

SOFT SKILLS REQUIRED FOR LIS PROFESSIONAL: A STUDY

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Abstract

This paper discusses the professional skills and soft skills required by the library professionals to be effective in rendering service to the user's community. Further it deliberates, the competencies required by the professionals such as user's needs assessment, application of new technology and development of print and non-print collection. It also discusses the soft skills one should have to serve the users effectively such as communication skills, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, presentation skills etc.

Keywords:

Competencies, Communication skills, Leadership skills

Introduction

India has the second largest population in the world. It is having huge manpower resources which are educated and having a lot of skills. However, in comparison to the high level of education and skills, it is seen that there are still a lot of people who are not employed. Employment opportunities do not come only with hard skills education or experience. This is important but employers also look for something more than this which is the soft skills part of it. Hard skills and experience are not enough for achieving success and progression of career. Employers prefer to employ those persons who are resourceful, ethical and self-directed with good “soft skills” and this is applicable in all sectors and situations. Development of one's soft skills is equally important.

Due to constant change in Information and Communication Technology, the role of libraries and librarians has changed from storehouse of information and care taker to actual learning center and information manager. So, information can be processed and delivered in different ways to the users. Due to this change, library professionals also require some of the special skills and competencies apart from the basic skills and practices of librarianship.

Currently, the libraries are experiencing tremendous change, i.e. the electronic information has occupied huge place in the publishing industry. New type of information transfer channels have come in existence, such as e-books, blogs, information gateways etc.

According to Sarrafzadeh (2005), if LIS professionals remain reluctant to gain new skills, they will become irrelevant to their organization and will probably lose out in competition for employment to people of other fields like scientists, engineers and IT professionals. Thus, LIS professionals must encounter rapidly changing environments that require diverse skills, new thinking and broader perspectives. They must be prepared to develop innovative ideas for the capture, process and sharing of knowledge and demonstrate good management practices if they want to remain relevant in the emerging knowledge age (Smythe, 1999). Hence, the present day

library professionals apart from their educational based practices, required different types of soft skills and competency to provide right information to right user at right time.

This paper will elaborate the soft skills and competencies required for the library professional to increase visibility and effectiveness of the libraries in the 21st century.

Competencies and skills

Competencies are defined as the descriptions of skills; know-how, abilities and personal qualities acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts to smoothly and adaptively perform a particular role and carry out complex activities or job functions successfully (Todd and Southon, 2001).

Now-a-days, merely having professional degree in the library science field is not desirable for the employment. There is demand for librarians having multidimensional aptitude in the areas of technical work, administrative work and also in providing user oriented services along with soft skills. Like any other profession, the soft skills are required in day-to-day working for carrying out routine jobs more effectively.

Some of the soft skills and competencies which are required by the library professionals to fulfill the core objective of the library and information centers are as follows.

Understanding user need

The library professionals must be able to understand the information needs of the users and also need to know how to fulfill the needs. While planning the new service, one should be able to maintain the balance in serving the users community. As the needs of the users keep on changing, librarians must be able to cope up with the every situation.

Conversation of traditional services into web based

Due to advancement in communication technology, the new way of information transfer and communication has come up. Library professionals can provide traditional library services in effective way with the help of new technologies. They can design and develop web-based content for online use. They can build digital library, develop and manage in house database etc.

Building print and non- print collection

Earlier days, libraries were filled with only print material, but now-a-days due to advancement in technology, we have e-books, e-journals, etc. Hence librarians should be able to keep balance between print and non-print collection, so that users can be satisfied in efficient manner.

Self-evaluation of service

Library professionals must be able to evaluate and question himself about the services which are provided to the user's community. This self-evaluation technique will help to understand and find out loop holes in the services and also lead to modification of services which could be able to attract the user's community, in turn; it will help to achieve the maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Comparison of technologies

In this knowledge era, various technologies are available for information processing and retrieval which can be used to provide effective and timely service to user community. The library professionals must be able to compare the software and other technical equipment's and buy good one among the available in the market.

Attraction of users towards library

The library professional must be able to attract the users toward the library. The librarians must use different kinds of techniques to attract the users. Various activities can be organized in order to create awareness of library resources such as book exhibition, book review competition,

Newspaper Review, etc. This way, it will help in maximizing the usage of information resources and services of the library.

Ready to embrace change

Due to advancement in technology, libraries should use latest technology to serve the users effectively; Marmion also (1998) stated that one of the biggest technology challenges facing the library profession today is preparing employees to use technology effectively. Hence, the library professionals must be able to embrace change.

Learn and use of new technologies: Aschroft (2004) stated the need for the skills, roles and characteristics of the LIS professionals to change in order to cope with the change in technology. The library professionals must be able learn new technology, which would be very useful in effective rendering of the services.

Listening skills

As we all know, listening is the key to the effective communication. Without the ability to listen Effectively, messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Therefore, librarians must have good listening skills, this is very much required while providing services and answering queries raised by the user's community.

Communication skills

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, whether this be vocally (using voice), written (using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, websites or emails), visually (using logos, maps, charts or graphs) or non-verbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). The library professionals must have good communication skills as they act as a knowledge gateway; it is very much needed while interacting with users, management, vendors, publishers and suppliers.

Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal skills are fundamental to successful relationships at home, at school, at work and socially. These skills should be developed by introspecting ourselves. The library professionals must be able to build good interpersonal skills among the fellow workers, users and others with whom they work closely.

Presentation skills

Presenting information clearly and effectively is a key skill to get your message or opinion across and, today, presentation skills are required in almost every field. Presentation skills would become useful during interaction of library professionals with users, management, publishers and vendor etc.

Leadership skills

The ability to lead effectively is based on a number of key skills. These skills are highly sought after by employers as they involve dealing with people in such a way as to motivate, enthuse and build respect. Therefore, Library professionals must have leadership skills.

Writing Skills

Writing skills are an important part of communication. Good writing skills allow you to communicate your message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face-to-face or telephone conversations. The writing skills plays very important role for library professionals during the course of written communicating with users, management, publishers and suppliers.

Marketing skills

Wee (2003) stated that in this information age, marketing and promotion of our services are pivotal to our survival and also Martey (2000) implied that libraries must survive and thrive because they still have role to play in the community. Librarians like all other professional should adapt to and cope with the changes taking place in the environment in which they operate.

Therefore, library professionals must have marketing skills, which would in turn, help to increase image of the library and information centers and serve the users effectively.

Conclusion

Libraries have great role in dissemination of information to the users, due to emergence of information technology and management techniques, the librarianship also facing challenge to cope up with the situation. To manage the situation, librarian professionals should have some of the important competencies and soft skills which are very much required to satisfy the user's community as discussed in the paper. Soft skills can be inculcated through variety of programs and methods. There are many soft skills training programs available in Institutes and Corporate in India to ensure that the employability of the young generation increases and to give some guidelines on how training conducted on soft skills can be measured to make them more effective.

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