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Librarians' Education in the Age of Knowledge: Consideration of Skills, Methods, and Tools

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Introduction

Librarians and librarianship have been changed by the development and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The use of these technologies has changed our ideas about access and ownership. It has also changed our ideas about librarians' duties and responsibilities. Library users have also been affected by ICT. Their experience with technology has changed their expectations of libraries and librarians. Can a librarian who has not risen to the challenge of ICT meet the needs of users? Today's users still need librarians for a variety of reasons:

- Increasing amount of information and continuous information updating
- Array of media and formats for information
- Lack of confidence in accuracy information
- Need to evaluate information resources according to professional standards
- Scattering of information in different electronic and printed sources
- Users' need for knowledge of different types of information resources and search strategies.

The educational and guiding roles of librarians are more important than ever. Librarians need new and updated education to fulfill their role. This article analyzes the skills needed by librarians and ways of providing education to obtain those skills.

Literature Review

A number of scholars have done research on the educational needs of librarians in Iran, and have also evaluated existing programs. Asadikiya (1997) studied in-service training for librarians in 1994-1995 among nine governmental centers in Tehran. The study found that courses in "classification and organization," "introduction to librarianship," and "filing" were taught most often and considered most important. These centers have also generally offered one or more additional programs in the form of seminars, lectures, and meetings.

Mazinani (1998) assessed the required skills of 333 managers and 915 librarians employed in 424 university libraries and specialty information centers. The results showed that more than half the organizations surveyed use personnel who have educations in fields other than librarianship and information science. About half the librarians and managers had not completed any library education. The respondents pointed to technology changes as the major factor requiring new skills. This study indicated that professional librarians and managers with a BA or higher degree, especially in LIS, need courses in information technology, library software, specialized reference sources and databases, whereas those with associate of arts and lower need training in general and specialized reference, selection and provision of audiovisual material and software, cataloging and organizing audiovisual material, and knowledge of databases and library software.

Teymoorkhani (2003) evaluated short-term in-service educational programs in the education center of the National Library in 1996-2003. This research considered courses offered, quality of classes, educational resources of the center, and behavior of the teachers. The findings showed that most of those surveyed (766 trainees) were satisfied with materials, classes, and teachers. Courses on cataloging, organizing, and reference materials were most welcomed by the trainees.

In 2005, Kalbasi and Abedi did research on the educational needs of librarians of middle and high schools in Isfahan province and on designing in-service training for librarians. The study showed that educational priorities for these librarians were collection building, organization, ethics of librarianship, psychology, sociology, and Internet. Gender and years of service had no effect on their priorities. The librarians surveyed felt little need for computer and Internet access and training, which is of concern.

Specifications for a Knowledge-based Society

Knowledge has been described as “a fluid combination of actual experiences, values, practical-based information and professional findings in an organization which provide a framework for evaluating and increasing new information and experiences. It originates from mind of knower persons and is also applied by their mind. In organizations not only documents and resources, but also most of the current styles, processes, activities and norms have connection with knowledge” (Davenport 1998 cited in Afshar and Nozari, 2006). These elements express specifications for a knowledge-based society.

Society includes people with different experiences, values, and information. Much personal knowledge is hidden in the mind of individuals and out of reach of other people. There are tools and resources for sharing and exchanging knowledge and preventing duplication and repetition of the same mistakes. Knowledge and experience are valuable wealth for developing and improving society. In such a society, the major activities of social, cultural, and economic organizations depend on knowledge.

Role of Librarians in a Knowledge-based Society

Information and knowledge are not the same. An information society is not the same as a knowledge-based society. What is the difference? When librarians deal with information, they deal with subjects, formats, documents, and collections. In a knowledge society, they deal with people as well. Collaboration, critical thinking, initiative, intelligence, and personal and group learning are characteristics of a knowledge society. Knowledge workers become valuable resources. Libraries and librarians are essential in this knowledge atmosphere (Materska, 2005). In the age of knowledge librarians deal with people because knowledge is found in the minds of people. Therefore it is necessary to change a subjective and mental knowledge into an objective and practical one by establishing connections with people and learning and sharing knowledge.

Required Skills for Librarians in the Age of Knowledge

Skills for librarians in the age of knowledge are divided into “professional skills” and “personal skills” by Fatahiyan (2004).

Professional skills include:

- Functional literacy
- Scientific literacy
- Technological literacy
- Information literacy
- Cultural literacy
- Global awareness

Personal skills include insight, creativity, risk-accepting, responsibility, and public relations.

Bailey and Clarke (2001) define knowledge management as “the process of acquisition, generation, filtration and processing of information ... to use ... for decision making, programming and running programs.” Knowledge management includes gathering information from activities of an organization and using it in other activities (Parirokh, 2003). All kinds of media, communication channels and retrieval techniques are used in knowledge management, including professional publications, personal correspondence and conversations, email, databases, and websites (Afshar and Nozari, 2006). As a knowledge-based organization, a library is a treasure of librarians' knowledge and experiences. It is impossible to perform knowledge management in a library without the librarians' cooperation and collaboration. That requires skills in the generation, composition, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. Librarians must be familiar with methods of organizing information and able to use different media for disseminating information. For example they should be able to use of library's e-mail, website and chat possibilities in order to disseminate their organized information to other colleagues and create new knowledge by composing disseminated knowledge. Required knowledge for supporting electronic educational programs of organizations is other skill which librarians need to have. Considering specific aims and users, different organizations hold electronic educational programs and need to librarians help in this regard. Librarians should be familiar with different types of information resources in every field and every format so that they can evaluate various resources and guide specialists of different fields.

That includes using email and chat to disseminate information to colleagues. Skill in supporting electronic educational programs is essential. Librarians should be familiar with information resources in every field and format to evaluate resources and guide specialists in different fields. Materska (2005) states that “libraries can organize seminars and educational programs for knowledge-based organizations and participate in organizational learning models through networks.”

All these skills will be only useful if a knowledge culture is dominant in the library. If librarians pay attention to the value of knowledge and the necessity of sharing and disseminating it in the organization, these skills will be useful. These skills cannot be expected to improve unless librarians accept the rapid changes in their responsibilities that have occurred. In such a new atmosphere those librarians who perceive the importance of acquiring and disseminating knowledge in organizations and have a knowledge-based insight are more successful and useful.

Educational for Librarians in the Age of Knowledge

Intra-Organizational Methods

Informal Relationships

A major portion of organizational knowledge is exchanged through informal relationships. Knowledge transferred this way is not usually recordable or controllable.

Meetings

Meetings can be used for sharing knowledge and creating an opportunity for collaboration and problem-solving.

Organizational publications

A library can create publications for employee continuing education. These publications can contain updated information designed by specialists for the needs of relevant personnel.

Intranet

An intranet is a private computer network which is accessible only to permitted users within an organization (Snyman and Mphidi, 2006). The contents of an Intranet are determined by to the needs and aims of the library. A good intranet can help foster a form learning culture in an organization and provide an opportunity for generating and sharing knowledge.

Extra-Organizational Methods

Library website

The library website is other way for increasing knowledge and awareness. It provides the possibility of exchanging information with other libraries and information centers and establishes communication with users. Since the library website offers news and information about activities and functions of the organization, it can act as a link between the library and society and offer services at a distance.

Some functions of library website that have a direct or indirect influence on librarians' education and development include:

- Access to databases and electronic publications.
- Email communication with other libraries
- Activities of other information centers
- Services offered by other information centers
- Access to OPACs of other libraries
- Access to electronic resources for organizing and disseminating information
- Use of electronic educational programs held by other centers

In Iran, several studies have been done to analyze the library website links. Fattahi and Hasanzadeh (2006) evaluated techniques of organizing information in the websites of university libraries.

In-Service Education

In-service training and education is a good way to help librarians adapt to change and fulfill their role in the age of knowledge. In-service education can be used to improve knowledge, technical and professional skills, and professional behaviors and attitudes. The aims of in-service training include:

- Improving the quality of library services
- Training paraprofessional library employees to perform under supervision of professional librarians
- Updating and familiarizing librarians with relevant scientific matters
- Improving the professional abilities and skills of librarians
- Giving updated LIS knowledge (Asadikiya, 1997).

In-service education varies according to the type, aims, and duties of library personnel. It is important to get input from librarians about their educational needs and the time and method of offering programs. This kind of education should be continuous and include updated information. It can be offered using various methods.

The National Library and Documents Organization of Iran offers educational programs to all personnel and also to other research departments through its education center. The National Library has offered Associate and Bachelors degrees since 1992. It also has a branch that offers in-service training for librarians.

In 2003, the Librarianship Higher Education Center, combined with the National Documents Organization and under the name "Education and Research Management" began to provide short- and long-term continuing education programs (Esfandiyari, 2004).

Congresses, Joint Workshops, and Inter-organizational Visits

Inter-organizational congresses provide the opportunity to exchange knowledge using the particular expertise of each organization. Such congresses prepare the way for projects like resource sharing and interlibrary loan, and also create a collaborative environment among librarians. Libraries with better resources may help equip other libraries by creating agreements among managers during these meetings. By expressing their own experiences in the course of managing organizational knowledge, managers can give guidance to other managers.

Holding joint workshops also provides the opportunity to visit other libraries and information centers, and makes librarians aware of the activities of other organizations, educating them on new methods and tools for improving services.

Remote Education, Electronic Education

Remote education is of the best methods for updating information and skills in the age of knowledge. With this method there is no need to attend class physically. Remote education has provided opportunities for librarians, including:

- Acquiring or updating knowledge and skills in needed areas.
- Improves previous qualifications and specialties with options chosen by learners.
- Increases availability of education and meets the needs of employed learners.
- Learners have flexibility to learn at home or in the workplace.
- Provides learning for those living in remote places
- Provides learning for those who have family or work obligations (Sacchanand, 2002).

English-speaking institutes offer remote librarianship education in printed form, including study resources and textbooks. There are also other media that can be used at home at any time including videorecordings, computerized education, postal and telephone education and consulting, and remote conferencing are also used. Interactive communication with tools like videoconferencing is a growing area, as is use of the Internet as an education medium in general. Educational materials usually produced as a part-time activity by faculty (Sacchanand, 2002).

Iranian librarians use some of these methods for developing their knowledge, but much more is needed. Electronic education is one of the most useful methods of remote education and it is obviously necessary in Iran, especially for Iranian librarians. Using web-based education allows librarians to update their knowledge, improve their connection with the new atmosphere, and change their workplace into a class for continuous education.

Planning Education for Librarians

Schedule. Time is an important factor for planning courses. Working-hours of the library, librarians free time for engaging in courses, and the particular contents are factors in determining the schedule. Repetition of courses is also important

Location. This factor is determined based on the number of applicants and program contents. The location should be convenient and comfortable.

Cost. Budget is other important factor in planning. Instructor, travel, equipment, and local arrangements all involve significant expenditures. The cost is well worth it, because the expenditures for education will be returned by improved services increased user satisfaction.

Equipment and technology. These needs vary according to the number of participants and the content of the course. Proper technology and equipment has a great impact on the quality of the course.

Instructors. Each course requires specialist teachers who are experts in the field. This is very important, given the need of librarians for continuous updating.

Conclusion

The knowledge-based society is a society where the value of knowledge is known and decisions are made and activities performed on the basis of knowledge. In such a society librarians' role is to organize, control, and manage. Traditional methods and thinking cannot meet the needs of library users in a knowledge-based society. Librarians need new skills to deal with the knowledge-based environment. These include knowledge management, information and computer skills, scientific and practical skills, global and cultural awareness, and ability to support educational programs of different organizations.

The development of ICT has brought new methods to librarians' continuing education. The library website, intranet, remote and electronic education, organizational publications, as well as congresses and visiting other organizations are some new methods of librarians' education.

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