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Librarians and their distinctive personality traits in the 21st century digital era

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Abstract

While there is a fair extension of literature in terms of core skills required by librarians but there is rareness of research on competencies that librarians should possess in terms of their personality traits that distinguish them from the rest of the professions. The role of librarians in the 21st century has migrated from information disseminators to the talent searchers, technological experts, innovators, strategy makers, and entrepreneur. Accordingly, they cannot rely on so-called "soft skills" of primitive nature; their skills must have a touch of dynamism. The study being theoretical type describes the personality based traits of the librarians on source of 16 Personality Factor (16PF), a widely researched normal personality inventory i.e., Reasoning, Dominance, Emotionally Stable, Liveliness, Social Boldness, Self-reliance, Vigilance, Privatness, Warmth, Tension Free, Rule-Consciousness, Perfectionism, Sensitiveness, Abstractedness, Apprehensive and Openness to Change.

Keywords: Personality traits, 21st century librarians, modern librarian, 16PF.

Introduction

Is the Librarian a distinct personality? In any occupation for becoming a good professional, it is very essential to match the personality profile of a person with a specific career (**Pressley, Dale, & Kellam, 2014, p.215**). The degree to which the members of a profession have embraced its values is of particular concern to the community as a whole, as well as to the profession itself. "Systematic knowledge of the reasons contributing towards the attitudes of the profession could enhance the services rendered, by facilitating the societal setup, the profession itself and the organizations to reciprocate in a positive manner to such type of attitudes" (**Aranya & Wheeler, 1986**). With separate schools of training and occupation, different jobs require distinctive potency and personality traits required for their successful pursuit (**Dashiell, 1930**). Experts in the field of personality research recommend the detection of personality patterns in order to identify the traits that cause people to be driven and thrive in a profession (**Eley & Eley, 2011**). Desirable personality traits of a professional are determined to the extent a person is able to work under non-preferable work conditions and this factor is highly associated with the emotional stability of a professional. According to **Jefferson (1947)** "in the face of difficulty emotional stability of a person is governed by three responses:

(a) "Facing it," the normal response, involving action;

(b) "Escape", the anxiety reaction;

(c) "Deception," the hysterical reaction of loss of function.

The stable individual faces the difficulty. The neurotic (according to type) takes one or the other course; the introverted person tends to escape by anxiety and the extrovert by deception". Similarly, various competencies that librarianship profession demands are essentially related to personality traits. **Williamson, Pemberton, and Lounsbury (2008)** are of the opinion that

“People-oriented information science specialties do differ from technique-oriented specialties in ways that are to be expected from the associated personality traits”.

The revolutionary technological changes and research transformations along with the major shift in scholarly communication is significantly changing the role of the librarian in the 21st century. The changing paradigms of libraries have made them a non-conventional space and librarians can't be expected to be of stereotypical nature. The librarians today are better managers, they develop new plans of research data management, hosting new platforms for research in collaboration, adoption of new and innovative services, managing and making way for institutional repositories (**Calarco, Schmidt, Kuchma, & Shearer, 2016**). The competencies stated mandatory for librarians in August 2013, by “Association of Research Libraries (ARL), The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), the Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER), and the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) launched the Joint Task Force on Librarians' Competencies in Support of E-Research and Scholarly Communication”(Calarco, Schmidt, Kuchma, & Shearer, 2016).

From that time these authorities are working on identification of rising specialty roles, developing competencies for managing research data, scholarly communication, open access, digital curation, data preservation and support for digital scholarships (**Calarco, Schmidt, Kuchma, & Shearer, 2016**). Another set of skills that can be evaluated on the basis of personality traits of librarians are called as “soft skills” also known as “people skills” (**Williamson & Lohansbury, 2016; Sackett & Walmsley, 2014**). As stated in the professional charter of the Reference and User Services Association (**RUSA, 2013**)

“Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers, soft skills should essentially be associated with interpersonal, social competencies and communication skills when a librarian is to be consulted i.e. librarian should be alert of his user as well should have a deep understanding of his information needs”

On the professional setup, librarians are evaluated on the basis of abilities and skills that fall under the wing of soft skills (**Matteson, Anderson, & Boyden, 2016**). With the rapidly changing nature of the librarianship and the ever-changing environment in which librarians work, librarians have to be at par with the technological revolution of the 21st century. Also, the dynamic learning environment, integration of libraries

and users require vivacious personality traits of librarians. Therefore, it cannot be overlooked without investigating their personality traits. This paper is a theoretical presentation to define personality traits of librarians irrespective of their work position and career path.

Review of Literature

There is a fair extension of literature based on the personality studies of librarians. **Dashiell (1930)** studied the different personalities of people working in different jobs and ranked their personality traits on the basis of tactfulness, good personal appearance, patience, originality, open-mindedness, good memory, leadership, keen observation, industry, honesty, analytical mind, and accuracy. The research concerning the identification of personality types of librarians was carried out by **Scherdin (1994)** which is based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test. Since then the personality factor and the librarian profession has been a subject to various such other studies. The studies of personality are generally based on either (MBTI) testing **Pressley, Dale, & Kellam (2014)** or John Holland's Vocational Typology(1997), according to, which each person can be identified as Realistic, Investigative, Artistic Social, Enterprising, or Conventional type (RIASEC Occupational Themes) (Chen & Simpson, 2015; Sheldon, Holliday, Titova, & Benson, 2019). Further **Morrison (1963)** in his study explains the self-description personality of academic librarians differentiated from each other on the basis of age, gender, type of library and experience of the workplace. According to **Hienstrom (2000)** personality traits and learning are closely related. Conceptual models including **Lounsbury, Park, Sundstrom, Williamson, and Pemberton (2004)** found the key personality traits such as extraversion, optimism, assertiveness, openness, and emotional stability and other rare traits consisting of conscientiousness and tough-mindedness subsist in librarians. **Pemberton, Williamson and Lounsbury (2005)** in their study revealed that the Records and information management professionals had several personality traits that aided them in the making professional and work decisions which are adaptability, assertiveness, autonomy, conscientiousness, customer service orientation, emotional resilience, extraversion, openness, optimism, teamwork, tough-mindedness, visionary or operational style, and work drive.

Williamson, Pemberton and Lounsbury (2008) identified traits measured by personality style inventory traits of person-oriented librarians i.e. adaptability, assertiveness, autonomy, conscientiousness, customer service orientation, emotional resilience, extraversion, openness, optimism, teamwork, tough-mindedness, visionary/operational work style, work drive and differentiated them from technique oriented librarians in terms of logic, impersonal analysis and decision making. A meta-analysis by **(Sackett & Walmsley, 2014)** found that several core personality traits like conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and extraversion are linked to overall job performs and in fact to the key elements of as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive work behavior of the employees.

Williamson and Lounsbury (2016) compared the personality traits of 88 librarians based on the Raymond Cattell's 16 personality factors and found that the majority of the librarians are more apprehensive, cautious, flexible, focused, imaginative, open-minded, respectful, self-reliant, serious, tender-minded, and trusting as well as higher on general reasoning skills than those in the norm group. **Lapidus and King (2018)** examined the personality traits of medical librarians based on their leisure activities and their personality types were found to be artistic, investigative, and conventional with a higher number of introverts based on their personality traits.

Personality traits of librarians in the 21st-century digital era

Librarians in the 21st century are collaborating with the highest leadership institutions, reinventing impact metrics, reengineering services, facilitating inclusivity, focusing cross-disciplinary facilities, and emerging as data savvy's (**Burton, Lyon, Erdmann, & Tijerina, 2018**). It is the personality traits of librarians that should be proficient enough in this digital era so that they can keep up with the changing learning environment and user demands including their own career decisions.

“The Sixteen Personality Factor (16PF) is a comprehensive measure of normal range personality found to be effective in a variety of settings where an in-depth assessment of the whole person is needed” (**Cattell & Mead, 2008, p.136**). The primary aim of the 16PF is to provide a comprehensive and deep understanding of an individual's personality. The applicability of 16PF can be correlated in any discipline including librarianship. The 16 personality factors are dependent on the type of personality and the conditions under which the individual works. The 16 personality factors/traits that should be found among librarians in the 21st-century digital era are:

1) Reasoning: The librarianship profession comes with a greater demand for general reasoning abilities and cognitive progression like librarians should be abstract, fast learners and bright (**ALA, 2009**). The core competencies required by a library science professional which are required for general reasoning among others are listed by **ALA (2009)** are the following

- “Concepts, issues, and methods concerned with the acquisition and disposition of resources, including evaluation.
- Cataloging, metadata, indexing, and classification standards and methods used to organize recorded knowledge and information.
- The application of information, communication, assistive, and related technology and tools.
- The methods of assessing and evaluating the specifications, efficacy, and cost efficiency of technology-based products and services.
- The concepts, principles, and techniques of reference and user services that provide access to relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information to individuals of all ages and groups.

- Learning theories, instructional methods, and achievement measures; and their application in libraries and other information agencies”.

2) Dominance: Librarianship being a social profession is not associated with active dominance. It does not promote dominance, in fact, a librarian is differential, cooperative and avoids conflicts. A librarian is supposed to be a humble personality who avoids being assertive. **Williamson and Lounsbury (2016)** share their opinion about the dominant trait of librarians in the following manner

“These are important traits for the components of a librarian role that calls for a service orientation—to library patrons and other library personnel and coordination, which involves adjusting one’s actions in relation to others’ actions”.

Among various other competencies the **ALA (2009, p.3)** guide for core competencies regarding information and services to individuals regardless of their ages and groups stress on:

- “Of reference and user services that provide access to relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information to individuals of all ages and groups.
- Techniques used to retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources for use by individuals of all ages and groups”.

Overall, a librarians should maintain a respectful personality which also aids him expressing his communication and interpersonal skills, supporting the library in the diversity of groups and communicating "the value of library services, products, and policies to library management, library staff, key stakeholders, user groups and the community”(as cited in **Williamson & Lounsbury, 2016**).

3) Emotional Stability: The emotional stability-instability dimension refers to the variation in individuals' disposition to experience situations gentle or pleasant versus threatening or distressing (**Undheim, Bru, & Murberg, 2015**).Emotions are usually triggered by a stimulus and for librarians, the emotional stimulus can be the narcissist nature of higher authorities or gender bias, economic conditions or the lack of job motivation and appraisals. Librarians should be adaptive and mature they should not be reactive or should act under the control of feelings while doing their duties.

4) Liveliness: Liveliness is usually supported by the personality of the individual being spontaneous, enthusiastic and animated but a librarian by his nature is a composed personality, serious, restrained and introspective. **Williamson and Lounsbury (2016)** share personality traits that are found among librarians in this regard:

- “Self Control —maintaining composure, keeping emotions in check, controlling anger, and avoiding aggressive behavior, even in very difficult situations.

- Concentration and focus on technical matters, such as computer systems, metadata, cataloging, indexing, storage devices, retrieval, scheduling, classification, and a wide range of Internet issues and applications”.

5) Social Boldness: Social boldness of librarians is associated with being venturesome and obtuse. These traits are essentially linked with teaching patrons on topics such as information literacy, library instruction, and technology use, conferring with colleagues, faculty and community members and organizations to conduct informal programs. “The development of constructive and cooperative working relationships with others and maintaining them over time” (**O*NET, 2018**). Social occupations frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others (**O*NET, 2018**). “Librarian should work creatively with others staying open to diverse ideas and perspectives” (**Webjunction, 2014, p.13**).

6) Self-reliant: Self-reliance is defined on the basis of the solitary and individualist nature of the professional. Librarians by profession should be self-reliant and self-sufficient. **O*NET(2018)** provides a comprehensive view of self-reliance in terms of librarianship as “ job requires being reliable, responsible, dependable, fulfilling obligations and independence. Further “job requires developing one's own ways of doing things, guiding oneself with little or no supervision, and depending on oneself to get things done”(O*NET, 2018).

7) Vigilance: the descriptors of high range vigilance are the suspicious and vigilant personality of the librarian. A librarian should be vigilant enough regarding all the activities concerning all the library stakeholders' patrons, staff and policymakers. But trust is the basic requirement for making a healthy environment at any workplace “interactions with the users require trust, respect and focus the needs of an individual” (**Webjunction, 2014, p.10**). The relationship between users and librarians “build trusting relationships with stakeholders and prioritizes communication and dialogue” (**Webjunction, 2014, p.32**).

8) Privatness: This trait is completely in agreement with the core competencies of librarians’ ethics, values and demands protecting the confidentiality issues and privacy concerns (**Web junction, 2014**). Discreetness or privatness of librarian is required while fulfilling patron request, demands, issues of books or user logs for research purpose of scholars, safeguarding user profiles and user privacy concerns. Privatness also reflects in the professionalism of librarians including nice mannerism.

9) Warmth: Librarians should be warm-hearted, caring to others. Librarians should have attention to all the aspect of the library and its users so that everyone should be able to approach him easily particularly during interpersonal communication. Librarians should always maintain a calm, professional mannerism in difficult situations with effective communication techniques (**Webjunction, 2014, p.11**).

10) Rule- Consciousness: Librarians should know the rules of their library by heart and have the potential to abide them. They should not overlook the duties concerned with a profession, the rules regarding patron services or library arrangements, information arrangement rules and rules while dealing with users(**O*Net, 2018**).

11) Perfectionism: Individuals who believe in perfectionism are organized and self-disciplined. All of these qualities are similar to attention to detail and distinct work procedures attributed to librarians. **O*NET (2018)** lists competencies that are in alignment with this trait as

“The ability to arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations”

Perfectionism of librarians in terms of rendering his/her duties, an organization of knowledge in libraries includes ordering of library holdings according to a certain arrangement.

12) Sensitivity: the high descriptors for sensitive personality are aestheticism and tender-mindedness. This trait of the librarians should include the sensitivity of their nature and “actively looking for ways to help people” (**O*NET, 2018**).

13) Abstractedness: The mind of librarian should be abstract, imaginative and should have the fluency of ideas. “The ability to come up with a number of ideas about a topic the number of ideas is important, not their quality, correctness, or creativity” (**O*NET, 2018**).The librarian should “promote the importance of ongoing professional learning and create and support opportunities to learn and to implement ideas” (**Webjunction, 2014, p.34**).

14) Apprehension: Apprehensiveness of a person is associated with self-doubt, worry, and nervousness. In such situations, librarians should “demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, reason effectively, hone critical thinking skill, deduce effective arguments, reflect critically on learning experiences, solve problems in both conventional and innovative ways and ask questions that clarify different points of view”(**Webjunction, 2014, p.35-36**).

15) Tension: Tension in terms of professionalism is a condition where a person is held between two or more choices that are acting opposite to each other. The descriptors of tension may include stress. If there are stress and tension like situation in the library atmosphere it depends on the emotional state of the person and his tendency to work in such conditions. Such conditions require librarians to “identify complex problems, review related information to develop & evaluate options and implement solutions” (**O*NET, 2018**).

16) Openness to change: The integration of technologies and libraries is changing the ways libraries process, organize, store and disseminate information. With the changing user needs and demands of users the librarianship profession requires continues growth and revolution. **Webjunction (2014)** lists the importance of openness to change in this way

“Change is the only constant and continuous learning at the central library of the library culture. The individuals who thrive in this environment embrace ongoing change and are focused not only on the present but also on the future” (p.12).

The librarianship job requires adaptability to ongoing changes and flexibility (**O*NET, 2018**).

ALA (2009) list openness to change in its core competencies of librarianship and suggest

“The necessity of continuing professional development of practitioners in libraries and other information agencies and technical knowledge and skills. The principles and techniques are necessary to identify and analyze emerging technologies and innovations in order to recognize and implement relevant technological improvements” (p.3-p.4).

Similarly OCLC’s **Webjunction (2014)** provides a comprehensive list for librarianship professionals for developing technological competencies which include

- “Embraces and adapts to change with curiosity and enthusiasm.
- Adapt to varied role and job responsibilities, schedules and contexts.
- Works effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing proprieties.
- Anticipates future trend and recommends future changes the direction of the organization goals.
- Explores and adopts new technologies for their potential to deliver new ideas, products, and services.
- Recommends and takes risks for implementation of change.
- Anticipates change resistant behavior (fear, negativity, conflict, complacency) and applies strategies to overcome it”(p.13).

Overall embracing the change should be the motto of the librarian’s personality and are supposed to be promoted on the ground level in order to be relevant in the 21st-century digital era.

Conclusion

Different professional occupations require different personality traits and librarianship is no exception to this. The emerging challenges in the librarianship are the witness to the fact that this job is evolving continuously. These being the reason librarians have to evolve their personality traits in order to validate their presence in the 21st-century digital era. The use of new technologies in librarianship plays a key role in the development of a librarian as an information professional and information organizer. The mannerism by which librarians handle stress, emotions, change, overcome every problem with rational thinking and communicate to social groups with boldness is very much dependent on their personality traits. This paper presents a brief description of the personality traits that librarians should possess in the 21st-century digital era. The strategies will differ from one organization to other in which the librarians are serving as the library

job can be very demanding there is always a search for “Unicorn Librarian – that magical creature who can be all things to all people” (as cited in, Calarco, Schmidt Kuchma, & Shearer, 2016). Therefore the personality traits as listed by the 16PF scale are essential for librarians to be in tune with the librarianship goals and personal development. These 16 personality traits are indispensable for librarians because their changing roles have forced them to redefine their goals in terms of addressing user needs and use advanced technological skills in modern libraries (Vassilakak & Papaconstantinou, 2015). Thus, when libraries are smart librarians have no other alternative.

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