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## PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE

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### Abstract:

*Development of new technologies in the field of library and information science especially in academic libraries has resulted in the need for library staff to be flexible in adopting new skills and levels of awareness. In addition to core technology skills, importance is to be given to other skills in communication, management, etc. This paper attempts to describe in brief the competencies and skills required for an academic library professional in the digital era.*

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**Keywords:** Librarian, Professional Skills, Professional Competencies, ICT skills.

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### Introduction:

The vast increasing rates as well as maximum need for the speedy access of latest information in the present day-to-day context, the libraries are now becoming an inseparable and integral part of an information-based society. Because of the increasing awareness among the users, availability of new resources and advanced application of information communication technology, the library is changing its traditional concept rapidly. Library and information centres are now becoming a global information hub, available and accessible to the users, where the users have the most opportunity to retrieve and access their required information covering all disciplines all over the world with a single mouse click on the computer monitor. The users can enter in and can access this type of library 24 hours round the year sitting at the most remote places too.

### Purpose:

The librarianship profession has gone through many changes over time, more so with the emergence of digital technologies. To thrive in the library and information science (LIS) profession, professionals must have knowledge, skills, competencies and abilities to perform their job duties. The purpose of this paper was to identify essential knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) for the LIS professionals.

### Definitions:

#### 1. Professional Skills:

Professional skills are competencies and learned behaviours that help you perform your job to the best ability. Professionalism may refer to how you conduct yourself in the workplace, your communication style, your integrity, your work ethic or how you handle conflict, but hard or technical skills could also contribute to your level of professionalism.

Thus, Professional skills are career competencies and abilities used in the workplace that are beneficial for nearly any job. Professional skills are a combination of both hard skills (job-specific duties that can be trained) and soft skills (transferable traits like work ethic, communication and leadership).

## 2. Professional Competence:

Is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served.

Competence builds on a foundation of basic clinical skills, scientific knowledge, and moral development.

### *It includes:*

A cognitive function - acquiring and using knowledge to solve real-life problems

An integrative function - using biomedical and psychosocial data in clinical reasoning

A relational function - communicating effectively with patients and colleagues

An affective/moral function - the willingness, patience, and emotional awareness to use these skills judiciously and humanely

Competence depends on habits of mind, including attentiveness, critical curiosity, self-awareness, and presence.

### **Objectives:**

1. To understand Professional skills of the LIS professionals.
2. To understand Professionals Competencies of LIS Professional.
3. To understand need of Professional skills and competencies under LIS professionals in an ICT age.

## **LIS is a Profession:**

A librarian conserves the cultural and intellectual heritage of mankind and acts as an agent of communication from information generation to the point of use. His services are indispensable in information transfer chain. This opinion was shared by many social and information scientists like Melvil Dewey, Butler, Greenwood, Schaffer et al and they tried to prove that librarianship is a profession as it has many attributes of a profession. Robert D Leigh wrote that librarians have accepted professional status as a goal on the following factors:

- 1) "They are identified with knowledge, which is prime service of occupational prestige in our society
- 2) They are service oriented rather than self-interested at least in certain senses.
- 3) Library and information professionals belong to professional association (state and national)
- 4) They are trained in professional schools, associated with universities.
- 5) They have code of ethics."

Thus, librarianship can be considered as a profession, as it possesses the following basic characteristics of a profession:

- a) A body of knowledge imparted in LIS schools;
- b) Intensive training and continued practice to gain mastery over the skills for knowledge organisation and retrieval;
- c) Oriented towards service to the society;
- d) Associations to bind the professionals;
- e) Standard terminology and practices; and
- f) Code of ethics.

Education for librarianship at middle and higher levels is imparted at post-graduate level for two years. Teaching different theoretical aspects and intensive training of skills support the view that it is a profession. S.R.Ranganathan contributed to the development of library profession in India by developing standard terminology, theoretical principles, LIS education – from certificate to research level, and introducing specialisation and standardised practices. Library profession in India owes a lot to his contributions. To quote Ranganathan “Librarianship is a noble profession. A librarian derives his joy by seeing the dawn of joy in the face of the readers who were helped in their search for the right information at the right time.”

#### **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 centres. 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 centres. 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 centres. 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 centres 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, Soft link 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) Cataloguing / 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 inorder 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.

A number of competency studies have been conducted in the field of library and information studies during the last few years in the wake of developments in information technology Most of these studies were generally concerned with the common competencies needed by LIS professionals. One of the major studies on competencies was undertaken by the Special Libraries Association (SLA) entitled Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century, revised edition, June 2003. The SLA identified two main types of competency. These are two core competencies very essential for every library or information professional.

Some important skills are necessary to the LIS professionals for manage library and provide good library services to the library users in an electronic age. These **Skills** are as follows.

1. **Advocacy/Politics:** Library directors want librarians who can demonstrate and explain the value of their library to their community, politicians, budget committee and donors among others. Information professionals should be comfortable and articulate when interacting with lots of kinds of people.
2. **Collaboration:** Many directors think this skill will grow ever more important on our interconnected (and sometimes virtual) world. Collaboration is critical between and among staff, stakeholders, patron, community groups and other libraries.
3. **Communication/people:** LIS professionals must be able to communicate to stakeholders the value their institution provides. They should be able to speak about all of their libraries services and program and how they directly benefit their communities.

Librarians must also deal professionally with library staff and patrons.

4. **Creativity/Innovation:** One director argues that a creativity is both super important and underdeveloped and that MLIS programs are not alone in failing to encourage this skills.
5. **Critical Thinking:** LJ points out that this is a skill all librarians should have, but that a lack of critical thinking skills is what is usually noticed.
6. **Data Analysis:** Information professionals should be able to determine what information they need, find and analyze data and then use their new found data insight to make decision. They should also be able to present all of this in a way that makes sense to others (we are back to communication again).
7. **Flexibility:** Given that change is constant in libraries, flexibility and adaptability are essential skills for any LIS professional.
8. **Leadership:** New and newish librarians must be able to step into the shoes of a generation of retiring managers, so leadership (and advocacy) skills are must.
9. **Marketing:** Although frequently overlooked and undervalued, marketing is actually really important to libraries and librarians also.
10. **Project Management:** This seems like a no-brainer, but a lot of what librarians do-from scheduling to budgeting to programming-are really projects they must manage.
11. **Specifically, web development, coding and technological literacy:** to best serve their communities, LIS professionals should know what is happening on the tech side of things and must be willing to learn about new developments.

### Professional Competencies:

**1. Professional Competencies:** related to the special librarians' knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing Library and information services. Professional competencies further include four major competencies, each supported with specific skills:

(a) Managing Information Organizations.

(b) Managing Information Resources.

(c) Managing Information Services.

(d) Applying Information Tools and Technologies.

**2. Personal competencies:** comprise a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently, e good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new field of work.

Successful running of an organization require certain leadership skills and careful management techniques. It is important that academic librarians acquire the skills that will enable them to operate effectively in large and increasingly competitive organizations.

### Important library management competencies are:

1. Effective financial management using sound business and financial judgement.
2. Use appropriate business and management approaches to communicate the library's value to university administrators.
3. Promote the library as a centre of lifelong learning for the community.

4. Maintain good public relations through communication and promotion of library's services and needs to all stakeholders.
5. Maintain a user friendly and safe physical environment to encourage library use by the academic community.
6. Maintain an awareness of current law and policy that may impact library services, administration and up-to-date policies/procedures for staff communication.
7. Understand the basic principles of marketing and how they apply to library services.
8. The librarian has to assist the professional and personal development of people working within the information organization by creating development plans for staff to gain necessary competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviour, attitudes).
9. Management of human resources effectively to increase productivity which is highly important to achieve the library's mission and goals.

### Conclusion:

Information and communication technology has become essential part of 21st century's libraries. ICT has made drastic change in the field of libraries, the libraries has transformed from traditional role to Digital libraries or Virtual libraries. The librarians must bring to this technological environment to make sense of a multiplicity of digital collections and e-resources. They must identify strategies to provide access to wide range of networks and information resources. For this purpose they need new skills and competencies to manage and create many information sources and services. The competencies and skills are required for survival and growth of professional in new technological era. So in the fast changing

environment, the library professional must possess multi-tasking abilities and competencies in their area of work

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