

Chapter 5

Core Competencies and Innovation for Library and Information Science Professional in 21st Century Digital–Based Environments

Robert Akinade Awoyemi

Adeyemi Federal College of Education, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Academic libraries and information technology centres are under serious threat due to the increasing pressure to achieve higher level of performance in a competitive global environment. Most of these challenges are as result of information communication technology (ICT) and digital revolution. This chapter discusses the impact of digital revolution on academic libraries and the need to acquire core competencies and new skills to effectively the 21st century academic libraries and information technology centres. Further, the author examines the sets of skills required by Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals to survive in the digital-based environments.

INTRODUCTION

Data, information, and knowledge are critical to the functioning of every institution and today's society. Effective management and use of information help institutions or an individual to prosper and develop. More and more, work is becoming knowledge based, and many professionals of all types have responsibility for elements of knowledge and information management. One category of professionals makes data, information, and knowledge its primary focus. These professionals come from various educational backgrounds, including library science, information science, and other disciplines. They work in many different types of organizations and settings and have a variety of job titles and professional labels. For

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8051-6.ch005

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purposes of simplicity and consistency, the term “information professional” will be used in this document to describe them.

Regardless of their job title and professional label, information professionals are connected by their focus on managing and applying the data, information, and knowledge required in their setting. They take a holistic view of the role of information and knowledge in institutions and communities, and they are concerned with information and knowledge through all stages of their life cycle. Library and Information Science (LIS) Professionals central mandate continues to be bringing information seekers and information sources together. This objective remains the same, whether the individual is creating metadata, answering a question at a reference desk, teaching a course, or constructing a new electronic service. The environment within which LIS Professionals execute their core mission, however, has changed dramatically. Researchers are turning away from traditional publishing outlets in favour of emerging community-vetted forums to disseminate data and research findings. Students arrive on campus with their information seeking habits and strategies already formed, and with experience in a host of new sources and new technologies. Transformative technologies and the behaviours they engender have radically changed the creation and distribution of scholarly journals, data and other research outputs (Ross & Sennyey, 2008). Scholars are adapting the ways they teach and the ways they conduct research to a new and ever-changing digital information environment. The academic library is constantly challenged to remain a vital part of this changing environment. A key part in meeting that challenge is to ensure that LIS Professionals roles are transiting to meet the evolving needs. New areas of expertise are developing as are new opportunities to provide innovative, value-added services for the students and researchers in the academic community. Globally, librarians and academic libraries are reassessing the role of the Information Professionals within the academy and these competency profiles provide a framework to help in that reassessment.

The work of the 21st Century Information Professionals continues to be grounded on a solid foundation of professional practice. An Information Professional develops expertise in specific areas, but builds and maintains a strong, well-rounded understanding of the library, the campus, and the larger scholarly communications environment. Interpersonal skills remain as key components of the Information Professional’s arsenal. Traditional skills, like written and verbal communication, are still important – but increasing emphasis is being placed on the capacity to create and nurture partnerships, to develop innovative new programs and to market the library to the campus community. The new LIS professional is expected to be a strong advocate for the Library and its central place in the University’s teaching, learning and research mission.

In the same vein, technologies have created a new service environment that has pushed conventional boundaries much farther, with the calculated risk and opportunities. In this environment, only those academic libraries and information centres that have the ability to deal effectively and proactively to a broad spectrum of contemporary challenges that focus on speed, cost and quality can survive. LIS Professionals working in such libraries need continuous grooming by acquiring core competencies and new skills so that they never become obsolete in this fast-changing environment. For this, they need to shift their focus from traditional library activities of collecting, processing, storing and accessing the information to offer customer-centered automated information services, generated by using online/off-line databases, e-resources, e-journals, networks and consortia, etc. Today, majority of libraries and information centres are using computers and latest ICT tools and techniques for performing various housekeeping jobs such as, acquisition and serial control and also for delivering various computerized services to the users. Technology is reshaping the world of academic libraries at an unimaginable speed.

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