

# Library & information Science Profession and professional competencies

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## Abstract

*Libraries ever since their beginning are engaged in the acquisition, processing and dissemination of knowledge, as knowledge is stock-in-trade for librarians. Because of modern technology applied in the libraries, nature of activities performed in libraries has changed to a great extent. With the passage of time all the three ingredients of library viz. documents (in any format), Users (in their behavior) and staff (in their skills) are changing. This paper analyses these changes & lists the competencies being adopted by LIS professionals in order to perform effectively and efficiently.*

**Keywords:** *competencies, skills, library & information professionals, information Technology*

## Introduction

Library is a social institution and provides information for education, inspiration and recreation for the enlightenment of the personality of an individual. Libraries also provide support to the social, economic, educational, cultural, technical and technological growth and development of a society and are considered as an indispensable part of the society. We find libraries of different hues serving all sections of the society and have thus achieved important position in a civilized society.

Libraries are service oriented institutions serving as bridges between knowledge generator and knowledge seeker. In the present Information Age the society thrives on availability and exploitation of information. Naturally, the role of libraries and the ways they offered services in traditional environment are progressively being substituted by roles and ways under the impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The competencies that library professionals were required to acquire, as a consequence, witness changes day in and day out.

The tasks they used to perform manually, the materials they used to handle just in print and the services they used to offer conservatively are being challenged by smooth and efficient application of ICT in whole gamut of library operations and services. Naturally, in order to be enterprising library professionals are called to demonstrate commitment to the values and principles of the profession and augment their competencies with ability to exploit ICT in their operations and services. Chopra while writing about the characteristics of the library profession rightly says:

*Librarianship calls for a unique combination of various kinds of academic attainments and personal qualities. A librarian is an administrator with out being any less a scholar. He is a scientist without being any less a theoretician. He is a lover of books and he is equally interested in people. He is a scholar, practitioner and a person with an eye on the technology, because all technological advances affect the libraries and their social relevance. These complex qualities call for a comprehensive training.<sup>(1)</sup>*

To be relevant to the merging social environment the librarian of today is called upon to offer traditional services with a blend of new sources and services available in cyber space. Consequently, he requires elaborate managerial and technological ability of a high order and meticulous devotion to details involved in increasingly demanded and multifaceted library services. Librarianship of today thus is multidisciplinary and encompasses the various fields of human endeavor like management sciences, computer sciences, mathematics, social and behavioral sciences, history etc.

Every profession exists, sustains and flourishes on the basis of a range of competencies that it

evolves for its practitioners. These competencies, as Murphy puts it, are the "interplay of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes required to do a job effectively from the point of both the performer and the observer."<sup>(2)</sup> Webster's Third New International dictionary has defined competencies as "the quality or state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect)." Griffiths talks of competencies in terms of three components viz, knowledge, skills and attitudes i.e. knowledge and understanding of the academic discipline, skills and the moral values and professionalism. Skills involve the ability to perform the various psycho-motor tasks and interaction with others. Professional attitudes compromise the emotive commitment to professionalism and the willingness to perform professionally.<sup>(3)</sup> Thus competencies are the capabilities existing and attained by a person in order to perform his duties effectively and efficiently.

#### **Libraries in changing environment:-**

Library and information scenario is changing at rapid speed. Libraries have changed from mere static store houses of knowledge to dynamic service centers. As such library profession has witnessed transformation after transformation in the wake of changes in intellectual environment, media formats and patrons approach to information. However the basic philosophy behind the services offered by the profession as linking mechanism between the sources of information and the patrons has remained unchanged. What has changed are the professional activities that were impacted by the advances in social, intellectual and technological spheres from time to time. The professional activities with regard to collection development, organization and access have thus undergone changes calling for new competencies compatible with the new environment. Moreover, the physical possession is no more the criterion for services. Availability of oceans of information on Internet makes information available without possessing it. So the possession has been substituted by access.

Changes that have been witnessed in library operations and services in the wake of deep

penetration of ICT are many. However, the major ones can be identified as under:

#### **A) - Increasing impact of technology:-**

In today's world among several developments in information technology, the ones which are directly affecting library and information services are computers. The use of computers and other electronic gadgets has now changed the face of libraries and information centers. Computers are not only used for housekeeping functions but also for recording, analyzing and retrieving of information and also for networking. The new media such as CD-ROMs and other multimedia forms have changed the whole complexion of libraries and information services. Developments in telecommunication have brought the world within the formats of an information village and these provide immense potential for services to be provided by library and information centers. Because of ICT developments, today there are library & information networks operating at international, national and regional levels such as INIS, AGRIS, INFLIBNET, DELNET, etc.

The software packages for automation and networking of library and information centers were developed and provided in terms of functions, user friendliness, efficiency etc. These software packages like ISIS family developed by UNESCO for database management and an integrated version WEBLIS developed by Institute for Computer and Information Engineers in Poland, SOUL, MINISIS, INMAGIC Plus, CAIRS-LMS (Library management software), TECHLIB Plus, Softlink Library Automation Software Packages, Libsys, MAITRAYEE, Tulips, *Librarian*, and Golden Libra etc are now used for automation of all library functions. Much work has been carried out in developing openware software for library integrated programmes by different organizations. Similarly progress has been made in evolving digital library software and open archive software like Greenstone, D-space, E-prints etc. These software packages can be applied to

1. Library operations
  - a) Acquisition
  - b) Cataloging/OPAC

- c) Circulation
  - d) Serial control
  - e) Digital archiving
2. Library services.
- a) CAS
  - b) SDI
  - c) Retrospective / current literature services
  - d) ILL services
  - e) Document delivery services
3. Internet interfacing

### **B) Library Management: -**

Application of theories of systems analysis and design, Total Quality Management (TQM), scientific management etc are now exploited in libraries in order to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness both in services and practices performed in libraries.

Thus in addition to the basic core of traditional skills and professional knowledge, today's professionals need a new variety of competencies and skills. If the profession has to retain its role in this new scenario, it has to develop new competencies to deal with new media, new approaches and new technologies. The profession has realized these realities ever since the beginning of this new scenario in the second half of the past century.

### **Competencies of library and information professionals:-**

There is great variety of competencies necessary to accomplish the role of the professional librarian. Competencies are contextual varying with the environmental conditions. Hence they are to be formulated at different levels and continuously modified. Close coordination is required between library & information professionals, educationists and employers to formulate competencies. Library associations at international, national and regional levels are playing an important role in this regard, so as to bring an overall improvement in the profession. An extensive and in depth analysis of literature on the subject reveals that library & information professionals (LIP) should possess competencies related to:-

### **1. Philosophical competencies :-**

- LIP should know the mission and role of the library in the community and the mission of libraries in general.
- LIP should understand the responsibilities and relationship between different departments in the library e.g. technical section, public services and administration.
- LIP should understand that his /her library is a part of large library system and thus cooperation and resource sharing is to be introduced.
- LIP should know the ethics and values of library profession.

### **2. Technological competencies:-**

- LIP should be able to demonstrate basic skills in the use of appropriate software and hardware applications for library functions and services.
- LIP should demonstrate basic skills in the use of audiovisual equipments.
- Demonstrate skill in web page design <sup>(4)</sup>

### **3. Educational / professional and personnel competencies**

- LIP should seek out and participate in continuing education opportunities in order to keep skills current and up to date. He should be able to integrate new techniques and methodologies into everyday practice.
- LIP should be open to self evaluation and thoughtful evaluation by superiors, peers & customers in order to become a contributing employee.
- LIP should know how information is organized and accessed within his /her library and as such should have thorough knowledge of the collection in the library.
- LIP should get involved in designing curricula and methods to meet the educational needs of clientele <sup>(5)</sup>

### **4. Customer service competencies:-**

- LIP should understand customer needs and preferences for information which

build and drive the selection of resources and services.

- LIP should always improve customer services in response to changing needs.
- LIP should understand information seeking behaviors and should facilitate the customer's successful information retrieval.
- LIP should act as a user advocate during the development of information products and systems.
- LIP should tailor services and information products to support the user needs.
- LIP should act as a consultant to the parent organization and community on information issues.
- LIP should speak a language that his/her clientele understand <sup>(6)</sup>

#### **5. Administration and leadership related competencies:-**

- LIP should create a culture which promotes change.
- LIP should provide a nurturing climate for staff and an encouraging attitude for their growth and development. <sup>(7)</sup>
- LIP should be able to develop and implement policies and procedures for the efficient and effective operations of library functions.
- LIP should continually adjust programmes and services to respond to social changes and service opportunities.
- LIP should assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges to the organization and develop strategies for dealing with them effectively without compromising vision, mission and values.
- LIP should always help others to achieve their full potential and should also give due value to the contribution of others.
- LIP should be able to set long- and short - range goals, objective and priorities. <sup>(8)</sup>

#### **6. Information literacy skills:-**

- LIP should understand the flow of information in society.
- LIP should find, review and use WWW

resources including search engines and databases.

- LIP should judge accuracy of information gleaned from traditional / web based resources.
- LIP should understand basic copyright principles, especially as they relate to electronic resources.
- LIP should understand information issues such privacy, freedom of speech and preservation of information especially as applied to an electronic information environment.
- LIP should know how to access troubleshooting guide online. <sup>(9)</sup>

As such competencies are to be developed because

- A) The changing environment in information storage, organization & access is driving libraries to change and adapt.
- B) Users / patrons expectations from libraries are changing.
- C) For planning human resources in a library in order to provide qualitative services.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the context of the advancement of information technology, library and information professionals are faced with the challenges they encounter in the provision and dissemination of information essential for over all development of human society. The institution that is known as library around the globe has been witnessing changes all through the ages. It is not a new phenomenon. Today the librarian and information professional is imperatively to function, in addition to his conventional practices, as information analyzer, interpreter, facilitator, consultant, advisor etc. Concepts like automated libraries, electronic libraries, digital libraries, virtual libraries point in this direction. Naturally, in this new environment the LIP has to spice his/her competencies with the fast emerging ICT to act both as librarian and cyberarian in this fast growing new environment. The professionals in order to be responsive to new social needs and demands have to master these competencies, failing which they may be marginalized or even threatened to extinction.

Thus it is a matter of survival and sustenance; sooner we realize it, better it will be.

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