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**DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES IN LIBRARIANS**

**THROUGH SOFT SKILLS**

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**Abstract:**

The traditional role of librarian; collection, organization, and dissemination of resources has metamorphosed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century mainly due to availability of information in many forms and formats. This has posed huge challenges on library professionals. It requires a multi-talented and multi-fold personality who can handle and fulfill the growing needs of user community and at the same time enhance the reputation of the organization. This paper throws light on various kinds of soft skills a library professionals need to possess while dealing with the stake holders of the library. To achieve success and add value to the organization one must possess skills that propel the growth and development of the organization. Therefore, it is suggested that the library professionals must acquire and execute soft skills in order to better the outcome of the parent institution.

**Key words:** Higher Education, Soft Skills, Library

**Introduction:**

The mankind is ruling the planet earth only because of his skills that other living and non-living things hardly possess. This statement is self-explanatory how important the soft skills are to survive and grow. Things are getting tougher to achieve success in life because of increased competition among human beings. Soft skills are becoming hard skills in this flat world. Every sector is experiencing the same and education system with its multidisciplinary approach has added enormous pressure on its patrons. 'Today academic excellence is increased, but its salutary effect in human behavior is decreasing'.<sup>1</sup> The need of hour is to adopt the soft skills in such a manner to bring out the 'ART' there by becoming 'smart'. So what are these soft skills and which soft skills are essential for librarians to prepare themselves to be seated as the 'SMART' (with 'ART') service provider is the crux of this paper.

The work of librarians, archivists, record managers is changing at a fundamental level. Therefore developing employability skills has been given new emphasis in all professional trainings and LIS is not an exception.

**Set of Skills and Soft Skills**

This century has seen the change in every aspects of life. But the discovery of Charles Darwin, way back in 1859 published as 'Origin of Species' in which, his theory on 'Survival of Fittest' is explained as "The individuals that are best equipped to survive and reproduce perpetuate the highest frequency of genes to descendant populations. This is the principle known colloquially as "survival of the fittest," where fitness denotes an individual's overall **ability** to pass copies of his genes on to successive generations."<sup>2</sup> His theory has changed the whole worlds' perception about Behavioral Science. The word ability means skill.

His visions and thoughts hold true in this competitive world, where there is growing pressure and demand on everything is seen. Various skills are required to make ourselves employable, generate revenue, etc.

There are various types of skills that can be acquired. These skills are categorized under 'Sets' based on their nature. There are five types of 'Sets' of skills. They are:

- **Hard Skills:** certificates acquired through completing formal education e.g. Certificates
- **Technical Skills:** abilities essential to perform a particular job e.g. employability skills
- **Professional Skills:** expertise in professional knowledge e.g. teaching skills, corporate skills
- **Life Skills:** enriching the innermost qualities like peace of mind, concentration, positive energy levels etc. E.g. Yoga, Meditation, Mind Power
- **Soft Skills:** a sociological term for a person's "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence Quotient) which refers to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, ability with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark each of us in varying degrees.<sup>3</sup>

To differentiate clearly between - Hard skills, Soft skills and Life skills as; any type of job/work/profession/trade requires a set of tasks to be executed. These are hard skills or Core skills. So these skills are basics for success in professional life. Soft skills prepare us to be acceptable by others, so that one can attain materialistic and psychometric success in his/her career. And Life skills prepare us to attain psycho-somatic success (Inner Happiness) in life.<sup>4</sup>

All these three skills finally elevate and refine our personality to greater heights, if one knows how to balance all these skills. The ever changing life style, hybrid cultures,

emerging management styles, technological revolutions essentially require refined sets of skills consisting of Hard Skills(Professional Skills), Soft Skills and Life Skills.

### **Why and How of Soft Skills to become a Leader**

Soft skills along with hard skills are the need of the hour (i.e. conventional knowledge) to survive in this competitive world. Technology has had profound impact on skills that employers want from business graduates today.<sup>5</sup> Having the soft skills will be an added advantage as such skills will enrich the Career Vitae and thereby attract the prospective employers.

The personal skills as vital requirements for young adult librarian are : analytical, creative, flexible, reflective, detective-like, adaptable, responsive to needs, enthusiastic, self-motivated, interactive and engaging, tolerant, networking skills, practices self-evaluation, multidisciplinary reader, confident, accepting of individual differences and respectful of cultural diversity. The professional skills listed essential are; information literacy, communication, critical thinking, team work, ethics and social responsibility, maintain professional attitude with youth, problem solving, leadership, time management, self-learning and professional development, ability to advocate and promote service, maintain confidentiality, working knowledge of English, possess clear vision of integrating technology in to the library programs.<sup>6</sup>

The speed of business is changing faster than ever and our education and social systems are not keeping pace. "A focus on communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking is lacking in our current education system, but these are required skills for successful employment." McCarthy's note to educators: Teach these skills, model them, expect them! <sup>7</sup>This suggestion of McCarthy is worth considering. The recent development in this regard is University of Mumbai has shortlisted three agencies to focus on testing and training students on several parameters. The Indian Express News Paper of 28/11/2013

reads as – ‘With most recruits expecting students to have a certain set of skills, Mumbai University has assigned three external agencies the responsibility of grooming students for campus placements.’<sup>8</sup> The parameters such as – assessment of English, verbal, logical and numerical abilities, communication skills, grammar and vocabulary, etc. are listed for training and testing to enhance job-worthiness of the students. This step of University shows mere formal education is not sufficient; and soft skills remain the priorities while recruiting the staff.

Following are the apex ten soft skills which are essential at workplace to become a leader are;

- Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening
- Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful
- Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable
- Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what’s right
- Interpersonal Skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills
- Positive Attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident
- Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised
- Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense
- Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative
- Work Ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance<sup>9</sup>

In above listed soft skills, Communication is very important aspect. Today everybody is in communication. If you cannot communicate, you miss out on providing that content,

context, connection and community.<sup>10</sup> To understand communication as soft skill, it is important to know some traits of communication process, that are;

- Every communication has an objective
- Communication establishes an ongoing relationship between two parties – the sender and the receiver
- Every communication is made up of a series of communication cycle.

One of fundamental ethics of library science is communication i.e., Dissemination of information to the user needs many backstage preparations which starts with communication process and ends with communication process; may be using various media. The non-verbal (signals), listening, oral and written communication should be very clear to develop the interpersonal relationships inside and outside of the organization. Hence this communication process is very effective tool in establishing good library rapport with the users.

#### **List of Soft Skills necessary for Librarians.**

Leadership qualities require the soft skills as fundamentals. Following are some of the significant soft skills that are required to become a successful library professional and successful leader:

- i. **Listening skills:** The library professionals must have good listening skills as he/she has to interact with different types of users all the time. By carefully listening to users' he/she can identify the exact requirement and then provide the service accordingly.
- ii. **Communications skills:** Command on language especially English and also regional will improve the communication. A good communication skill also requires understanding people, self-confidence which enables to solve the problems with ease.

- iii. **Interpersonal skills:** Library professionals have to deal with all levels of people like Management, users, colleagues in library, vendors etc. To deal with each in rightful manner requires interpersonal skills. In bigger institutions, it is most important to build rapport with all departments, which helps in managing the library and providing better services to everyone.
- iv. **Writing skills:** The librarians are asked to help in writing research proposal/business proposal/project report, which requires good writing skills. Today there are many library professionals who are contributing to various publications, even in-house also or by sharing information and their experiences through library blogs and websites.
- v. **Project management skills:** In corporate libraries many times, library professionals are part of project teams and are assigned with specialized jobs such as knowledge management. This requires dedication, understanding of the project, time management for completion of work, teamwork and reporting the results etc.
- vi. **Presentation skills:** The presentation skills are required in report writing, library committee meetings and even in daily work which represents the overall library management. Now, during NAAC visit to colleges/universities the library report presentation is an important aspect and which is expected to be presented by the librarian. Presenting the papers in conferences is also expected by the librarians from UGC for their career advancement. So it is very much necessary to develop the presentation skills for all librarians.
- vii. **Public relations:** One needs to use Public Relations very effectively to attract users in libraries through various ways. It also helps to bond with users and vendors and gives ability to work with other professionals too. A pleasant smile with helpful nature is what a librarian should sport throughout his career.
- viii. **User service:** To satisfy the information needs of the users is the utmost priority for any library. The library professionals provide various services such as CAS,

SDI or other specialized services. The user service emphasizes the user satisfaction, which in turn guarantees that the satisfied user will always come back to the library.

- ix. **Leadership skills & Teamwork:** Library management especially in a bigger library set up is about team work/exercise. Hence, it is required to have leadership skills to manage and guide the team from time to time, as every subordinate is important for carrying out their work efficiently for smooth running of library system.
- x. **Negotiating skills:** These skills are required on such occasions specially handling bulk purchases, while subscribing online journals/databases through vendors/publishers, procuring foreign edition documents, dealing with contract agreement with suppliers/publishers, etc. Also some times in delicate situations like library committee meetings or avoiding undue requirements from arrogant users etc. The sound negotiation skills will always help in handling various tasks and situations in the library.
- xi. **Teaching skills:** Libraries spend huge amount to procure resources both print as well as electronic, therefore, it is essential to possess teaching skills, which helps to conduct the information literacy classes effectively and teach how to access the resources available within the library and outside the library. It also includes motivating reading habits in users.<sup>11</sup>
- xii. **Ability to see the bigger picture:** an understanding of the broad context of the organisation and the fit between KM and IM strategies/ projects, other critical success factors and academic research value.
- xiii. **Awareness of technology:** an understanding of the range of information and communication technologies available and realization of its role in information and knowledge management. This skill is most essential of all in this IT era.<sup>12</sup>



Library, the part and parcel of education system has also surfed along the tide of 'change'. The new block in this changing system is soft skills which are needed to suite this hybrid library system. The above listed skills are not the complete list; because the number of soft skills is innumerable.

### **Conclusion**

World is witnessing a rapid transition in this century due to the phenomenal technological developments and globalization. Demand for human resources that are possessing multilateral skill is growing. Therefore, possessing executable set of skills, merit based competency has become a baseline for man power recruitments, promotions and career growth. Hence, the soft skills should not be the icing on cake rather they should be the part of dough itself to produce effective professionalism in librarians.

Leadership qualities can be improved with the help of soft skills. Imbibing soft skills is the first step to reach the leadership. Librarianship needs both soft skills and leadership qualities. The hybrid situation of libraries, demanding users, new norms appearing every now and then by the Government, etc. need effective leadership. This is surely achievable by learning soft skills. Therefore, it is highly recommended not only to library professionals but to all, to possess soft skills in order to become successful and smart professionals. Therefore, it is highly recommended not only to library professionals but to all, to possess soft skills in order to become successful and smart professionals.

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