Soft Skills are the Desiderata for the Librarians of 21st Century

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Abstract

The advancement in the library science field has transformed the library as a workplace with evolved an interpersonal dynamic, that can not be ignored. The acts of listening, presenting ideas, resolving conflict, and fostering an open and honest work environment has come down to knowing how to build and maintain relationships with people. It's those relationships that allow people to participate fully in team projects, show appreciation for others, and enlist support for their projects. It is important for the librarians to recognize the vital role of soft skills that play within the team and not only work on developing them within themselves, but encourage their development throughout the organization. Team Work, Interpersonal skills, Leadership Qualities, Writing skills, Presentation skills play a role in the success of a Library profession.

Key words: Soft skills, Librarianship-soft skills.

Introduction

People rise in organizations because of their hard skills and fall due to a shortage of soft skill**s.** Soft skills are one of the important skills that figure up the overall development of the personality of the individual. Sociologists do use the term soft skills to describe a person's "EQ" or "Emotional Intelligence Quotient" (as opposed to "IQ"). It also takes into consideration the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterizes relationships with other people. Soft skills complement hard skills which are the occupational requirements of a job and many other activities.

Most of our educational inputs deal with hard skills. However, successful practice in any chosen discipline requires "soft skills". In

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the present epoch of competitive world mere having a professional degree is not sufficient and it requires much more from an individual. Soft skills are necessary in the workplace for professional success. They are vital at every level of an organization if, it is to function smoothly and productively. It also holds good in the case of library profession too. Hard skills are technical competencies and domain knowledge, while soft skills are a combination of people skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills and emotional intelligence. 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 having professional degrees in library and information science is not sufficient and there is a 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. The librarians working in large organizations like corporate offices are already practising these skills through by experience or training. One may learn these soft skills easily provided they are aware of the skills.

Literature Review

ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science defined library management as "the process of coordinating total resources of an organization towards the accomplishment of the desired goals of that organization through the execution of a group of interrelated functions such as planning, organization, staffing , directing and controlling"[10]. All general principles of management are applicable to library management. Hence functioning of library professionals can be very much compared with those of management executive. Some researchers link interpersonal skills with communication ability (Anselmi and Zemanek 1997)[15], whereas others link it with the ability to be collaborative and offer emotional support (Ambady, Krabbenhoft, and Hogan 2006). Finally, some researchers seem to take a wider approach and simply state that interpersonal skills have to do with the right kind of personality. [15]

Rainsbury et al. [1] (2002) categorized the competencies of superior

managers identified by Spencer and Spencer (1993) as hard skills or soft skills. Only three of the 20 competencies were classified as hard skills, while the remaining 17 were organized as soft skills. The categories of soft skills, include achievement and action, impact and influence, managerial (team management and developing others), and personal effectiveness.

For decades, the center of management was on the so-called 'hard' skills, i.e., the emphasis centered on technical skills imperative to effectively perform within the organization. These skills tended to be more job-specific or more closely related to the actual task being performed. These soft skills have come to play an even more central role in management positions in today's setting. As the world has changed and the nature of work has changed, the skill set required for managers has also undergone a change.

According to Sutton, [13] soft skills have become extremely important in all types of occupations. Glenn (2008) added that hiring individuals who possess soft skills is instrumental for high-performing organizations to retain a competitive edge.

According to a survey by Harvard University[1], 80 percent achievements in career are determined by soft skills and only 20 percent by hard skills.

Lotions et al. [1] (1985 and 1998), on the basis of their study conducted with more than 450 managers, ascertained that the average managers spend most of their time in traditional management activities, whereas in the case of managers who were successful (defined in terms of speed of promotion within their organization), networking skills made the largest contribution to their success. In the case of effective managers (defined in terms of the quantity and quality of their performance and the satisfaction and commitment of their subordinates and coworkers), communication skills made the largest contribution.

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It is unfortunate that people lightly esteem the significance of soft skills. In fact, the concept of soft skills is a developing ambient that people must take seriously It is often difficult to quantify soft skills (unlike hard skills),but soft skills are both interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that determine a person's ability to get well with others and excel in their profession. (Rao, 2012)[1].

Objectives of the study

The study is made with the help of primary data and secondary data .The objectives of the study are:

- To understand the various types of soft skills.
- To derive a relationship between the library profession and the soft skills.
- To light upon the relevant soft skills that are very much required for the success of the library profession.

Methodology

Data regarding the views of library professionals about soft skills is collected with the help of a questionnaire, comprising questions on how much importance is being given to soft skills in the library profession while recruiting new persons or experienced persons. The respondents are asked to rate the eleven broad categories of skills included in 'soft skills for librarianship' and the typical soft skills they look for when recruiting. Data is collected by sending a questionnaire. 25 professionals have responded to the questionnaire. Finally, the data collected through the questionnaire is analyzed and the results are listed. Secondary information resources such as books, journal articles and websites are referred for the purpose.

Meaning and definition of soft skills

Defining 'soft skills', Perreault (2004) stated that these are personal qualities, attributes, or the level of commitment of a person that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience.

According to James and James (2004), 'soft skills' is a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. Soft skills characterize certain career attributes that individuals may possess, such as team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service skills and problem solving skills.

World English Dictionary defines soft skills 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".

Business dictionary .Com defines soft skills as " Communicating, conflict management, human relations, making presentations, negotiating, team building, and other such ability, defined in terms of expected outcomes and not as a specific method or technique such as statistical analysis.

According to the online slang dictionary soft skills are non-technical skills usually involving interpersonal interaction.

Soft skills for Librarians

In the present scenario the library profession in large organizations such as universities, special libraries, public libraries demand library professionals having knowledge of soft skills in addition to technical and administrative skills as they have to cater a wide range of human beings and also to achieve the goals of the parent organization they serve .

Soft skills that are required for a successful library profession are:

Listening Skills, Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Public Relation, Customer Service, Leadership Skills, Teamwork, Negotiating Skills, Writing Skills, Teaching Skills and Presentation Skills,Time Management and Conflict Management .

Listening Skill: Library profession is a service oriented profession and to render an effective service, the librarian has to develop a good listening skill. Listening is the most important part of effective communication. To respond to the clientele's questions he/she should listen carefully. Listening is very important for good decision-making. The successes of the ready reference/short range reference

service mainly depend on the listening skill of the library staff.

Communication skill: Good communication skill leads positive relationships in the organization. While communicating one should create a win-win situation rather than a win-lose situation. Communication skills are very important in conflict resolution and they also improve social relationships. Communication in libraries as in other organizations goes downward, upward and in horizontal directions. The staff at the circulation desk should be well trained in communication as they function as reception desk of the library. The librarian should have command over English and regional languages so that he can confidently deliver his/her ideas clearly, effectively and make it understandable and functional.

Interpersonal skill: Communication in teams is most challenging task. Librarians have to deal with all levels of people like management, users, colleagues in a library, etc. To deal with each one of them in an effective manner it requires interpersonal skills. In a large organization, it is most important to build rapport with all departments, which helps in managing the library and providing better services to everyone. Good interpersonal skills result in a friendly and healthy working environment.

Public relation: Public relation goes far beyond good interpersonal skills. It is not enough for the library staff to maintain a good interpersonal relationship they should also give importance for the public relationship. Public relationship in the case of library profession means to have a good relationship with the fellow professional colleagues of other institutions, relationships with the eminent personalities of the library science field, library vendors, book publishers and so on. The success of the referral and interlibrary loan facility services depend on the level of public relationship the librarian maintains with others. Excellent public relationship helps the librarian to fulfill the second law of library science that is "Every reader his/her book/information.

Customer service: Library customers are nothing but the library users who include the teaching staff, students, management staff if it is an academic library. Library staff should inculcate polite and

friendly attitude towards the students and help them in getting their required information. User satisfaction should be the motto and the library staff should work towards the fulfillment of the motto.

Leadership skill: The role played by a librarian in a library is in parallel with an executive manager of any organization. Librarian by exhibiting technical, human and conceptual skills in managing, can transform the library into an effective, productive, competent information center. Technical skills, which are based on his/her training and experience, are most important at lower level management where the librarian acts like a coach to give training to his/her subordinates. Human skills, which are based on interpersonal relations will benefit the librarian in getting the work done at all the levels of the library. Conceptual skills which are based on long term planning and broad thinking will help the librarian in dealing with top level management.

Teamwork: High leadership quality results in effective teamwork. People acting together as a group can accomplish things which no individual acting alone could ever hope to bring about. Librarian as a team leader plays a critical role in maintaining the balance between the task and people, and can transform an average team into a truly effective team. Effectiveness of selective dissemination of information (SDI), indexing service, and project proposals etc. demand positive team work.

Negotiating Skill: Negotiating is an attempt by two people/parties to achieve a mutually acceptable solution. It is a process that ends either with a satisfying conclusion for both sides or with failure for both sides. Librarian being the chief of the library will come across several situations where he has to negotiate with the others. Inculcating negotiation skills help the librarian in situations like purchasing library requirements, dealing with the higher authorities, satisfying the needs of library users etc.

Writing skill: Librarians have to prepare many documents such as library requirement specifications, budget proposals, library committee meeting minutes, library annual report, user notifications, guidelines for library use such as library manual, meta data in case of

digital resources and also business letters including book purchase orders and journal subscription letters etc. To write all these documents clearly and efficiently, the librarian should have excellent writing skills. Documents that are written well, in an easy to understand style and to the points are very much appreciated by the readers.

Teaching Skill: Most of the time, librarian in a library has to take up a role of informal teacher. Hence he/she should have the basic knowledge of teaching skills. At the introduction of new services , the use of digital resources, browsing of online databases, at certain times the operation of digital devices available in the library require user orientation, in such occasions teaching skill is very much required for the library staff.

Presentation Skill: The productive use of the library resources, services by the students, teaching staff, or any other user depends on how it is presented in the library. The fulfillment of the first four laws of library science is the manifestation of the presentation skill of the librarian and his/her staff. The success of current awareness service(CAS) and user satisfaction about the library resources and services rely on how they are presented to them. The sanctioning of library fund or library budget by the authorities is also holds good with the presenting skills of the librarian.

Time management: Everybody has to manage their time to some extent whether it be at home or at work or both. The sequence in which one performs tasks on an everyday basis has a profound effect on his life and career. 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 querries cater information to the needy in the prescribed time otherwise the information itself becomes obsolete.

Conflict Management: Conflict is a natural corollary to the competitive environment and it do exists in all kinds of organization and one cannot spare library in this regard. Diversity in people, processes, communication and management may cause conflicts in the library. The role of librarian in such situations becomes crucial.

Excellent interpersonal relationship and strong management provides a sense of purpose and confidence which encourages constructive conflict. Weak management breeds uncertainty and low morale and results in destructive conflict.

Findings and Analysis

The findings were on expected lines, with a total 88 percent of the respondents (that is 28 percent strongly agree and 60 percent agree) opine that soft skills are very much required for the success in the library profession. (Figure No. 1)

Figure No. 1.Soft skills are crucial for the success in the Library Profession.
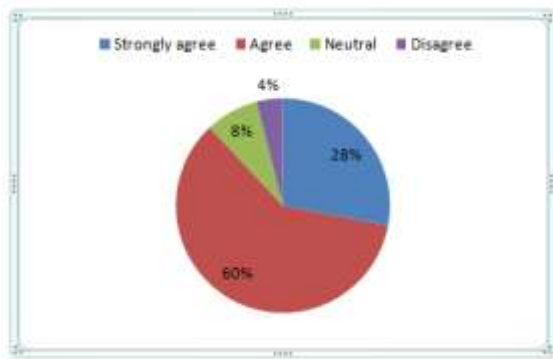
The Tables below show the findings of the study

The study reveals that 48 percent of the respondents strongly agree that, soft skills should be treated as an important criteria at the time of interviewing the candidate, 36 percent of the respondents feel that soft skills are more important than the experience, 36 percent are neutral and 28 percent disagree the statement. Further it states that 44 percent of the respondents are on the opinion that juniors do not possess required soft skills for the profession. As per the study 60 percent of the respondents agree that there is a gap between the library requirement and the college output, 72 percent agree that soft skills can be acquired even after joining the organization by arranging personnel development programmes and 48 percent strongly agree that incorporating soft skills in the college curriculum would provide library professionals with the best advantage.

Table No. 1 : Respondents' Responses

Questions	Percentage of Respondents	Opinion
Soft skills are important criteria when interviewing	48 40 08 04	Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree
Soft skills are more important than experience	36 36 28	Agree Neutral Disagree
Juniors possess required soft skills	24 44 32	Agree Disagree Neutral
Gap between the library requirement and the college output	16 60 24	Strongly agree Agree Neutral
Soft skills can be acquired even after joining the organization	24 72 04	Strongly agree Agree Disagree
Adding soft skills in the college curricula will provide best personnel	48 36 16	Strongly agree Agree Neutral

Source: *Primary data*

Levels of Library Management

Generally ,there are three levels of management i.e. top level,middle level and lower level management.

Top level: In libraries, the Chief librarian, Head librarians or Directors of libraries may represent the top level authority. Functions like taking jurisdiction of an issue, decision making, confirming the decisions taken by executives at different levels, counseling and guiding them in the initial stages of policy formulations and reviewing their acts through reports and inspection etc. are carried at the top level management.

Middle level: Deputy/Assistant Chief Librarians, Assistant librarians or Deputy/assistant directors may constitute the middle level management. Normally they assist the chief executive, serve as leaders for persons under them, coordinate the activities in three directions such as upward, downward and sideward.

Lower level : Senior library assistants, Head assistants, Office Superintendents and Library Assistants comprise the third level i.e. lower level management in libraries. Supervising the work of the rank and file, serving as the administrative link between the workers and authorities and issuing orders and directions to the workers to be implanted in them are some of the functions carried at this level.

Table No. 2 : What ratio would you offer to soft skills and work experience

Levels of Library Management	Percentage of Respondents	Ratios
Lower Level Management (Library Assistants)	44 40 16	40:60 50:50 60:40
Middle Level Management (Jr Librarians, Asst. Librarians) .	12 64 24	40:60 50:50 60:40
Higher Level Management (Librarians, Sr. Librarians)	24 24 52	40:60 50:50 60:40

Source: *Primary data*

Regarding the ratio of soft skills to work experience, 44 percent of the respondents opine that at the lower level of library management which constitute the senior library assistants, library assistants and the library attendants, the ratio should be 40:60, at the middle level management which constitute Jr. Librarians, Asst. Librarians , 64 percent of the respondents say it should be 50:50 and at the higher

level management i.e with Librarians and Sr. Librarians, 52 percent of the respondents agree that it should be 60:40.

The respondents are also asked to give first six ranks among the eleven 'must have' soft skills to succeed in the workplace. Table No. 3 shows the results.

Table No. 3: Ranking of Soft skills

Soft skill	Respondents' Responses in Percentage					
	Rank1	**Rank2**	**Rank3**	**Rank4**	**Rank5**	**Rank6**
Team management	56	20	20	-	4	-
Conflict management	12	36	16	12	4	20
Communication skills	56	28	12	-	-	4
Time management	64	20	12	-	-	4
Interpersonal skills	44	32	12	4	4	4
Leadership Qualities	56	44	-	-	-	-
Listening skills	48	24	20	4	-	4
Public Relations	36	16	32	12	4	-
Writing skill	32	36	20	4	8	-
Presentation skill	40	28	4	20	4	4
Teaching skill	20	40	24	4	4	8

Source: Primary data
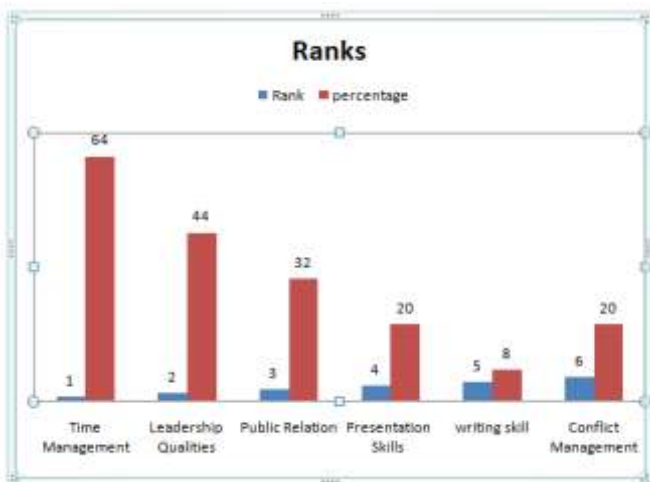
As per Table No. 3, 64 percent of the respondents considered Time Management as the first preferred soft skill, 44 percent of the respondents choose Leadership Qualities as the second most preferred skill, 32 percent choose Public Relation as the third important skill , 20 percent selected Presentation Skill as the fourth preferred skill , Writing Skill is considered as fifth required skill by the 8 percent of the respondents and 20 percent of the respondents choose Conflict Management as the sixth most required skill for the success of the Librarianship.

Conclusion

Soft skills relate to a person's blend of personality traits and behavioral traits like social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills are increasingly becoming the hard skills of today's workforce. It is just not enough to be highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer, interpersonal and relationship-building skills that help people to communicate and collaborate effectively. Time management, leadership, Public relation, Writing skills, Presentation skills and conflict management skills are highly required soft skills for the librarianship. Librarianship is a service oriented profession and acquiring soft skills would enhance the success in the profession. The library science education should incorporate soft skills in the curriculum so that the library professionals with best advantages are produced.

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