

論數位時代圖書館館員之通才知能

Generic Competencies for Librarians in the Digital Age

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摘要

在數位時代中，圖書館須面對網際網路、Google 等各種營利性的資訊服務機構之挑戰。圖書館若欲達永續經營的目標，則在良好的行政管理與館員核心能力之培育外，亦需關注館員通才知能之發展。本文探討數位時代圖書館員具備如溝通能力、領導能力、管理能力、創新能力、批判性思考能力以及壓力與情緒管理能力等通才知能之必要性，藉以提供圖書資訊學界與圖書館實務界在設計相關教育課程時另一個思考面向。

Abstract

In the digital age, Internet, Google, bookstores, and other for-profit information agencies can locate and deliver information to users at a much lower cost. This situation of novel competition means that the role of libraries and librarians must be repositioned. For libraries and librarians to survive as professionals, this article argues that generic competencies, such as communication, leadership, management, creativity, critical thinking, stress, and emotional management are the keys to success.

Keywords: Generic competency; Librarian; Library;

關鍵字：通才知能、圖書館員、圖書館

1. Introduction

As a result of the rapid advancements of information and communication technology, information retrieval has changed dramatically. Libraries no longer have the monopoly of the information market and have to share it with other information providers. The stable, quiet, and non-competitive operational environment of libraries no longer exists, and methods adopted in the past no longer satisfy the information demands of users in the digital age.

Libraries are facing threats from diverse societies, as well as changes within the internal and external environment. In the external environment, book stores, rental stores, bulk-sale stores, and other related organizations, provide convenient access to multiple choices of library information. Although the information they provide is not free, the service is friendlier than that offered by libraries. With the popularization of internet services, and the dramatic development of other related informational technologies, users can directly retrieve information through peer-to-peer (P2P) technology, and the Internet is fast becoming the major source of information for the general public. In terms of the internal environment, libraries are encountering problems, such as a reduction of human resources and funds, the aging of professional staff, low level jobs and salaries, low staff morale, and high turnover of staff. However, the challenges imposed by the internal and external environment are not the main problems libraries face. Rather, the main question to be addressed is whether or not they have the ability to change in order to cope with the demands and challenges imposed upon them by the digital age.

Readers make use of libraries in order to obtain information and resolve problems, and they demand good service and value. Thus, librarians must provide a “value-added service”, which not only involves the use of technical skills but, more importantly, mental and emotional skills. Under different circumstances, the responsibilities of librarians change from production to management and supervision, and skills relating to interpersonal relationships, and leadership are becoming increasingly important. Demand for librarians who possess generic competency in the library and information science realm is significantly greater than before. Thus, if libraries wish to respond to

the challenges and prepare for transformation, they need to adjust their roles, increase their service items, and revitalize their service content. [1-4]

2. Role Transformation of Libraries and Librarians in the digital age

Libraries need to modify their ideology and service styles according to the changing era and the social environment. In the digital age, not only do libraries have to play their traditional role as a center for cultural preservation, information, and lifetime education, but they also need to function as a leisure activity and meeting center. This is because reading is regarded as a method of relieving stress, and as a leisure activity which can help people to resolve psychological difficulties. [5-6]

Recent years have witnessed a progressive change in the operation of libraries and the services they offer. In terms of library storage facilities, not only do they keep hard copy collections, but they also have various types of audiovisual information and electronic resources. At the same time, collections of classical works have evolved into collections of non-classical works. In terms of service, the traditional standardized service has been changed and has been replaced by personalized service. In the past, librarians provided readers with a fixed standard of service, and neglected their individual differences. Today, however, emphasis is placed upon a resilient and personalized service which can increase readers' satisfaction. The current trend of contemporary educational development and interdisciplinary integration has caused the distribution of subjects of interest across multiple educational fields. Thus, librarians need to be able to correctly retrieve information from the library's knowledge system, and transform it into a user-friendly format. Furthermore, they also need to help readers to collect, integrate, and evaluate information sources for each educational field. However, in terms of subjects of service, there is an increasing trend of specific information usage in libraries, and librarians must provide services to meet the specific demands of different populations. [7]

As well as operational changes in libraries, there has been a marked shift in the role of the librarians. The role librarians have to play in the digital age not only consists of the original role of information consultant, mediator, manager, and academic and system professional. Today's librarians must also engage in knowledge guidance, learning

facilitation, and reading guidance. [8-11] Librarians must be able to guide readers towards the location of accurate information, and assist them to evaluate the information they collect, helping them to disseminate it into a user-friendly format. In other words, they are expected to provide an information and knowledge value-added service. In order for libraries to fulfill their mission and objective in the digital age, librarians must actively adjust their role to achieve work competency and job satisfaction.

3. Generic Competencies for Librarians in the digital age

Due to the role transformation, the competencies necessary for librarians in the digital age differ from those of the past and, although there is no consistent definition for “Competency”, a combination of the perspectives of various scholars suggests that “Competency” is “knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to work”. Among these, “knowledge” means “possession and familiarity with the methods and experience of handling tasks and affairs”, whereas, “skills” refers to “the effective utilization of personal knowledge and abilities”, and “attitudes” is “the expression of psychological and emotional factors when faced with matters and affairs”. [12-15]

Competency can be divided into “Core Competencies” and “Generic Competencies” (Transversal Competency), [16-17] and some scholars divide it into professional skills and personal skills, or “hard skills” which are related to the intelligence quotient (IQ), and “soft skills” which refer to the emotional quotient (EQ). [18] In terms of “core competency”, library and information science differs most significantly from other professions and, furthermore, librarians also differ in their information resource, technology, management, and other related knowledge, skills, and attitudes. However, “generic competency” concerns the possession of basic skills in all trades and professions. [19] It also concerns resilience and the effective implementation of work knowledge, skills, and attitudes, such as interpersonal skills, leadership skills, management skills, logical analysis and creative skills. Librarians who possess generic competency skills can become effective communicators, outstanding informational added-value workers, and life-time learners. Generic competency can affect librarians’ individual job performance and organizational effectiveness and, although it generally cannot be evaluated by normal intelligence tests, it can be promoted by means of

educational training courses. [20]

With respect to the question of which generic competencies are necessary for librarians, the author has summed up the following through reviewing various related articles: communication/interpersonal competency, leadership competency, management competency, creativity/innovation competency, analytical/critical thinking competency, and stress/emotional management competency.

3.1 Communication / Interpersonal Competency

“Communication” is the “sharing of information, ideas, and attitudes with others, whilst constructing a common consensus”. The essence of communication lies within the adjustment of information transferred between the sender and the receiver. [21] However, “Communication / Interpersonal Competency” considers “how individuals should communicate and implement communication skills effectively”. [22] On one hand, librarians who possess interpersonal competency can effectively attend to the perspectives and experiences of others, and empathetically understand them. They are able to systematically account for the truth and express their personal opinions. On the other hand, they also understand the application of open-questions to clarify individuals’ requests, and actively search for constructive feedback. They actively respond to individuals with a positive attitude, and are able to be friendly and uncritical. Librarians who possess interpersonal competency are able to regard readers of different groups and cultural backgrounds, applying the appropriate communication methods whilst interacting with them. [23]

When providing service to readers, librarians engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication in order to deal with interactions which occur face-to-face, over long distances, and through the internet. Service content includes providing assistance to inquiring readers, interviewing readers, feedback on readers’ opinions, expressing personal opinions, and dealing with reader complaints. [24] For example, other than possessing skills for collecting information sources, reference librarians also need to possess reference interview skills. In order to understand readers’ problems and engage in effective interaction, librarians need to possess good communication skills, which include verbal and written language.

Other than verbal communication skills, librarians also need to possess logical writing skills. For example, librarians in the digital age have to edit and deal with all different kinds of written materials, such as reference catalogues, library information and reports, projects, and budget reports. Therefore, the ability to communicate with written words is even more important than it was in the traditional era of print. In the past, library services mainly relied upon face-to-face communication. However, with the development of internet technology, librarians frequently encounter readers who wish to obtain service via e-mail, BBS, MSN, and other on-line communication tools. Communicating through the internet prevents the perception of facial expression, and thus, it is important to pay attention to the use of words and sentences, which further signifies the importance of librarians' word communication skills. [25]

Furthermore, according to the research results, interpersonal interactions are the greatest source of negative emotion experienced by librarians. [26] Librarians are bound to face interpersonal interactions at work, which include superior-subordinate relationships, supervision of subordinates, peer group relationships, and service relationships with readers. Favorable interpersonal interaction depends upon adequate interpersonal communication skills. Generally, librarians who possess good interpersonal communication skills are more acutely aware of the self, the organization, and the organizational culture, and are able to provide effective feedback. At the same time, they are also able to share their knowledge with others, and provide assistance. Thus, they collaborate and communicate well with readers, colleagues, and individuals outside the library. In addition, librarians with good interpersonal communication skills are able to receive respect from others, and maintain good interpersonal relationships. Therefore, research articles around the world demonstrate that interpersonal communication skills are considered to be an indispensable generic competency skill. [27-34]

3.2 Leadership Competency

Leadership is a kind of influence, since it is defined as “the ability to influence the behavior of other individuals, enabling them to perform tasks which they initially would not carry out”. [35] In terms of organizations, leadership occurs through a non-coercive influence which assists organizational members' activities, and increases employees'

devotion towards organizational goals. [36] Leadership includes acquiring respect and trust from other individuals, while influencing them. In order to direct behavior towards organizational goals, leadership competency is also concerned with guiding, enlightening, and adjusting. The majority of librarians possess leadership competency; and leadership competency can be developed. However, few individuals are able to bring this ability into full play. [37]

The management of libraries in the digital age aims to develop a general framework which differs greatly from the past. For example, in mid-level management, worker roles are transformed into work-manager roles. The development of the internet in the new high-tech era has caused organizational frameworks to become exceedingly loose, and emphasis is placed upon informal communication and sharing of ideas. Leadership is not limited to senior librarians, but rather librarians must plan each service of their own accord, and take on the responsibilities of both managers and leaders. [38] In addition, the operational trend of libraries in the digital age emphasizes the sharing of resources, which is effective for promoting team collaboration between libraries. Librarians must possess leadership skills and be able to carry out leadership activities of their own accord, which can enhance the achievement of organizational goals. Leadership is a shared enterprise, [39] and effective leadership is extremely important for library enterprises. Thus, librarians must possess leadership skills. [40-44] In other words, every librarian employed within library organizations must possess substantial leadership skills in order to face the challenges posed by the digital age.

3.3 Management Competency

“Management” is the process of effectively completing tasks with the help of others. “Management Competency” is to internally and externally adjust, distribute resources, and deal effectively and efficiently with matters of affairs, and organizational strategic plans and decision making. However, management competency is a subject of debate in areas of personnel, such as conflict management, and group negotiations, in public relations such as fundraising and negotiating with information storage agents, in library policy formulation such as the design of user training courses, the formulation process of operations, project management and budget setting, performance evaluation, and

service marketing planning. Generally, management activities consist of planning, organizing, recruitment, and control. Amongst these, planning means the setting of an objective, strategy, and scheme. Organizing consists of constructing an organizational system, coordinating and distributing resources and authority among individuals. Recruitment concerns the demand for personnel resources, the selection, employment, training, and career management of staff. Control is linked to quality analysis and the performance evaluation of employees. [45] Individuals who possess management competency can effectively carry out the management activities mentioned above, and also play an impressive managerial role. Moreover, they are also able to adopt an organization's internal coordinating mechanism to integrate related resources, satisfy employees' demands, and achieve the organization's overall goal. Thus, many scholars argue that management competency is a generic competency which librarians in the digital age cannot afford to lack. [46-51]

Developments in computer and information technology have, to a great extent, replaced the occupational activities which librarians were forced to handle in the past. Thus, libraries now have more personnel resources to deal with management related activities. Especially when the operational trend of libraries in the digital age emphasizes cooperation with other related organizations, librarians generally need knowledge associated with management. Related investigations show that the ratio of graduates from Library and Information Science who occupy a director post is 34%. [52] Therefore, management competency is extremely important for librarians. When faced with coordination and related management activities, librarians with management competency are more successful in developing internal and external relationships. They are able to finish assignments adequately and achieve organizational objectives. In other words, librarians need to examine the trend in the digital age, in order to understand the internal and external changes which are occurring, and their effects on the library. In addition, related resources and tools can be effectively distributed, and valuable results can be obtained by using a minimum amount of funds.

3.4 Creativity / Innovation Competency

Creativity / Innovation competency is which individuals are not limited to rules and

rigid frameworks when they engage in problem solving. They have the ability to be original, and can develop novel concepts, methods, designs, and projects. [53] For example, during the process of assisting readers, reference librarians do not proceed with a single fixed model. By adequately understanding the problem and being highly skilled from reference resources and past experiences, librarians are able to resolve problems. This process is a kind of creativity and innovation. For a long time, libraries have faced the problem of insufficient financial assistance and limited resources and, in the digital age, new subjects of debate are constantly raised in the library and information industries. If libraries do not wish to fall behind in such a competitive market, then librarians need to possess innovation competency. Librarians need to consistently deliberate on how to innovate items and contents of service, and ascertain the areas in which libraries can be the most competent. [54-59] This will help them to face the different challenges brought about by the internal and external environment.

3.5 Analytical / Critical Thinking Competency

Analytical/Critical Thinking competency is an individual's ability to understand the demands and requests of others, analyze problems, integrate problems, evaluate information sources, determine appropriate information resources, adopt effective methods during problem solving, and produce logical conclusions. [60] Facing the diversification of information resources and poor quality in the new technological era, librarians need to evaluate and determine the most appropriate information resource and critical reference resource, according to the demands of readers. Thus, emphasis is placed upon the necessity for librarians to possess analytical and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the correct selection of information sources can satisfy readers' demands. [61-65] For example, when answering reference questions, reference librarians should decompose the question into fragments which are easier to understand, find their relationship to one another, and collectively search for information sources related to the particular field of interest.

In other words, librarians must consider the current trend when they are making decisions, and also be able to collect, make use of, and explain, related information. At the same time, librarians must also consider readers' information level and the amount

they need. Librarians need to possess the ability of evaluating the appropriateness, authoritativeness, and expediency of information resources. Assisting readers with selections, and suggesting appropriate information sources, librarians can successfully play the role of an information mediator and a knowledge guide. This may help to remove the problem of an information explosion faced by readers today.

3.6 Stress / Emotional Management Competency

Stress / Emotional management competency is an individual's ability to adapt to continuous change in personal and organizational objectives caused by the unstable environment, and also practice appropriate stress management techniques in order to relieve work stress and negative emotions. [66-67] Computer and technological development has promoted the arrival of a new informational network era, and library operations are facing major changes. Library organizations have to face problems of shrinking funds, reductions in personnel, and readers' increasing demands for information. The stress experienced by librarians in the new era is much greater than before. Other than changes occurring within the organizational environment, an accumulation of negative emotions and exhaustion caused by persisting matters can also cause negative work emotions, and feelings of demoralization. Related studies indicate that librarians with work listlessness may behave cynically and indifferently towards others, and this behavior may influence other colleagues, pervading the library's atmosphere with negative emotions. In addition, when librarians do not possess a good emotional status, their services are affected (such as inappropriate handling of matters), which can greatly reduce the quality of service. [68]

Therefore, understanding work stress in library organizations, adjusting emotions in order to face work with a positive attitude, and coping with stress, are all important issues which librarians have to deal with in the digital age. [69-73] Under these circumstances, librarians need to adopt appropriate stress and emotional management skills in order to relieve stress and negative emotions, which can be detrimental to the library operation.

4. Conclusion

Library organizations in the digital age are facing internal and external distress caused

by drastic social changes, digitization of library information sources, and diversification of readers' demands. If libraries wish to surmount these difficulties, they need to actively cultivate outstanding librarians with an abundance of professional competencies. Outstanding librarians need to possess two kinds of professional competency. One involves the competency needed to handle a task. This includes librarians' knowledge of the work itself and how to carry out a particular task. The second involves the competencies involved in "how to conduct the self", which requires the cooperation and coordination of organizational members in order to achieve organizational goals.

There is an acute shortage of generically competent librarians in the digital age. The focus of librarians' educational training in general libraries and library schools is upon technological aspects. Course contents greatly reflect the necessity of practical work for cataloguing, acquisition, and circulation librarians. However, the generic competencies needed by librarians, including interpersonal competency, leadership competency, innovation competency, and stress and emotional management competency, have not received much attention. This has caused a gap between librarians' education and training course contents and their practical demand for generic competency. In order to increase librarians' generic competencies, library organizations and library schools need to offer more "people-related" courses. In other words, other than core competencies in library and information science, of informational source organization, and technical skills in traditional cataloguing, librarians in the digital age also need to possess interpersonal, cooperative, and leadership competencies. Relevant courses include management psychology and effective interpersonal skills. In addition, courses such as marketing, public relations, and project management evaluation, should also be actively promoted.

However, Library and Information Science education has not provided sufficient training for students in the past and, in order to respond to the occupational trend, Library and Information Science education should adjust its content, and increase its courses related to generic competency. Providing librarians with an opportunity for education and training is also an obligation for library organizations. Moreover, the development and promotion of related generic competencies is the responsibility of

librarians themselves. In the digital age, librarians must continuously engage in self-education and life-long learning in order to strengthen their personal advantages, cope with changes caused by challenges at work, and bring about a new turning point for libraries.

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