DETERMINING WHO IS A LIBRARIAN: SKILLS COMPETENCIES FOR THE 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN

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Abstract

The Study Focused On Determining who is a librarian: skills, competencies for the 21st century librarian, The objective was to explore how professional Librarians assess their information literacy (IL) and which knowledge, skill and attitude they consider important in facilitating the developing of IL of library users.

Librarians need knowledge and skills in pedagogy and andragogy, instructional design, information technology, foreign languages, marketing, information sources and databases as well as on learning domain. The Paper also highlighted the increasing role of technology in libraries has a significant impact on the changing roles of librarians. How the 21st century librarian is required to be very much updated of technological changes, Social skills, personal characteristic and attitude of librarians are very important in facilitating IL. Additionally, some of these skills may not be as important as others. The place of employment will have a large impact on exactly what is needed to thrive in a particular position in a particular job and the specific competencies most important in that occupation. The study expressed the view that all librarians and information professionals must be able to advice users individually to facilitate their information literacy IL, but not all should be required to deliver courses and lectures for a group of students or library users. Way forward, librarians should always leverage on the available opportunities in information technology IT, so as to keep them abreast of the latest innovation in Librarianship.

Keywords: Information Literacy, information, competency, competency profile, standard, Librarian, 21st century.

Introduction

Competency profile has been used within many professional groups to help chart professional progress and define goals and objectives. National level statements and standards across multiple institutions.

Competencies for a profession generally list or group a series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behavior that define and contribute to performance.

Competencies can be used to design and develop job postings, positions, descriptions, training and education programs and performance evaluation programs (Federal Librarians competencies, 2008). This competencies profile commissioned by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries CARL Building capacity subcommittee (formally

the Library Education Working Group, 2006-2009), is intended as a guide to help librarians working in libraries, information centers manage their careers, set meaningful professional development goals and align those goals with the missions of their respective parent organization.

The ability of an individual to apply a specific set of knowledge, skills, and abilities in a defined work environment is known as competency. According to CARL (2010), competencies form the foundation for skill standards, encompassing the knowledge, behaviors, skills, and abilities that organizations expect their staff to demonstrate for workplace success.

Competency represents the practical application of skills and knowledge that enables individuals to effectively carry out their work responsibilities. As stated by Uzohue and Yaya (2016), both personal and core competencies are necessary for librarians and other information professionals to successfully deliver high-quality, filtered, and actionable information.

While personal competencies require the ability to effectively communicate by presenting ideas clearly and negotiate with confidence and persuasiveness, professional competencies relate to information professionals' knowledge of information resources, access, technology, and management and the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information service.

Information professionals of the 21st century must be multi-skilled and prepared to work in a virtual environment with information technology tools and technologies. Hill (1996) confirmed that it will become clear that information professionals should possess online skills, quick reference skills, communication skills, etc. Knowledge management is a multi-dimensional discipline and requires a demanding mix of skills and competencies. In light of this, information professionals today must work harder to make themselves proactive and do their best to competencies for the job at hand.

A plethora of literature exists regarding the competencies and skills required of a 21st-century library professional. Tennant (1999) lists several key personal attributes, including the ability to learn continuously and quickly, flexibility, innate skepticism, a willingness to take risks, an enduring public service perspective, strong interpersonal skills, the capacity to enable and foster change, and the desire and ability to work.

Omekwu (2003), mentions basic knowledge of computers and their capabilities; Competency with search engines; online facilities; e-mail; internet navigator tools, web browsers and web file formats; database software; internet creation and administration know-how. Krishnan (2011) lists critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, media literacy, ICT literacy, flexibility and adaptability, as well as communication and teamwork, as some of the other 21st century talents. We are acquainted with the aforementioned talents; the difficulty lies in utilizing them to provide efficient library services.

A key component of any organization is its human resource base, which determines much of its success or failure. In the 21st century, librarians must adapt to a changing environment as a result of information and communication technology (ICT). Moghaddam (2009) notes that specialized human resources, such as librarians,

are essential to success and dynamism. LaRue (2012) is adamant that a library's most valuable asset is its expert staff. Tanawade (2011) noted that it is time to publicize ourselves, our professionalism, and the skills we have to offer. Based on the aforementioned, the librarian of the 21st century is no longer one who sits behind the reference desk answering simple reference questions but rather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to his community at every opportunity. He packages current information sources and delivers on point.

According to him, librarians have the power to change lives and build community. But in order to do this, they have to leave their desks and buildings and demonstrate to the community what a powerful tool they are.

Librarians can also use this profile to identify strength and gaps in their personal competencies in order to find out their portfolios. Library Directors and human resource managers, moreover, can employ it as a compass or checklist of desirable competencies when hiring new librarians or when identifying training and development opportunities for existing librarians.

Libraries as a collective entity can use the competence profile to market the library profession and recruit new talent. This core competencies profile addresses the recruitment and restructuring issues inasmuch as it presents a set of key skills, attributes, and attitudes which are suggested as integral to building and maintaining a nimble staff which ably serves its community and continually adapts to a dynamic, constantly evolving research/information landscape.

To maintain the leading position that academic libraries hold in assisting teaching, learning, and research, librarians as the traditional guardians of information must be aware of these profound shifts and make use of their technological know-how and creative output. Therefore, in order to fulfill the evolving information demands of their clients, librarians in the 21st century will need to possess competent abilities that will improve their ability to provide successful library services.

So far, the standards in this profile may apply to particular institutional setting, individual libraries may place greater or lesser emphasis on specific portions of competencies that follow. The profile attempts to reflect the unique compositions of competencies required by academic librarians working in intense 21st century academic research environment. The profile was design specifically for use in Canada but the authors summarize that the basic concepts may also be appropriate in other technologically advanced countries.

Librarians are increasingly called upon, not just to support the research of others on campus but to be researchers in their own right. More and more academic librarians produce research and scholarly work on their own to help them gain better knowledge of the profession and to contribute back their own knowledge, skills and experience. Librarians will increasingly be required to conduct research in order to meet condition of employment (i.e. to meet criteria for promotion and tenure of equivalent).

Problem Statement

Information workers need to possess a variety of skills due to the demanding information and research environment in the educational Sector. Researchers, instructors, and training programs in academia have high standards for librarians and expect them to provide proactive services. Librarians must develop their competences in order to meet these demands.

According to professional skills, a librarian should be proficient in creating bibliographic tools, searching literature, and offering reference services. Along with these other skills, he or she should have similar proficiency in networking, communication, and negotiation (personal competencies). To prepare librarians for the difficulties of an unpredictable and changing world, the twenty-first century demands new knowledge, competences, and learning approaches. To train librarians for life outside the library, a new set of skills is required.

Literature Review

The field of library and information science (LIS) has produced a wealth of international literature that focuses on the variety of skills that librarians, particularly those working in academic libraries, need to possess.

Gulati and Raina (2000), for example, approached the perspective of knowledge management to present the professional competencies required of library and information professionals, mentioning skills like collection development, collection processing, collection service, and user education as professional competencies in the knowledge age.

Given the evolving nature of university virtual learning environments, IT skills, particularly those related to the internet, are crucial for information professionals, but they also need to maintain traditional skills (Biddiscombe, 2001).

According to Heinrichs and Lim (2009), future librarians will be expected to have training in web design, database development, and multimedia skills. Since librarianship now has to deal with the provision of information in this digital era, the methods used to share knowledge and information have also changed with the introduction of wikis, web portals, blogs, and instant messaging capabilities.

These new tools require expertise in developing multimedia, such as text, audio, and video for the web environment, conducting research using Google and Wikipedia, and providing a platform for knowledge sharing through wikis, blogs, and other tools.

Cardwell (2009) compared the present level of skills with the required standards of competencies among the librarians of the Deakin University Library. This study helped to connect the current review process of the librarians with the future staff development program. Hernández (2010) pointed out a unique competency for university librarians.

It is about the role of librarians in the development of information competencies in teachers, researchers and students of the universities. The author mentioned this role of university librarians as “high-value competency” for their academic community.

Machala and Horvat (2010) emphasized on lifelong learning for librarians to acquire, sustain and enhance their general and core competencies. They concluded that core skills for librarians are customer oriented and technology driven in bibliographical outlook.

In order to narrow down a skill set for library directors and aspiring managers, Jordan (2011) carried out an intriguing study. In the first round of the survey, he began with 34 competences. In the second phase, the list of skills was reduced to 18.

In the end, it was narrowed down to eight essential and valuable competencies for the library managers in the third cycle. Among the final list of essential skills were honesty, customer service, and Priority order for responsibility, trustworthiness, zeal, taking risks, resource management, and inventiveness.

The variety, relevance, and usability of information and communication in university libraries can be increased by librarians with the use of ICT skills, as stated by Bamigboye et al. (2013). For the University of South Florida librarians, Smith et al. (2013) created a customized list of ten essential competencies.

They determined that the following factors determined an academic librarian's performance: teamwork, initiative, problem solving, adaptability, productivity, quality of work, communication, standards of service, and people management. Sa'ari et al. (2013) noted that university librarians' inventive performance in the context of Malaysian academic libraries was characterized by his entrepreneurial competencies.

Finding possibilities, igniting creativity, and tactical thinking are all parts of the entrepreneurial skill set. Lefevre and Terence (2013), state that academic librarians need to be proficient in digital publication.

An Environment Scan: Challenging Traditional Roles

The essential role of the librarian has not changed regardless of his or her specific position; the librarians' central mandate continues to be bringing information seekers and information sources together.

This objective remain the same, whether the individual is creating metadata, answering a question at a reference desk, teaching a course or constructing a new electronic service.

The environment within which librarians execute their core mission, however, has changed drastically. Researchers are turning away from traditional publishing venues in favor of emerging-vetted forums to disseminate data and research findings.

Students arrive on campus with their information seeking habits and strategies already formed, and with experience in a host of new sources and new technologies. Transformative technologies and the behaviors they engender have radically changed the creation and distribution of scholarly journals, data and other research outputs (Ross and Sennyey, pp.145-146). Scholars are adapting the ways they teach and the ways they conduct research to a new and ever changing digital information environment (ibid).

The academic library is constantly challenged to remain a vital part of this changing

environment. A key part, perhaps the key part, in meeting that challenge is to ensure that librarians' roles transition to meet evolving needs.

New areas of expertise are developing as are new opportunities to provide innovative, value-added services for the students and researchers in the academic community. Across the country, librarians and academic librarians are reassessing the role of the librarian within the academy and this CARL competency profile provides a national frame work to help in that reassessment.

Core competencies for 21st century CARL Librarians draws from other existing librarian competency statements and from competency research in general (Rocchi, 2008); ARL, 2001; SLA, 2001; Federal Library's information centre, 2008; ALA, 2008). This document also fulfills a recommendation of the CARL Library Education Working Group's final report in May, 2008.

University librarians in Nigeria are proficient in word processing and email usage, but Ayoku and Okafor (2015) discovered that their understanding of search engines and directories beyond Google and Yahoo is limited.

They lack familiarity with subject gateways, specialized databases, and certain open-access library databases; they are ignorant of database management; they are not proficient in web design; and they are not conversant with web design software. They also lack comprehension of the process of evaluating and cataloging electronic resources.

Key Components of the New Model

The work of the 21st century CARL Librarians continues to be grounded on a solid foundation of professional practice. The successful practitioner develops expertise in specific areas, build and maintains a strong well rounded understanding of the library, the campus, and the larger scholarly communication environment.

Interpersonal skills remain as key components of the CARL librarian's arsenal. Traditional skills, like written and verbal communication, are still important but increasing emphasis is being placed on the capacity to create and nurture partnership, develop innovative new programs and to market the library to the campus community.

The new academic library practitioner is expected to be a strong advocate for the library and its central place in the School's teaching, learning and research mission. The connect with administrators and leaders, are often front-and-centered with faculty, students and are also increasing at the table when campus wide IT decisions are made.

Librarians advocate for the library's central place in campus life by taking their story to the entire University (School) community and beyond when and where appropriate (Dupuis, P.13). The expectation of strong interpersonal skills is standard practice for academic librarianship, and it will continue to grow in importance.

Expectations for competence in management and leadership have increased dramatically. As leaders, academic librarians are expected to influence, motivate and challenge

their colleagues and their community to advance library and institutional goals and objectives.

Management skills are no longer expected only of those librarians in administrative positions. Rather, all librarians should understand the principles of budget planning, and facilities, staff and project management.

Librarians holding management positions would be expected to develop their knowledge and skills in these areas to a higher level, to enable them to effectively manage the library and its resources. Librarians are also taking on new teaching roles within the academy.

They are partnering with faculty to teach information literacy (IL) to their students. They are working with their instructional technology/teaching support centres to enhance the resources available to instructors. They are seeking out, and often earning seats at the table when key decisions are being made concerning support software and systems.

They share with faculty the interest in helping students/staff use information efficiently and ethically in a "copy and paste world" (Wilson and Linke, 2009).

Competencies for Librarians in the 21st century

With differences in emphasis depending on the nature of individual academic/research librarian position, the following is presented as a holistic compendium of core competencies for librarians working in an intense research environment.

1. **Fundamental knowledge**

All librarians should have a strong foundational knowledge of:

(a) The social, cultural, economic, political, and information environment within which they work.

(b) Librarianship and professional practice

i. The ethics, values and foundational principles of the library and information profession.

ii. The role of the library in the promotion of intellectual freedom through the development and preservation of the scholarly research record.

(c) The library or library system within which they work

i. Structure (the divisions, department, Unit).

ii. Decision making bodies and procedures

iii. Budget process

iv. Key policies and procedures

v. Key collection strengths (subject areas, format, etc.)

vi. Advisory committees (do they exist? Mandate?)

(d) The larger institutional organization

i. The campus environment

ii. Organizational structure (where does the library fit in)

iii. Institutional decision making bodies and processes

iv. Institutional budget process (how is funding allocated, within the University/School?)

v. Institutional mission, goals and objectives

(e) Scholarly communication models and practices (including institutional repositories, open access journals data management).

2. Interpersonal Skills

All librarians should have the following skills:

i. Adaptability, flexibility and eagerness for new experiences and knowledge
ii. Communication and advocacy-effectively conveying the importance of libraries to their parent institutions, to their target audiences/constituencies, and advancing of the values of the library profession (e.g. empowering users to be self-sufficient, freedom of expression, upholding to the right to access information and knowledge for future generations, etc)
i. Negotiation- working with others to arrive at mutually acceptable/beneficial solutions.
ii. Change management – being able to work effectively in the face of ambiguity; open mindedness to change and adaptation of work habits/behavior to different conditions.
iii. Making decision- making well informed decisions in a manner that is perceptive of the implications; committing to actions even when faced with uncertainty in order to fulfill organizational goals.
iv. Problem Solving- Identifying problems, determining relevance and accuracy of related information, and using good judgment to come up with solutions; possessing the ability to manage and resolve conflicts/disagreements in constructive manner.
v. Initiative- the capacity to identify issues and to develop and implement solutions to address those issues
vi. Collaboration- working with diverse groups, in and out of the library, in pursuit of shared goals and with an appreciation of diverse perspectives; taking library's story into the community
vii. Marketing- promoting the expertise, services, collections, and facilities to the library to a varied clientele (e.g. undergraduate students, graduates, and faculty in all discipline and making the case to administrations for the library as a vital institution in the research enterprise and for teaching and learning.
viii. Mentoring- providing useful advice and feedback to new members of the profession to help them attain success in the field and in their new positions
ix. Writing Skill- preparing persuasive grant proposal or reports
x. Presentation Skills- ability to speak in front of audience with or without technology.

3. Leadership and Management

All librarians should commit and develop the following:

i. Leadership- influencing and motivating others to strive for excellence; able to adapt to a variety of working/learning styles, scenarios and organizational cultures and to lead change within the organization.
ii. Financial Management- understanding the principles of planning and budgeting in academic libraries
iii. Human resources Management- understanding the principles of effective personnel practices and human resource development.
iv. Risk Management- understanding the advantages and disadvantages of any action or decision and being able to effectively evaluate both to support any decision made

v. Project Management- planning, organizing and managing resources to successfully complete specific project objectives within a stipulated duration of time
vi. Assessment and Evaluation- understanding the concepts and methods for service, resource and project evaluation and outcomes assessment.
vii. Partnership and collaboration- understanding the reasons and strategies for developing collaborations and partnership with relevant stakeholders and communities.

4. Collections Development

All libraries should have a foundational knowledge of the following:

i. Scholarly publishing cycle- understanding the life cycle of scholarly publishing, from creation through various stages of use to disposition
ii. Collection development and management-understanding the concepts, issues and methods related to the acquisition, and disposition of resources , including knowing collection strengths and library and institutional goals and objectives for resources development
iii. Digital curation- understanding best practices for the selection, collection, presentation, description, organization, and archiving principles for digital documentation and research data in various formats.
iv. Digital Presentation- understanding of the principles, activities, policies, procedures, and services for persistent access.
v. Management and preservation of collections – basic understanding of the management and preservation methods for general collections and for rare books and archives.
vi. Records Management- understanding how information is organized for easy identification and retrieval, including cataloguing and metadata standards for all formats.

5. Information Literacy

All librarians should have a strong understanding of and commitment to the following:

i. Information Literacy – principles of information literacy in the academic environment, including numerical and data literacy
ii. Learning and teaching – knowledge of learning models and strategies as well as relevant teaching pedagogy and models for the academic environment.
iii. Institutional teaching and learning – knowledge of institutional teaching and learning programmes and goals to effectively connect with stakeholders and integrate information literacy programs as appropriate.
iv. Critical thinking and lifelong learning – knowledge of concepts and principles of information literacy including the value of integrating critical thinking and lifelong learning into teaching and instruction methodologies.
v. Reference Services – knowledge of the principles and techniques of effective reference services that provides access to relevant and reliable information
vi. Patron Engagement – knowledge of the principles and techniques to effectively interact with users to determine

information need and when that need has been satisfied.

6. Research and Contribution to the profession

All librarians should be knowledgeable of, and commit to ongoing research and professional development through the following:

i. Research and Publication – Contributions through writing, editing, referencing or reviewing of books, articles or reports
ii. Conferences- Contribution through presentations to professional or scholarly association/meetings
iii. Formal study – taken to broaden subject or professional knowledge and may include study for advanced professional and/or related academic qualifications
iv. Teaching – teaching courses in areas of librarianship, archive or other academic disciplines
v. Conference Management- Planning, organizing or conducting professional programs, workshop, seminars or conferences
vi. Professional Associations- active participation in professional associations which may include holding executive office, serving on committees, etc
vii. Active/engagement in community initiatives – especially those associated with their areas of professional or subject expertise
viii. Stay informed – ability to stay abreast of research in a specific area to support a research agenda or to support other work as a librarian within the library
ix. Research models/profiles – knowledge of the fundamentals of qualitative and quantitative research methods including the research process (e.g. question formulation, peer review, etc.)
x. Grant writing – knowledge and pursuit of avenues available for grants to facilitative research work
xi. Information Technology Skills: All librarians should have strong knowledge and capability in the following:
xii. Integrated Library Systems (ILS) – knowledge of basic structure, content and use of an integrated library system
xiii. Emerging web technology – knowledge of major trends in web development including online social networking tools (as of 2010, would include twitter, face book, Myspace, etc.)
xiv. Electronic resources management – knowledge of how digital resources are acquired, managed and accessed
xv. Web Page Development – understanding of principles of web page design and maintenance
xvi. Institutional repositories – understanding the basic structure, content and use of compact institutional repositories
xvii. Learning Management System (LMS/CMS) – Knowledge of the structure and the use of campus LMS/CMS
xviii. Data base management – understanding how data bases are designed and structured for convenient data and/or information retrieval.

Conclusion

The vocation of librarians is evolving due to the ever-changing nature of information and user needs, which presents new challenges and opportunities. Since the quality of the library staff determines the services provided by the library,

librarians must reshape themselves in order to meet the information needs of its Patrons.

The current level of personal and professional competencies differs significantly from the required level, and this difference must be eliminated in order to minimize the disparity.

Librarianship revolves around passion, innovation/creativity, competencies, perseverance, self-reliance and self-motivation. Library activity creates new opportunities.

Information and communication technology (ICT) revolutionized the contemporary society. Finally, Library and information professional become relevant when they key into the dynamics of change to improve their overall skills and knowledge through acquisition of various forms of social, cultural, interpersonal, and ICT competencies and develop mindset to exploit various opportunities in the profession and achieve self-actualization.

Recommendations

i. Library professionals need training to gain competence to make up for the gaps in their knowledge due to the shift from traditional positions like book custodian to newly developing roles like information manager and, more recently, knowledge manager (Khan et al., 2015). In order to teach academic librarians to assist scholarly communication initiatives, there is an urgent need to establish a connection between their internal knowledge and specific events. These events will also improve the librarians' proficiency in managing these kinds of activities (Rodriguez, 2015).

ii. Librarians should acquire specific skills in ICT in order to exploit the market opportunities in the profession so that other professional from computer science, engineering do not step into their core areas of specialization which is information management.

iii. Librarians should develop culture and mindset. Librarianship is all about innovation, creativity, competency, and lot more. LIS professionals should have the mindset to embark on trying to create new things

iv. In order to help professional in the field, chart professional progress and define goals and objectives, professionals should attend workshops and seminars on knowledge and skills acquisition and business acumen required to engage in any library venture.

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