CONFERENCE PAPERS
Session 2 : Developing Competencies for the 21st Century
Chairperson: Dato' Zawiyah Baba

21ST CENTURY LIBRARIANS AT THE CROSSROADS: SPECIALIZED COMPETENCIES NEEDED

Dr. Saidatul Akmar Ismail and Assoc Prof Dr Mohd. Sazili Shahibi
Faculty of Information Management
Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Perdana Campus
Shah Alam, Malaysia
saidatulakmar@salam.uitm.edu.my; mohdsazili@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract
Library work traditionally involves a process of collecting, organizing, promoting and circulating data and information. The work processes should be a means to an end. With the advancement of the Internet and online technologies, the traditional process of library work and the advancement of the technologies have to be integrated and require a certain type of thinking skills which involve the left-and right-brain activities. This paper attempts to highlight the processes of thinking that seem necessary for the libraries of today to manage technology effectively. The librarians must also be able acquire new competencies and discover opportunities for improving services through tapping along with these technologies. Curriculum pertaining to the development of the 21st century librarians and information professionals is also discussed in order to ensure that the new breed of information professionals are able to act as change agents in society.

Keywords: Librarians; Competencies; Library and information science education; Library technologies

INTRODUCTION
Over and over again, librarianship is described as the process of collecting, organizing, promoting and disseminating data and information. The introduction of the Internet with its ability to share and store huge amounts of data and information has affected the traditional librarianship. Even though the profession seems ordinary and outdated, yet there remains one core element of the profession that remains unchanged, but rarely expressed, that is, an evaluation and acceleration of knowledge.

The role of librarians is beyond the routine process of collecting, organizing, archiving and disseminating information. These processes are just a means to an end, not the end themselves. The librarians have to bear these questions in mind: Why archive anything if there is no intention to retrieve the materials later? Why organize them unless someone was supposedly to browse and use them? Why collect things if one is not going to use them?

The librarianship as a profession directly deals with data and information. Deep in their heart, the librarians and information professionals consistently aim to create new knowledge, expanding understanding and spreading wisdom throughout their career. However, the Internet with all its strengths and weaknesses has a deep effect on the profession. The profession needs to reflect and understand that the Internet and its accompanying technology is merely another tool to fulfil those goals.

INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL SKILLS WITH TECHNOLOGIES

The process of merging traditional skills (and ethics) with the Internet and other networked technologies requires a certain type of thinking skills (Deng, Thomas and Trembach, 2014; Gonzalez, 2010; Lussky, 2008). In the context of librarianship, thinking can be an intellectual process characterized by methodical, systematic, and left-brain activities (Morgan, 2000). In many ways, this kind of activity is seen through solving mathematical problems and computer programming. Another process of thinking is referred to as intuitive, creative, critical and unsystematic, such as artistic works.

Both of these processes of thinking are necessary for the libraries of today and tomorrow to manage technology effectively. Thinking must be used to analyse the needs of our library users. It must be applied when drawing up expenses. It is a necessary activity when trying out the latest piece of software and when evaluating how to apply and use computer technologies for library services.

At the reference desk, thinking must be taken into account when answering a new reference question. Therefore, thinking involves the process of sorting out problems through several ways or solutions. Unfortunately, the profession today tends to ignore the importance of thinking process as well as the skills.

LIBRARIANS WITH SPECIALIZED COMPETENCIES

Competencies for a profession generally list or group a series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours that define and contribute to performance. Competencies can be used to design and develop job postings, position descriptions, training and education programs and performance evaluation programs. In the context of libraries and librarians, it is not only necessary for libraries to continually be aware of new computer technologies, but they must also be able to discover room for improvement of library services with the application of networked technologies. Then, and only then, will librarians be effectively using the Internet and other networked information. The entire process requires librarians to possess a fundamental understanding of library principles. At the same time, it requires them to think "outside the box" for the purpose of enhancing the way they apply the library principles (Deng, Thomas and Trembach, 2014).

Today, most information professionals are discussing the need for soft skills. Soft skills are also seen as vital for librarians and information professionals in particular communication and organizational skills (Gonzalez, 2010). Lussky (2008) indicates that passion for learning, risk-taking ability, public service orientation and independence in decision-making should be the desired qualities. A study by Deng, Thomas and Trembach (2014) also found that their respondents unanimously agreed on the need to hire well-rounded candidates with strong communication and critical thinking skills. They also found that the need for being creative and be able to think outside the box among librarians were a thread across all interviews and surveys. They highlight that creativity and thinking outside the box is defined as "entrepreneurial spirit" by one of the interviewees, the Dean of an academic library.

Earlier, Buttlar and Du Mont (1996) identified fifty-nine essential professional library competencies. They used them as the basis of a survey to measure the relevance of these skills to librarianship. In priority order, they outlined ten competencies:

i. Knowledge of sources in all formats to answer typical reference questions
ii. Collection management skills (development, selection, de-selection, preservation)
iii. Ability to conduct appropriate reference interview
iv. Effective communication in writing reports, proposals, procedural manuals, correspondence, etc.
v. Application of critical thinking skills to library problems
vi. Effective human relations skills in group processes
vii. Selection and evaluation of print and non-print materials
viii. Application of appropriate principles to weed and inventory materials and equipment
ix. Oral communication skills to make presentations
x. Development of selection policies.

They are of the opinion that, while technical skills such as collection development and reference interview techniques, is important, so too are communication and human relations skills.

Goulding, Bromham, Hannabuss, and Cramer (1999) share a similar view derived from a survey of nearly 900 employers. According to them, the most essential qualities for library workers are:

i. Ability to accept pressure
ii. Flexibility (respond to change)
iii. Ability to deal with a range of users
iv. Written communication skills
v. Inquisitiveness (love of learning)
vi. Reflection
vii. Dedication
viii. Detective-like (follow-up and track-down)
ix. Leadership qualities
x. Innovation.

Unfortunately, the study also found that some of these highly preferred qualities are hardly found in new librarians. Among the qualities considered most lacking were:

i. Commitment to organizational goals;
ii. Friendliness;
iii. Ability to accept pressure;
iv. Reliability;
v. Energy (vigour/activity);
vi. Flexibility;
vii. Logic;
viii. Written communication skills;
ix. Confidence about ability; and
x. Ability to work with/for a range of colleagues.

From the literatures mentioned here, no doubt, the 21st century librarians need to enhance their evaluating competencies which are the larger part involving thinking skills.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCHOOLS CURRICULA
How do library schools or faculties such as the Faculty of Information Management prepare the librarians to meet job market of the 21st century?

This question keeps on echoing amongst our library educators. At the Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), the curriculum has been geared towards preparing students to become 21st century librarians and information professionals. Students in the field of library and information studies are prepared to Major in Library and Information Management and can opt for a Minor in Information Systems Management. This will help students to strengthen their knowledge in ICT besides having a solid background in library and information science. This is evident in the curriculum for the Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons.) Library and Information Management Programme. The following are the details of the curricula offered by the Faculty:

1. Faculty Core Courses
IMC 401 Foundation of Information Communication and Technology
IMC 402 Foundation of Information Management
IMC 403 Introduction to Reference and Information Sources
IMC 404 Management of Internet Information Sources and Services
IMC 405 Organization of Information

2. Faculty Core (Library And Information Management) – Major Courses
IML 451 Information Proficiency
IML 452 Organization of Information : Descriptive Cataloguing
IML 453 IT in Libraries and Information Center
IML 454 Library and Information Center Management
IML 501 Computerized Textual Information Management
IML 502 Organization of Information : Subject Cataloguing and
Classification
IML 503 Information Sources and Services in: Social Science
IML 504 Information Sources and Services in: S & T
IML 505 Information Sources and Services in: Humanities
IML 506 Information Marketing in Libraries and Information Centres
IML 551 Research Methods in Library and Information Science
IML 552 Organization of Information : Abstracting and Indexing
IML 553 Public Relation in Information Work
IML 601 Publication & Production of Information Materials
IML 602 Organization of Information : Computerized Cataloguing
IML 603 Planning and Design of Information Centres
IML 604 Research Project in Library and Information Science
IML 651 Digital Libraries
IML 652 Metadata
IML 653 Library Automation
IML 654 Information Professional Work

3. Elective And Minor Courses From Information Systems Management
IMS 453 Support Service and Maintenance for Information Systems
IMS 504 Database Management Systems for Information Professional

IMS 503 Introduction to E-Commerce
IMS 552 Information System Management
IMS 554 Information Marketing for Information Systems Department
IMS 553 Multimedia for Information Professional
IMS 604 Web Programming for Information Retrieval
IMS 652 Strategic Information Systems for Information Professional

4. University Courses
Islamic Studies I
Co-curriculum
English I
Co-curriculum
English II
Islamic Studies II
Third Language

In line with the aspiration of the Malaysian Government to move ahead into the K-based economy and the Malaysian Government Transformation Program, the Faculty too has taken initiatives to introduce the post graduates programmes - masters and doctor of philosophy. The main aim of the post graduate programmes are to offer specialized and advanced professional training and education in an area which focuses on the acquisition, creation, generation, capture, organization, retrieval, sharing and utilisation of information, knowledge and information management systems in an organization which involves people, technology and processes. The following is a list of post graduate programs offered by the Faculty:

      i.   Master of Information Management
     ii.   Master of Knowledge Management
    iii.   Master of Information and Library Management
    iv.   Master of Records Management
     v.   PhD in Information Management

The above said programs are offered both in full-time and part-time modes, except for the Master of Information Management which offers in full, part time and flexible learning modes.

LIBRARIES TODAY AND TOMORROW
In this contemporary world, the advancement of networked technologies helps the library users to accomplish their information searching activities without the help of a librarian. In most cases, users can search information effectively and efficiently without having to set foot in the library. The library users today have all forms of technology and communication tools as well as means to do so. Therefore, most experts in the field of librarianship and information management and the public see this situation as a preamble to the closing of the library itself.

However, whatever is the position of the library in the past and the present, the authors do not see libraries disappearing with the rapidly evolving technology. They see libraries can take advantage of existing technological advances to further promote its development. They can still visualize a library standing tall in today's environment. Morgan (2000) beautifully described the profession as a caterpillar. He said that "libraries can use the current environment to foster growth, turn upon itself for the purposes of reorganization, and emerge as a beauty unto itself and for others".

CONCLUSION

The more people use and access information, the more they are in need of a correct way to evaluate and use the information found. The authors believe that the process of selection, evaluation and use of information is where the future of librarianship belongs to. Librarianship has begun its library activities and processes by providing data and information to library users through the promotion of knowledge and understanding. Hence, the knowledge generation becomes the core of today's society. The rapid development of networked technologies enables them to accelerate the development of knowledge at greater ease. The technology today will also act as a tool that could help libraries and librarians to offer not only information services to the library users, but beyond the expectation of the users, that is, knowledge and understanding services.

REFERENCES

Buttlar, L. and Du Mont, R. 1996. Library and information science competencies revisited. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 44-62.

Deng, L., Thomas, A. and Trembach, S. 2014. Shaping the 21st-century information professional: A convergence of technical and "soft" skills for workplace success. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology,* Vol. 51, no. 1: 1-4.

Gonzalez, M. 2010. Workforce competencies: Focus on urban public libraries. *Library Trends,* Vol. 59: 1-2.

Goulding, A., Bromham, B., Hannabuss, S. and Cramer, D. 1999. Supply and demand: The workforce needs of library and information services and personal qualities of new professionals. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science,* 212-223.

Lussky, J. 2008. Employer demands for catalogers and cataloger-like librarians and implications for LIS. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science,* Vol. 49, no. 2: 116-27.

Morgan, E.L. 2000. *Ladder of understanding: The Internet effects the principles of librarianship, or does it?* Retrieved 1 August 2015 from:

http://infomotions.com/musings/pointers/ladderofunderstanding.htm