

Soft Skills - A Bridge between LIS Professionals and Digital Times

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ABSTRACT

A single factor which has caused significant changes in library services during this century is undoubtedly information communication technology. There is demand for library professionals having multidimensional aptitude in the areas of technical work, administrative work and also in providing user oriented services along with the soft skills. Effective organization of resources in the web and managing internet tools and services requires specific skills to meet the information needs of the users. LIS professional have to assist the user community in getting relevant information using innovative methods. This paper deals with how to make LIS professionals ICT literates and its advantages.

Key Words : Skills, LIS Professionals, ICT

INTRODUCTION

Like any other profession, the soft skills are required in day-to-day working for carrying out routine jobs more effectively. There exists a gap between librarians and the user's information needs. To bridge the gap they need to educate themselves to acquire new skills. The librarians working in large organization like corporate offices are already practicing these skills through by experience or training. Unlike in the past, the libraries of the present organizations have undergone drastic changes in terms of information resources, types of information services and information users. For today's librarians there is demand for having multidimensional aptitude in the areas of technical work, administrative work and also in providing user oriented services along with the soft skills.

Skills and knowledge required for LIS Professionals:

World English Dictionary defines soft skill as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people and a positive

flexible attitude"

For the successful implementation of library services, it is essential that LIS professionals are well trained and possess requisite knowledge and skills in this respect. In the present scenario the library profession in large organization such as universities, special libraries, public libraries demands library professionals having knowledge of soft skills in addition to technical and administrative skills as they have to cater a wide range of human being and also to achieve the goals of the parent organization they serve.

Soft skills that are required for LIS professionals are:

Listening skills:

Listening is the most important part of effective communication. The library profession must have good listening skills as he has to interact with different types of users all the time. The success of ready reference/short reference mainly depends on the listening skills of library staff. By careful listening to users they can identify the requirement and then provide the service accordingly.

Communication skills:

Command on language will improve the communication. Communication has a great importance in providing better services to users. While communicating one should create a win-win situation rather than win-lose situation. The staff at the circulation desk should be well trained in communication as they function as reception desk of library. He/she communicates the value of library services to decision makers, staff and users. When he/she provides information to the user he/she must communicate clearly and respectfully with customers and colleagues. The librarian should have command on languages so that he can confidently deliver his ideas clearly effectively and make it understandable and functional.

Technical skills:

It has become increasingly important that librarians keep up with technology and have certain basic skills. In the current scenario library professionals must have the knowledge of HTML, Networking, scripting languages, the ability to deal with the OPAC, the ability to translate library services into the online medium, the ability to troubleshoot basic computers and printers problems, or just a good healthy knowledge of emerging technologies.

Public relation:

One needs to use public relation very effectively to attract users in libraries through various ways. Public relation in the case of library profession means to have a good relationship with the fellow professional colleague of other institutions, relationship with eminent personalities of the library science field, book publishers so on. The success of inter library loan facility service depends on the level of public relationship the librarian maintain with the others.

Leadership skills and team work:

Library management especially the big library is team exercise. Hence it is required to have leadership skills to manage and guiding the team time to time. Librarian by exhibiting technical skills in managing can transform the library into an effective, productive, competent information center. Human skills, which are based on interpersonal relations, will benefit the librarian in getting work done at all the level of the library. Conceptual skills which are based on long term planning will help the librarian in dealing with top level management.

Presentation skills:

When librarian wants to implement a new technology or service for library clients firstly he must create a proposal for management by showing that what would be the consequence of this new technology which tool to use to train staff, market, service etc. He must show the role that new technology in currently being used in libraries. He can practice and develop reader's advisory skills to promote reading habits among all the users.

Customer service:

Customer is library users and to satisfy his information needs is customer service. The librarians are always giving attention to their users and providing service through CAS, SDI or other specialized services. He can demonstrate a sincere commitment to customer service. Always he must try to observe customer needs and try to provide their desired information on time. User satisfaction should be the motto and the library staff should work towards the fulfillment of the motto.

Negotiating skills:

Negotiation is an attempt by two people to achieve a mutually acceptable solution. These skills are required on special occasion such as handling bulk purchases, specialized databases subscription with vendors etc. Also some time in delicate situation like library committee meeting or avoiding undue requirements from arrogant users etc. Librarian being the chief of the library will come across several situations where he has to negotiate with the others.

Managerial skills:

In managerial skills we include:

- a) **Technical skills:** The technical skill involves the librarian's understanding the nature of job that people under him have to perform. It involves process or technique knowledge and proficiency in a certain specialized field. These skills are more important for librarian to deal with huge number of staff doing the organization work.
- b) **Human skills:** Librarian interacts and cooperates with employees and staff of the organization. Human skills involve ability to interact effectively with people. Librarian with good human skills is able to get best out their people.
- c) **Conceptual skills:** It refers to the ability of

librarians to take a broad and farsighted view of the organization and its future, his ability to analyze the forces working in a situation, his creative and innovative ability and his ability to assess the environment and the changes taking place in it. Thus technical skills deals with things, human skills concern people, and conceptual skills as to do with ideas.

Time Management:

Time management should be the motto of every library as it deals with the service of information dissemination. The librarian should see that the services such as SDI, CAS and reference queries cater information to the needy in prescribed time otherwise the information itself become obsolete.

How to make Library Professional ICT Literate:

Due to lack of ICT literate, most of the library professionals are not confident enough to handle many of the ICT tasks in libraries. ICT may be any combination of tools and procedures that facilitates the generation, acquisition, storage, organization, retrieval, searching, viewing, updating and transmission of information using electronic means. Over the past two decades, libraries have become increasingly aware of the revolutionary impact of developments in information and communication technology on their key function. ICT are now diminishing the central role of traditional libraries. LIS professionals must updating themselves with contemporary knowledge at regular intervals is equally essential for delivering good services to its users.

ICT literacy can be enhanced effectively through the following:

- Use of ICT based materials, tools and technology.
- Informal and short term computer course like DCA/PGDCA.
- Library professionals who are in lower cadre and assisting their immediate higher officers may be assigned with digital project through which they can learn more. They can build their ICT skills by experiencing with their expertise, documents and hands in training.
- Individual instruction, orientation, tors and workshops.
- Web based instructions tutorials and self-help guide.
- Membership to online professional groups, discussion forum etc., for sharing experience.

- Installing and using library, management software for creation of institutional repositories.
- Introducing a common communication platform via internet at institutional level which can be used for obtaining instruction for higher authority, decision making and resolving professional issues.
- Making all the library correspondence electronically via email is considered to be environmental friendly and also bring more accuracy and rapidity to work.
- Training programs to get the library staff learning ICT skills may be conducted at institutional level may gradually get them away from the fear of technology and acclimatize to the electronic environment.

Advantages of ICT literate for the clients:

- It is easy to provide right information at the right time very quickly.
- Online information services such as ask the librarian, instant messaging are bring the revolutionary changes with great impact.
- It enables users to find the information independently and avoids interdependency which is time consuming.
- Irrespective the storage medium it facilitates uses of information and system to access and evaluate information easily.
- Through clear and rapid communication users get a voice to express their need for information.
- Successfully involves the users in the process of knowledge creation and management and dissemination of information product.
- It enhances user's satisfaction level.
- Helps gain knowledge about searching techniques and encourages use of information sources more frequently, independently and confidently.

Advantages of ICT literate for LIS professionals:

- It helps to provide better services to clients with less effort and time.
- Makes the concept of "The right information to the right reader at the right time" a reality.
- It saves the time of both readers and library professionals who can be spent for the benefit of research and development work of the society.
- Reduces considerable cost of the acquisition, correspondence, maintenance, management organization and dissemination of documents because of the ICT

implementation.

- Provides wider accessibility with electronic resources like eBooks and e-journals as ICT allows multi-user access resource at the same time.

- Through information networks, now the libraries have become more confident to serve user better than ever. Online document delivery has added a new dimension to the concept of resource sharing.

- Library without walls, the virtual library in other words, is fixing an innovative paradigm of information services with the encroachment of ICT application (Girish Kumar and Muruli, 2013; Malik and Bala, 2011; Ramesh Babu, 2011; Singh, 2011; En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_skills and <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/softskill1#ixzz2asktdRWT>).

Conclusion:

Softs skills are increasingly becoming the hard skills of today's workforce. It's just not enough to highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer interpersonal and relationship building skills that help people to communicate and collaborate effectively. Soft skills are necessary in the work place for professional success. They are vital at every level of an organization if, it is to function smoothly and productively. More over the rapid changing environment of academic libraries needs attention of the authorities that manages LIS education in the society.

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