

Core Competencies for Information Professionals of Thai Academic Libraries In the Next Decade (A.D. 2010-2019)

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to develop core competencies framework for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade (2010-2019). The study consisted of two phases, Phase 1- the study of roles of Thai academic libraries and information professionals in the next decade and Phase 2- the development of core competencies framework conducted by using the Delphi technique. This paper presents Phase 2 of the study. The research conceptual framework on core competencies for information professionals was synthesized and adopted from several resources including Gulati, & Raina (2000); Gorman & Corbitt (2002); Abels et al.(2003); Aschoft (2004) and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library (2007). The subject of Delphi study included 21 experts from the following three groups: 8 instructors of library and information science, 8 administrators/practitioners of academic libraries, and 5 scholars who have had active roles in the library and information professionals. Data were collected in 3 rounds and analyzed by using the median, mode and inter-quartile range. Results of the study were concluded and discussed on the three following core competencies for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade. 1) The Knowledge - consists of 8 areas including the knowledge on the foundations of information profession, information resources, information and knowledge management, information technology, library and information services, organizational management, research and user studies, and continuing education and lifelong learning. 2) The Skills – consist of 11 skills including user services, information resource management, information technology, marketing, language and communication, team working, analytical thinking, problem solving and decision making, management and planning, teaching and training, conceptual thinking, and knowledge management skills. 3) The personal attributes – consist of 7 characters including the leadership, service mind, morals and professional ethics, achievement motivation, accountability, self-management and adaptability.

Keywords: Professional competencies; Core competencies; Academic libraries; Information Professional; Thailand; Delphi study in library research; information profession

INTRODUCTION

University libraries, in the present decade, have seen changes from advances in information technology and communication to the multiple and increasing needs of library users. Although information technology is the major force behind the changes, there have been other factors, including the availability and emphasis placed upon increasing numbers of students admitted into places of higher education. The number of institutions increases, and hence there are more alternatives, the quantitative expansion is rapid, and the social attitudes towards education have changed (Brophy, 2005). University libraries in the future still have to face improvement and adjustments of their operations in many aspects, for instance, aggressive operations for services that respond directly and promptly to users' needs, flexibility of work, and provision of services that are open around-the-clock and a variety of access to information resources (Stueart, & Moran, 2007; Ramos, 2007). It is clear that the future of information technology and communication processes, will be based on integration of multiple sources and implementations in media. The development of virtual universities in tertiary level institutions and government's policy all lead to the enhancement of lifelong learning. The information professionals in university libraries have to work in this ever and rapidly changing environment (Stueart, & Moran, 2007).

Such changes have an impact on university libraries and the information profession. It has become necessary for those in this profession to learn and adjust themselves to the new environment, and catch up with the technological advances, in order to adopt these developments to the library work. As a result, Information professionals must learn to acquire various roles, knowledge, competencies, and skills; and the emphasis of their role now is on

management, services, and cooperation (Tanloet, & Tuamsuk, 2010). The changing roles of university libraries and the information professionals result in their awareness of the importance of developing information personnel, so that they become a knowledgeable asset to their organization in the present, and are able to respond to any future changes. One of the human development tools adopted is called competency development. Intrinsic competency denotes knowledge, ability, skills, and characteristics shown as behaviors that lead to successful operations. Such concepts accent the long-term quality development necessary for future work (Spencer, & Spencer, 1993).

Research studies will be conducted to predict the future core competencies of the information professionals, these studies will be greatly beneficial to those related to the development and preparation of personnel in this field, including academic institutions, the professional association, and university libraries networks. The results will be useful for the curricular development planning of future graduates and professionals in the information profession. The core competencies will be the framework for instructional development in the discipline, including, curricular improvement, development of course contents, and development of students' skills that meet with the requirements of the labor market. In addition, the core competencies of the information professionals in university libraries will promote a heightened opinion of and interest in the information profession. This will, in turn, result in readiness and competency of the people in the profession, enabling them to acquire visibility at an international level. Hence, a research study that develops the core competencies of the information professionals in the next-decade, indicates that advanced university libraries are helpful to the profession, and the administration of university library human resources, who will then apply the core competencies as a guide for planning and preparing for the changes in order to administer and improve the qualities and skills of manpower in the profession.

OBJECTIVE

To study the core competencies of the information professionals of Thai university libraries in the next decade (A.D. 2010-2019) by using a Delphi technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competency is an individual's inner attribute that can propel the individual to perform good operation that is in accordance with the responsible criterion (McClelland, 1973). It is the quality inside an individual that regulates the behavior of that person towards the goal under an organizational environment. It also regulates the person's determination towards the required outcome and ability to outdo others (Boyatzis, 1982). Competency is often defined in terms of relationships of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes affecting operation. It can be assessed and compared to standards. It can be enhanced by means of practice and development (Spencer, & Spencer, 1993; Parry, 1996; Armstrong, 2006). In terms of organizational services, the core competency is defined as quality, knowledge, basic ability possessed by every individual in the organization. It can be said to be a common characteristic of the organizational personnel and hence, the organizational culture. Thus, an organization's core competency may not be similar to another organization's core competency (Kongkasawad, 2007). With reference to profession, core competency is a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes which are the professional bases leading operation within the framework of the professional standards, in accordance with academic changes, marketing demands, and other environmental conditions that cause the requirements of professional knowledge and expertise to change (Abels et al., 2003).

The information profession has undergone changes regularly and at a high level due to the ongoing development of information technology, advancement of information management, and the ever-changing learning behaviors and needs of users. Consequently, information professionals need to be developed in terms of knowledge and competencies to be able to work in the changing conditions. This is especially true for information professionals working in university libraries where several surrounding factors differ from other libraries or information organizations, whether they are the university's visions and policies, readiness in information resources and technology, curricula and programs offered, requirements for research of

lecturers and students, etc. Review of literature indicates that the professional associations in many countries and some universities have given importance in stipulating the scope of competencies for information professionals as the criteria to accredit the programs, the institutions, and graduates' qualities in the field of library and information sciences. For example, ALA's Presidential Task Force (2008) has stipulated the following core competencies for information professionals and graduates in the field of library and information sciences from the association-accredited institutions; 1) Foundations of the Profession 2) Information Resource 3) Organization of Record Knowledge and Information 4) Technical Knowledge and Skills 5) Reference and User Services 6) Research 7) Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning 8) Administration and Management. With reference to the competencies of university libraries personnel, it was found that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln library (2007) set the following 9 core competencies for the development of library personnel: 1) Accountability 2) Adaptability 3) Communication Skills 4) Customer/Quality Focus 5) Inclusiveness 6) Occupational Knowledge/Technology Orientation 7) Team Focus 8) Leadership 9) Problem Solving/Decision Making. McNeil, & Giesecke (2001) conducted a study and showed 12 competencies of information professionals in university libraries: 1) Analytical Skills/Problem solving/Decision Making 2) Communication Skills 3) Creativity/Innovation 4) Expertise and Technical Knowledge 5) Flexibility/Adaptability 6) Interpersonal/Group Skills 7) Leadership 8) Organization Understanding and Global Thinking 9) Ownership/Accountability/Dependability 10) Planning and Organization Skills 11) Resource Management 12) Service Attitude/User Satisfaction.

Abels et al. (2003) proposed 2 groups of core competencies of information professionals. Group 1 refers to the Professional Competencies comprising 4 items: (1) Managing Information Organizations, (2) Managing Information Resources, (3) Managing Information Services and (4) Applying Information Tools and Technologies. Group 2 involves Personal Competencies which are the attitudes, skills, and values of information professionals to work towards the goal, seek challenges and new opportunities, holistic viewing, efficient communication, clear presentation of viewpoints, negotiation, persuasive ability, confidence, cooperative network building, team working, awareness of risk factors, planning, prioritizing, creative thinking, awareness of professional values, flexibility, positive thinking, happiness towards one's own success and others'.

In Thailand, the professional association has not stipulated clear core competencies for information professionals. The competencies are only the results of library research and development work. Chat-uthai (2008), for example, studied the needs for competency development of a university's staff members' competencies and found 5 core competencies, namely, good services, morality, achievement determination, accumulation of professional expertise, and unity of efforts. The same author also found 6 competencies of library services, namely, emphasis on quality, information management, information seeking, accuracy of work, professional ethics, and understanding of others. Naresuan University Library (2009) laid 8 core competencies for all staff members: attention towards the outcomes, awareness of clients and competitiveness, emphasis on quality, research, creative development, continual learning and improvement, network and alliance building, conscience and ties with the organization, and awareness of good governance. There are also 5 competencies of supporting staff: service mind, cooperation and organizational responsibilities, understanding of systems and work procedures, team working, and facilitating services.

This research study on the development of Core Competencies for Information Professionals of Thai Academic Libraries in the Next Decade (A.D. 2010-2019) is a future study based on knowledge and experiences of experts in the profession of library and information science and administrators of Thai university libraries. The study was conducted on future responsibilities, compilation of competencies studied by previous researchers, and compilation of information from important people who had access to operational officers (Spencer, & Spencer, 1993). The research conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on core competencies of the information professionals of Thai university libraries in the next decade and the development of the core competencies had the following procedures:

The sample is comprised of three groups of experts related to the information profession, namely, 1) 8 lecturers in library and information sciences, 2) 8 officers in university libraries, and 3) 5 academic officers related to the information profession. The research tools included the questionnaires for three implementation rounds. 1) The open-ended and close-ended questionnaire for experts to freely show their opinions in core competencies of the information professionals in the next decade. The content obtained was analyzed. The questionnaires for the second and third implementation were the 5-scale rating questions. The data was analyzed using median, mode, and inter-quartile range.

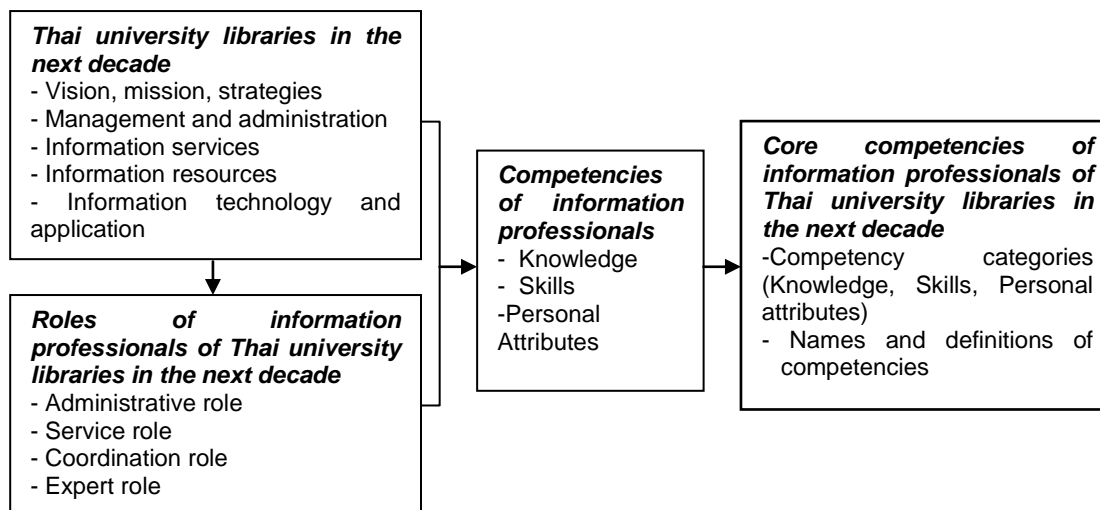


Figure 1: The Research Conceptual Framework

RESULTS

The findings reveal that information professionals in university libraries in the next decade have to change and adjust themselves to the changing roles that arrive with library changes. They have to take responsibilities in management, which involves policy setting, knowledge management, provision of in-depth and specific consultation. The roles will also extend to teaching and training on information, coordination and facilitating users of libraries so that they can have access to information, expertise in information technology and research, marketing knowledge in terms of analysis of users' requirements. The role adjustment will have impact on the competencies of library and information professionals who work in academic libraries. The knowledge, skills and personal attributes that should be possessed by information professionals can be concluded as follows:

Definitions of terms

Information Professionals of Academic Libraries refer to those who hold at least a bachelor's degree in library and information sciences, information sciences, information studies, information management, or other relevant areas with different names. These professionals work in information management of academic libraries. Their line of work includes information acquisition and development, information organization, information storage and retrieval, and information services and dissemination according to the academic library's objectives and according to the needs of users of academic libraries.

Core competencies refers to the characteristics of information professionals that reflect their knowledge, skills, and personal attributes they appropriately and successfully use in the operation of information profession according to academic library's goals.

Knowledge is the knowledge and understanding of information professionals that is derived from their own accumulated experiences or from self-learning and development. It consists of information, knowledge, experiences related to the work in academic libraries.

Skills refer to the ability of the information professionals derived from practices to the level of expertise in the work related to the operation of academic libraries.

Personal attributes refers to thoughts, feelings, opinions, attitudes, motivation, and personal needs of the information professionals that are related to the work in academic libraries.

Core competencies of the information professionals of Thai university libraries in the next decade

The results of the study indicate that the core competencies of the information professionals consist of 8 knowledge competencies, 11 skill competencies, and 7 personal attributes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Core Competencies of the Information Professionals of Thai University Libraries in the Next Decade

| Core competencies of the information professionals of Thai university libraries in the next decade | | |
|---|---|---|
| Knowledge: K | Skills: S | Personal Attributes: A |
| K1 – Foundation of professional knowledge K2 – Information resources K3 – Information and knowledge management K4 – Information technology K5 – Library and information services K6 – Organizational management K7 – Research and user studies K8 – Continuing education and lifelong learning | S1 – Customer service skill S2 – Information resources management skill S3 – Information technology skill S4 – Marketing skill S5 – Knowledge management skill S6 – Language and communication skill S7 – Team working skill S8 – Analytical, problem solving, and decision-making skill S9 – Planning and management skill S10 – Teaching and training skill S11 – Conceptual thinking skill | A1 – Leadership A2 – Service attitude A3 – Morals and professional ethics A4 – Achievement motivation A5 – Accountability A6 – Self-management A7 – Adjustability |

Competencies and their definitions

This article will present only the names and definitions of the core competencies of the information professionals as follows:

The eight knowledge competencies are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Names and Definitions of Knowledge Competencies

| Name Of Competencies | Definitions |
|---|--|
| Foundations of the Information Profession | Knowledge and understanding of library and information sciences, foundation theories of the profession, codes of conduct/professional values, role of information professionals, and patent laws and intellectual properties related to library and information |
| Information Resources | Knowledge and understanding of information resources, types and sources of information resources, information resources management which consists of provision and development, storage and retrieval, services and dissemination, storing of innovative information resources, selection of the appropriate approach for each type of information resources and for users who have different purposes |
| Information and Knowledge Management | Knowledge and understanding of principles and information management theories, knowledge management, information systems |

| Name Of Competencies | Definitions |
|--|---|
| | and knowledge management systems, factors and impact of information management and knowledge on libraries and the library and information science professionals |
| Information Technology | Knowledge and understanding of information technology and its overall impact on the profession, society, and the country; information technology for information resources management; management of other work related to operations and library information resources services; information technology for administration of libraries and information organizations; information technology innovations that are rapidly developed; and integration of information technology in libraries for appropriate changes |
| Library and Information Services | Knowledge and understanding of service principles, theories, and techniques; proactive services and roles of libraries in providing services to users; efficient library and information services; selection of appropriate services for users needs; application of theories or innovations in services for best achievements; and evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of services in order to improve services |
| Organization Management | Knowledge and understanding of new management principles and theories appropriate for libraries, strategic management, management of organization resources including human resources development, budget management, building management, office management, organizational quality management, organizational assurance and evaluation, building of cooperation among libraries, networking, and participation of stakeholders |
| Research and User Studies | Knowledge and understanding of research principles and theories, appropriate application of research methods in the profession of libraries and library and information sciences, user studies, analysis of information use behaviors and users information requirements, research for analysis and evaluation of different operations of libraries for quality improvement of libraries, dissemination and creation of research work for publications and exchange of research results |
| Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning | Knowledge and understanding of the necessity of continual profession development of implementers in libraries and information operations, learning theories, teaching approaches, evaluation, application of instructional knowledge in libraries and information operations, and the arrangement of teaching activities appropriate to different groups of users with different backgrounds |

The eleven skills competencies are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Names and Definitions of Skill Competencies

| Name Of Competencies | Definitions |
|--|--|
| Customer Service Skills | Ability to apply information service knowledge in order to foster quality service, as required by users |
| Information Resource Management Skills | Ability to manage information resources including processes and methods in provision, selection, analyses, categorization of information resources, referencing, indexing, and abstract writing accurately and appropriately |
| Information Technological Skills | Ability to efficiently apply information technology in operation and provision of services to users |
| Marketing Skills | Ability to analyze information use behaviors of users, categorize user groups in order to provide appropriate services, analyze appropriateness of resources for users, build satisfaction among users, carry out public relation and marketing research |
| Language and Communication Skills | Ability to communicate and exchange information, and correctly perceive and understand users, by using communication techniques appropriate for each individuals, ability to negotiate, be a good listener, and use language correctly |
| Teamwork Skills | Ability to work with others by building reliability and encouraging unity and good relationships, making the team determined to achieve goals by encouraging freedom of thinking, accepting individual |

| | |
|--|--|
| | differences, exchanging knowledge, sharing responsibilities and jobs |
| Analytical Skills, Problem Solving and Decision Making | Ability to accurately identify sub-issues and causes of problems, solve problems appropriately, and apply problem-solving tools efficiently |
| Management and Planning Skills | Ability to appropriately plan and manage with existing resources |
| Teaching and Training Skills | Ability to understand expectations of learners, answer questions related to taught topics, select techniques and teaching and training approaches accurately and suitable to individuals |
| Conceptual Thinking Skills | Ability to think positively, creatively, differently, non-conformingly, systematically; perceive things holistically and distinguish details |
| Knowledge Management Skills | Ability to build, exchange, store, disseminate, and gain access to knowledge sources in order to carry out work appropriately |

The seven competencies in personal attributes are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Names and Definitions of Competencies in Personal Attributes

| Name Of Competencies | Definitions |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Leadership | Be a leader, give advice, dare to think and make decision, set directions and goals for the team accurately and appropriately, have astuteness and wit to tackle problems, be thoughtful, reliable, persuasive such that others will willingly follow ones lead, be a good model in terms of responsibility |
| Service Attitude | Have strong intentions and the willingness to provide services, enhance and maintain relationships with users, accent services that efficiently respond to the needs of users |
| Morals and Professional Ethics | Exhibit virtue and correctness in the course of operation, both to oneself and to others for the growth of the organization, carry out duties according to the professional codes of ethics |
| Achievement Motivation | Have motivation that will drive one to attain success as intended |
| Accountability | Ability to efficiently carry out work that can be accounted for |
| Self-Management | Ability to manage oneself in behaviors and emotion, and to manage time appropriately |
| Adaptability | Ability to adapt oneself to meet with the changing situations and accept new challenges |

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of research on the development of core competencies for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade reflect the necessity to develop Thai information professionals in knowledge, skills, and several aspects of personal attributes even though some competencies have not changed. In terms of knowledge, one cannot deny that professionals of all periods need basic knowledge in library and information sciences, especially the knowledge related to information management and services. This also includes the technology used in information management and is in accordance with what many researchers have concluded. Nevertheless, an interesting point has been noted, i.e., future academic libraries must accent their role as an information resource that enhances competitiveness as stated in universities' strategic plans. Future information professionals need to possess knowledge in administering a modern organization and ready to adjust to the rapid changes. They must acquire an important part in knowledge management in order to respond to decision making and the establishing of universities' visions and policies. These correspond to the work of Ajiferuke (2003), who found that necessary core competencies of librarians and information officers include ability to analyze business procedures, to understand knowledge on business procedures, ability in the use of information technology, ability in administering changes, ability in managing projects, and ability in managing information and documents. Nevertheless, under the conditions in which knowledge management is receiving its popularity in all types of organizations, the roles of information professionals in knowledge management are very few. Utilization of knowledge and skills of experts in this field is also little (Abell, & Oxbrow, 2001). In Thailand nowadays, it can be said that information professionals still take few roles in organizational knowledge management.

Only few university libraries play their parts in the management of documents and archives, and in the management of the university's intellectual properties (Tuamsuk, 2009).

Libraries' paradigm shift emphasizing the importance of users has led to the changes of professional concept to one that responds to the needs of users and to truly appropriate services. From the study, experts see that future information professionals must possess marketing skills, especially those related to users' behaviors. Marketing concept accents the building of relationship with clients or library users, attempts to develop service qualities to meet clients' needs, and regular and continuous building of satisfaction, impression, and confidence in library services. ALA's President Task Force (2008) and Ashcroft (2004), in setting core competencies, also emphasized marketing and user study. In addition, it was found that besides being service providers, information professionals need to be knowledgeable and skillful researchers who can carry out research for efficiently developing their operation. They should also be capable as research assistants in order to support specific research, particularly in research-based universities where acceptable and competitive quality research is emphasized. Libraries are thus significant in terms of a university's research development. Many academic libraries of the world research universities have set the Research Support Services. The research work of New Jersey Library Association (2006) also mentions the roles of information professionals. In Thailand at present, libraries do not pay attention to this trait, while university administrators have high and greater expectation for libraries to support research work.

With reference to personal attributes, the study findings indicate that information professionals who have service mind are required. They should also be willing and have great intention to provide service that meets the needs of users and build satisfaction among users. These qualities cannot be absent since libraries will only survive with service qualities. Therefore, the competency in terms of service mind is included in nearly all standards or professional scope for information professionals that have been developed from research studies both in the country and abroad. It has also been found that ethics and morality in the profession are to be included. It should be noted that library and information operations are principally related to intellectual properties. It was interesting to find that experts see the importance of future competency in administration and leadership in modern organizations. This attribute can be said to be the weakness of librarians and information officers in general. Thus, there are 3 new attributes that need to be developed: 1) Leadership capacity – ability to give advice, dare to think and make decision, set directions and goals, have astuteness and wit to tackle problems; 2) Achievement Motivation - have motivation that will drive one to attain success as intended; and 3) Adaptability - ability to adapt oneself to meet with the changing situations and accept new challenges. These qualities rarely are mentioned in the research work of Chat-uthai (2008) and Naresuan University Library (2009) where the importance was placed on morality, professional ethics, understanding of others, service mind, cooperation and organizational responsibilities, and continuous learning and improvement.

The next decade core competencies of information professionals in academic libraries developed from this research will be useful for Thai Library Association or the Association of Thai Academic Librarians, the two organizations that hold responsibilities and roles in establishing the professional framework for the accreditation of those in the profession. The core competencies will be the criteria for the accreditation of the information professional programs of study in Thailand. Academic libraries can also apply them in setting personal attributes when recruitment is required. In terms of evaluation, the competencies can be used as the criteria as well as for the development of potentiality of information professionals. For universities that offer programs in information profession, the core competencies can be based on in their revision of curricula and teaching and learning so as to prepare quality graduates who are knowledgeable, skillful, and possess the attributes that contribute to the success of their future organizations or employers.

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