

Invited Speech

Transforming Academic Librarians' Skills and Competencies to Facilitate Millennial Learners Effectively



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The modern era we live in has been defined as an 'era of knowledge' and the society is defined as the 'knowledge society' and according to some arguments the 'information society', where information is the base for the knowledge creation. The drive of the knowledge society, in which the knowledge is the base for intellectual capital, has taken sharp bends making the social life complex and paving the way to emergence of new social identities. As members of this society librarians engage in knowledge transactions in social space, business space, citizen charters and in all aspects of environment related actions. The modern society also is driven towards different debatable discourses such as intellectual capital, openness of knowledge and open science, copyright and licensing systems of intellectual capital, open culture, cyberspace, digital living, technology adoption in societal activities which had created a subject area called informatics, unconventional science streams etc. In the industrial economy, physical capital (land, equipment, buildings) and financial capital were the primary factors of production and the sources of wealth. In the knowledge economy, knowledge or intellectual capital is the primary factor of production and the main source of wealth generation. The technological advancements as the main driver of the information society have been created strong impact over the all aspects of social living. The information sector as the main impact area of this transformation and competencies of librarians as its main stake holder is being seriously challenged. The situation requires critical insight into the competencies of academic librarians where higher education plays exceedingly important role in the knowledge society. Universities are the platforms where research based knowledge is generated, therefore impact of knowledge society over the universities as higher seats of learning is significant in shaping the economy, technology and social life. Surrounded by this fast growing landscape, new identities emerge in higher education sector with new functionalities and mandates where the academic librarianship also has been challenged to be converted into a new identity with newly defined set of skills and competencies. Among the competencies *Intellectual Capital Assets* of academic librarians need to be identified very clearly.

It is envisaged that the knowledge economy enables human capital development through open and e-learning by reaching learners across borders and education and skill building became a necessity to be an active citizen of the modern society. It is also expected that the landscape of knowledge society paves the way to promote lifelong learning through modern technologies and community empowerment with enabling education systems. The millennial user demand information at the instant of the information need is generated and their behavior is not only for the information acquisition but for knowledge elicitation, knowledge exchange, knowledge synthesis and regeneration etc.

Hence the information provision sphere has changed towards a different angle, as examples; acquisition of information converted to knowledge acquisition, information use is converted to knowledge utilization and knowledge exchange, information dissemination is transformed to access to knowledge, information literacy education had transformed to learning to learn skills, information searching skills transformed to knowledge discovery, bibliographic information leads to full text through open access licenses etc. Thus transforming information provision to knowledge facilitation is to be achieved efficiently and meaningfully by the librarians.

In this setup we as academic librarians need to understand that the e-resources and digitised resources are prime commodities we are to deal with and virtual channels are the dissemination methodology to reach the millennial client. On top of managing these commodities universities expect different contribution from librarians in facilitating the knowledge for their teachers and learners and researchers. The question is how the academic librarians are going to harness themselves in providing these challenging services and facilitation expected by the clients in the higher education sphere. It is also important how effectively the librarians contribute to build-up the graduate profile of millennia expected by the university.

Skills needed by the knowledge society

According to the clarification extended at the two day global summit on 'One Globe Forum' in 2017, held in Delhi, it was communicated that innovation, education, skill development, research, and science are the key drivers of a knowledge society, hence education is in paramount importance in modern society. The Pearson's Learning Curve published in 2015 indicates 8 learning skills need by the modern learner; Leadership, digital literacy, communication, emotional intelligence, entrepreneurship, global citizenship, problem solving and team working.

According to the K-Sam compliance model of the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka expedited in the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (2015) embraces set of skills that are expected from a graduate to develop during the period of undergraduate (UG) study. After completion of the UG study programme the graduate profile is expected to confirm on four competencies.

I quote, SLQF (2015), "Knowledge: *what the qualification holders know*, Skills: *what the qualification holders can do*, Attitudes, values, professionalism and vision for life: *how the qualification holders think and behave*, Mind-set and Paradigm: *how the qualification holders perceive the world*". These set of core competencies were further broken down into 12 skills. (See figure 1)

learning outcomes to get the SLQF –KSAM compliance for a degree programme. In attaining these learning outcomes how the academic librarians can align their competencies to facilitate to build up intellectual assets of the learners?

Before obtaining financial capital for providing different learning resources to learners, before obtaining many modern modulated furniture, obtaining access to expensive databases, having robust technologies , fast access systems and Wi-Fi installed we need our academic librarians to get prepared to face the challenge and elicit the opportunity embedded in the challenge itself. Therefore it is necessary to discuss about the issue where the academic librarians already have their qualifications achieved but how can they be assertive than we superficially assumed.

When we talk about knowledge facilitation, it cannot simply be applied. According to Choo (1998) and Dixon (2000) the fact is a critical point for libraries as it addresses the difference between knowledge as a resource and knowledge in action which means, knowledge utilization. That includes, transfers, exchanges, validation, invalidation, and so on. Making use of knowledge resources is a skill which will be highly valued in the knowledge society. SLQF (2015) p. 14

1. Subject / Theoretical Knowledge	Independent learning activities, interactive lectures, team-based learning, and other small group activities
2. Practical Knowledge and Application	Problem-based learning, team-based learning, inquiry-based learning, practical classes, laboratory sessions, role play
3. Communication	Student presentations, role play, debates, dramas
4. Teamwork and Leadership	Group projects, industrial training, small group learning; e.g. problem-based learning, games
5. Creativity and Problem Solving	Assignments, projects, small group learning activities; e.g. problem-based learning
6. Managerial and Entrepreneurship	Group projects, industrial training, small group learning; e.g. problem-based learning, games, simulated training, industrial (workplace-based) training
7. Information Usage and Management	Assignments, presentations, projects, case studies
8. Networking and Social Skills	Student presentations, role-play, debates, dramas
9. Adaptability and Flexibility	Group projects, industrial training, small group learning; e.g. problem-based learning, role plays, portfolios
10. Attitudes, Values and Professionalism	Group projects, industrial training, small group learning; e.g. problem-based learning, role play, portfolios
11. Vision for Life	Portfolios, reflective practice
12. Updating Self/ Lifelong Learning	Portfolios, reflective

It is expected that all the study programmes, courses and study units of degree programmes in universities and higher education institutions are to comply with these learning outcomes. All the academic programmes are also expected to map the programme outcomes with the SLQF

I quote Alvesson, 2001, “..Those who know how to do this are called knowledge facilitators. Knowledge facilitators help a group of people to create, interpret, articulate, express, and tell stories about knowledge in all of its forms. Their role, in a library of the future and in the knowledge society of the future, aims to orchestrate the distribution of knowledge. The knowledge facilitator’s role is to create arenas and opportunities for sharing knowledge. This is a new role in knowledge commerce and knowledge markets..”.

As mentioned above the knowledge society presents new opportunities for librarians to create new identity within the academic scope we belong to. One prominent opportunity for them is to leverage their “Intellectual Capital Assets” to maintain professionalism on par with other academicians, to contribute to corporate culture of the university and to serve the millennial learner effectively and meaningfully. Hence intellectual capital is the most illustrious asset that need to be inculcated by the academic librarians.

Intellectual capital assets of librarians

When dealing with the intellectual capital (IC) assets of librarians, an introduction is necessary as to what is the intellectual capital. Intellectual capital is the knowledge that produces or creates value to a product or service. As Andriessen (2004) and Amidon et.al. (2005) define, the intellectual capital contain three aspects; a) human capital :tacit knowledge and skills, and attitudes b) structural capital : culture, procedural and explicit knowledge, and c) relational capital : communication, knowledge and social networks, as well as corporate reputation. It is an asset that is valued on top of any other tangible asset in the knowledge society. In academic arena there are two levels of competitive IC assets;

1. Organizational capital assets of the higher education institution

An organization’s intellectual capital includes its employees’ knowledge, brainpower, know-how, and processes, as well as their ability to continuously improve those processes. In an academic institution most prominent employee category is the academic and academic support staff, where non academic administrative staff too plays an important role in administrating structural and procedural functions to manage the organization in its corporate status.

2. Individual capital assets – intellectual assets belong to each and every individual in the institution ; academics/ researchers/students who belong to the institution

Intellectual capital of the individuals and communities is the wealth of the organization to build up the intellectual capital of the organization. In this era knowledge and intellectual capital will be the most important assets an organization can possess. The IC assets are intangible competencies rather than a mixture of tacit and explicit knowledge. The intellectual competencies inculcated by a librarian contain higher value than the physical assets and variety of resources displayed and owned by a library. This will be an acceptable fact for librarians as well as for Top 10 reputed companies in the country as selected by Business Today. Hence in the academic sphere intellectual capital has higher value than the social capital assets, because the primary value of a library in the knowledge society has a shift from the library’s resource collections to librarians’ intellectual

capital assets. Hence cost incurred in propagation of IC among librarian is to be treated as an investment and not as a cost heading in the institutional training budget as their intellectual growth has a prime importance with regard how the academic libraries operated and how they are aligned with the learning culture of the university in new knowledge environment.

Bedford et.al. (Bedford,2015, *page 84-85*) had mentioned certain integrated Intellectual Capital Skills worth referring in focus of academic librarians engagement in facilitating learners. Following includes Bedford's skills redefined and added the other skills that I have observed during my engagement as an academic librarian according to the learning culture of our academic environment.

- **Tacit Knowledge** (achieved by working in the subject area and in library sector) – A personal knowledge, emotional intelligence gained over the years, intangible, cannot transfer, cannot teach and cannot trained someone upon. However threaded as a personal skill: Eg: knowledge of information resources, way of answering queries, knowledge of subject domains, knowledge of information behaviors, comprehension of knowledge in compiling information products, knowledge about publishing industry, organizing any type of material, utilization of technologies for a purpose etc.
- **Intellectual Skills** - A learned skill and most important for librarian who can propagate within him/herself but different from person to person upon the intellectual capacity and the skill that may not be transferred to another person fully: research skills, analytical skills, critical thinking skills, knowledge compilation (digital and web based), coaching and mentoring skills, teaching and training skills, presentation of knowledge, communication skills, facilitation and negotiation skills, advocacy skills, interviewing skills, knowledge sharing in academic forums with other academicians, knowledge elicitation (very important skill for an academic librarian), strong organizational skills etc.
- **Professional Attitude** – is very important towards attaining professional dynamism as well as in planning and implementing services. Attitude of the librarian has a prime importance in shaping the total library service: Attributes of attitude - adaptability, advocacy, sharing experience and knowledge, keenness for continuous learning, inclination towards creativity, collaborative attitude, mentoring, self-motivation, self-reflection and review, service attitude, situational learning approach, social intelligence, visioning, willingness to work in teams, delegation of power, empowerment and training of work teams (senior staff as well as subordinate staff) dedicate toward achieving an outcome etc.
- **Explicit Knowledge** – knowledge and skills gained through recorded information. Anybody in the service can inculcate this skill level. Collection development policies, collection guides, information standards, bibliometrics/scientometrics, ranking systems, rules, regulations, by laws, relevant acts and ordinances etc. come into this category. It is again the personal interest to inculcate the knowledge within oneself.
- **Procedural Knowledge** – Competency and skill gained by studying, analysing and by using procedures: Acquisitions and selection knowledge, budgeting, cataloguing and using classification systems, facilities management knowledge, information discovery strategies relating to institutional environment, using circulars and procedures in procurement process, copyright clearance issues, record management procedures in the institution etc.

- **Cultural awareness** – A strong factor for librarian’s success. the skill need to be developed in relation to the organizational culture. This may be different from higher education institution to institution depending on the locality, community and subject streams specialised. The librarian should absorb, adopt and respect the cultural values of that particular academic environment effectively. Open mindedness for specific behaviours, practices, norms, recognition of personal identities, rituals and practising accordingly is highly important. The librarian need to be impartial on religions, ethnicity, social status etc. in this purview the librarian can be a builder strong library culture within the community culture of the university.
- **Networked professionally** – a professional competency that need to be developed, maintained and enhances by a professional librarian: memberships in professional associations (Associatships, Fellowships) , author networks, publisher networks, LIS community, public sector community networks, social networks, subject related networks, community outreach groups, technology supportive groups, international professional network, Agreements and MoUs with other reputed foreign university libraries.
- **The reputation** – reputation of the individual also counts in this regard business relationships of the individuals, connections to civic organizations, connections to public sector agencies and departments, affiliations to other professional associations (eg: OPA, Royal Asiatic Society etc. professional reputation to promote by engaging in scholarly work, publishing, presenting, teaching, organizing scholarly events, initiating networks and forums, ability to contribute constructively in professional forums, our reach activities such community programmes, school level programmes, disadvantaged communities (prison, differently able, disaster affected, etc.).
- **Dealing with new concepts** – the librarians should be vigilant and be thorough about upspringing concepts such as Openness (an overarching concept;open access, open licenses, open science, open research, open data, open educational resources, massive open online courses), collaborative learning systems, adult learning, flexible entry levels to higher education, lifelong learning etc.

Conclusion

A crucial attribute of knowledge society is an extraordinary increase of complexity of knowledge which affects the information landscape tremendously. Beside the ever developing cyberspace and digital living the amount of information cannot be copied up by individuals but need to be facilitated by the institutions according to the institutional strategic plan where the academic librarians are placed in a strategic position within the action plan. Within ever expanding horizons of higher education and globalization of distribution of knowledge the role of academic librarians is shifting from custodians of collections and structures but to utilize unused mental and intellectual potential in facilitating millennial environment of learning.

The knowledge society and economy brings up transformations in all aspects of modern life style that change how libraries work and what they have to do. The most important change will be the increased value of librarians’ intellectual capital assets and importance of librarians will be much more proliferated with facilitation role and knowledge mediating role than ever. Librarians should harness for new roles demanded by the knowledge society, not just by increasing their technology skills and systems skills but by investing in and inculcating their intellectual capital assets. Library

science professionals should be continuous learners, effective trainers, good teachers, humanitarians and mentors, accommodatable facilitators, builders of dynamic capabilities of the library staff regardless the positions. Library and information science curricula should include theory and practice components to prepare future librarians on intellectual capital competencies. Intellectual and behavioural competencies mentioned above should be inculcated on par with functional and operational competencies. Therefore a fundamental change in attitude is the necessity of the day for development our own intellectual capital assets and we must see ourselves as a new social identity in the knowledge society within our own academic culture.