the changing trends forced the professionals to learn the skills to IT, particularly in information handling and processing. A professional cannot face the challenges unless he/she is trained well to have access to new information resources. The application of information technology in the libraries were treated by most of the library professionals did not equip themselves with the knowledge of IT. Now the stage has come to apply the skills of IT and consequently to change their attitudes. The communication infrastructure all over the world is developing to handle the electronic traffic and to exchange more and more data in electronic and machine-readable formats.

Moreover, advances in multimedia application are going to add new dimensions in information process and retrieval. Hence, the professionals will have to qualify themselves to provide great inputs for the creation of multimedia.

One of the jobs of the professionals is to serve the users with appropriate information, precisely as far as possible. The traditional methods of information process and retrieval

begin to fade out with the appearance of new information techniques. "The library and information professionals develop new skills and strategies in order to change; survive in the world of electronic information. The main role of information professionals has now changed from producing data and information to the integrating new information techniques".

The quality of the library and information service will be largely determined by the library professional skills and imagination in bringing into balance the needs, priorities and technologies for the information. The successful application of information technology in libraries depends on staff involvement in its planning, design of analysis and implementation. The psychological barriers to change must be cleared in the initial stage involving all the staff in its implementation, the staff involved in IT implementation need to be trained and must be aware of the latest developments and trends in it.

The library staff should be provided with adequate training to have thorough understanding over the knowledge of IT potentials on library and information products and services. The knowledge skills and interest in various aspects of IT will always help further development. Therefore, a continuous in-service training for library staff is essential to learn new skills in the use of modern information techniques.

CONCLUSION

Many may say that the library profession is an easy one where no particular expertise is required. Even through this may be the belief of many, it is first an assumption and an illusion. All cannot be librarians and all librarians cannot become professionals. The library and information profession has its own subject skills and ethics which must be upheld. For a librarians to be called a professional, he must maintain relationships and update his knowledge and skills. One who is seeking to maintain relationships must also communicate and maintain standards for discipline through a positive approach. In trying to do this, he must be direct, be specific, have positive expectancy, uphold standards consistently and also employ of variety of strategies matched to the situation.

Having a sense of human, gentle appearance, being courteous, showing respect and of course listening attentively to the users and attending to their need will be add features to the profession. Professionally, a librarians should establish a very good rapport with all. After all, the greatest names in history of many well read people were written because of the efforts made by the committed and selfless librarians.

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