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Skill sets required for librarians in the post pandemic scenario: An assessment

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1. Introduction

The world as a whole has been gripped by the spread of the Covid-19 Virus and has changed the way people interact in the society. One of the institutes that has affected the most is the library. As people are not allowed to gather at one place, and several SOPs are designed to avoid contact with one another, the usual services of the libraries could not be conducted. But we are not in a position to end the library services as a whole and sit idle. We have the pragmatic solutions to reach the desktops of the clientele through computer networks and provide services digitally.

Even before the spread of the pandemic itself most of the libraries were working as hybrid libraries, incorporating digital resources and services simultaneously. This situation warranted the importance of having specialized skills for librarians to hand the digital tools and resources. The syllabi in the library schools may not get updated all the time to suit the prevailing demands of the profession. As such most of the skills are to be acquired by the professionals while being on their job. We can segregate the

essential skills for a librarian into two as professional skills and general skills. In their study Gerolimo and Konsta identified the skills in the above pattern.[1] In the post-pandemic scenario whether the same set of skills or we need added skills is the question this paper is trying answer. The skills listed by Gerolimo and Konsta is listed below. They are categorized under two heads namely; professional general skills.

Professional skills are:
- Management of Conventional library materials
- Management of Digital Resources of the library
- ICT Skills
- Organizational Skills
- Education

General skills are:
- Personal skills
- Inter personal skills
- Experience
- Lifelong learning skills

2. Skills in detail

The Management of Conventional library materials include the selection, acquisition, creating an index and arranging for the proper usage of the items. Present day libraries make use of Integrated Library Management Systems like the KOHA to make things easier. These are already part of the syllabi of the library

[1] Michalis Gerolimos, Rania Konsta, (2008) "Librarians' skills and qualifications in a modern informational environment", Library Management, Vol. 29 Iss: 8/9, pp.691 – 699.

schools. Hence the professionals are trained for it. But experience polishes their skills in this area a lot.

Management of Digital Resources involve a totally different set of skills. However, Selection and Acquisition processes remain to an extent unchanged. But managing the resources and helping in information retrieval and discovery are challenges to every one including library professionals. Hence, it is a career long learning process for the librarians as the technology associated with the digital resources changes every day. But they cannot proceed without learning the skills.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Skills include knowledge of using computers and peripheral devices, Operating Systems, Office packages, Designing Webpages, Server management and so on. In this area there exists a lot disparity among the professionals. The ICT content in the syllabus of various schools differ in India and hence the professionals also vary in their ICT Skills. As a matter of fact many professionals acquire the ICT skills on their own during their career.

Organizational Skills include Managing the library, Managing Human Resources and Financial Resources, Projects Management, Marketing skills etc. These the library professionals acquire through their courses and through their career.

Other General skills include learning new languages, presenting new ideas in Conferences and getting associated with the Library Associations etc.

A complete professional needs several other General skills also along with the skills listed above. They can include critical thinking capacity, attention to details, Leadership skills, Understanding user demands and information needs etc. Lifelong learning also is a capacity required for library professionals.

3. Skills for the post pandemic era

All the above skills are essential for information professionals, but the pandemic has resulted in certain situations where additional skills are warranted for librarians. Libraries cannot entertain their clientele within their brick walls. Standard Operating Protocols prohibit the gathering of people at one place as long as the pandemic remains among us. We are forced to reach the places where the clientele are available. Fortunately, we have the networks and the World Wide Web to assist in this scenario. But the professional librarians need to adopt and adapt to the new developments by acquiring new skills. Let us see what all the new skills they need are in the post pandemic scenario.

   i.   **Web technology skills**

Most of the services and Resources are going to be online and hence it is essential that the stake holders of the libraries are to be techno savy and have good control of what is happening around them. They need the following essential skills in utilizing the power of Web technology.

ii. Skill of developing interactive web pages/sites

Web pages have become interactive with the evolution of Web 2.0 tools. Library professionals should know how to develop interactive web pages using databases in the back end. If they know how to do it, they can develop services quickly and easily.

iii. Skill in the use of Web Discovery Tools

Web Discovery tools are those software tools which help in retrieval of information from the various databases subscribed by the library. They will have a dynamic index of all resources, including the catalogue of the library to help in retrieval of information in easy steps. These software tools avoids the unnecessary task of searching all databases for a research query. Librarians should know to acquire and use Web Discovery tools for their users. They also should conduct intermittent orientation sessions to train the users in the use of Web Discovery Tools.

iv. Skill in the use of Remote Access Software

The users are not coming to the library due to the pandemic. But they need access to the resources subscribed by the library. Most of the publishers do not allow access beyond the campus but they allow a proxy access through remote access software or Virtual Private Networks. Librarians need to know which a suitable software is for their clientele. They should adopt one and conduct regular orientation in the use of Remote Access Software.

v. Knowledge of metadata use

A Digital Document can be identified from a group only if it is properly documented. Proper documentation needs the use of proper metadata. As we will be procuring and using more and more digital documents it becomes essential for librarians to use metadata efficiently.

vi. Skill in managing Servers and facilitating access

Servers are the points in the network where information in the form of web pages are saved. The also act as points where the e-resource contents are made available by the publishers. The library then facilitates access to the e-resources in the campus networks or to the desktops of users through remote access software. Servers also are used to establish digital libraries by archiving digital surrogates of documents of archival value. Open Access Repositories are examples for such digital libraries. As such

librarians will have to strive a lot if they do not know how to manage servers and the technology associated with it.

vii.   Social Media skills

The Internet has mad the entire world into a Global Village. Anything happens on one end of the world is visible to the other end of the world on live screens. Information flow through various channels on the Internet Super highway. Some of the biggest channels in this Super Highway are the Social Media Platforms. The Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Researchgate etc. are some of the major Social Medial players available to us. Librarians cannot avoid them as the presence of their clientele in those platforms make it necessary for librarians to be available in them. They can make use of the platform for marketing their libraries. Hence librarians needs Social Media Skills more in the post-pandemic conditions.

viii.   Negotiating skills

As the publishers are moving towards digital platforms, their business also undergoes revolutionary changes. The time till things settle, the publishers will be sceptical about the future of their business. Hence, there are chances that indomitable pricing patterns will be adopted by them. Here, the librarians need skills to

negotiate with them to bring down the cost of item that are being procured.

4. Conclusion

As such, the post-pandemic libraries offer the librarians a lot of new challenges and it is their attitude to adopt and adapt to new skills make them leaders and stake holders in Information Profession. Lifelong learning is the only option for the professionals. We cannot expect that the developments in these areas will have a full stop and we can rest. As changes are happening every moment, librarians need to keep their eyes and ears open for the new things. Adapt to the changes. The library schools also need to change with the changing scenario. Change their syllabi and make their product face the challenges of the future.

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