Librarian's Skills and Qualifications in a Modern Informational Environment

Purpose
The aim of the research is to investigate the qualifications and the skills of the librarian's profession as they are impressed through the job ads.

Design/methodology/approach
200 job advertisements were studied from UK, Canada, Australia and the U.S.A. in 2006 and 2007. The data was derived from known websites.

Findings
38 skills and qualifications were identified through the job ads. Their percentage of appearance was recorded and this constitutes the basic element for the final findings of this research.

Research limitations/implications
The research restricted in ads was emanated from developed countries' websites. This methodology records the ideal model of a librarian.

Originality/value
This research, like others, confirms the meaning of the traditional library science in the modern informational environment.

Keywords: Librarians, Skills, Qualifications, Library Science

Introduction

The appearance of the Internet and the World Wide Web, as a final stage of an evolution (or revolution?) started many decades ago with the introduction of computers and network technologies, has created a new information and social environment, radically different from the functional environment of the traditional library. This fact has led to a considerable research and discussion concerning the form, the role, the position and the functions of the social institutions known as «libraries» within this new context. At the same time, and as it might be expected, another discussion is under way, concerning what may be considered as the human parallel of the institution, that is the librarian or the information professional that runs the library. This discussion concerns many aspects and problems of the information professional in the new environment and especially the types, the education needed, the skills and qualifications required, the extent to which the profession should or will change etc. In

an attempt to determine and understand these changes and, mainly, to analyze the data that will lead the profession to the new century, several works with various types of predictions, analyses and proposals regarding the future of the profession have been published.

A brief overview of the relevant literature follows so that the findings of our research are considered in the suitable context.

According to these works, thus, the modern librarian should be a professional that possesses standards and values that function effectively and smoothly in a technological environment. He fully understands and knows sufficiently the conventional library practices. He constantly wishes to change, to develop and to learn. He adapts easily in a permanently altered environment of information, he has experience in education and possess a considerable amount of communication skills (**Salter,** 2003). His survival will be ensured by the fundamentals of his science and the skills and roles that emerge from them. The role of intermediate and instructor will still be essentials and librarian will focus into helping the user identify the information he needs and providing tools for evaluation and use (**Sharp**, 2000).

Audunson [et. al., 2003] believes that the modern academic courses in LIS should aim to create the "complete librarian", while **Fourie** (2004) points out that the education should not only focus on the technical matters of Library Science, such as the creation of a digital library, but should also be orientated towards the development of survival and affective skills. Concerning the education side of the problem **Missingham** (2006**)** suggests that in the modern environment procedures and practices in education should convergence with those found in an actual working environment**.**

Abram (1999**)** states that librarians must emphasize in the learning environment they create themselves and not solely to technology. He also demonstrates ten tendencies of the contemporary environment of information that influence librarian's function and role such as: virtual is a place not a format, communities of interest are no longer bounded by geography and every profession's relevance is in question. According to him, one of the most important future roles is that of information councelor. Identification of the most important issues that affect – within the modern environment – the behaviour and attitudes of every librarian is also accomplished by **Melchionda** (2007). Technostress and technophobia, lack of standardisation and quality, competition with search engines and commercial tools are few of the factors that influence the role of librarian in the modern environment.

An important issue should be the examination of the real cause of changes in the librarian's profession, regardless of time frame, and through a more realistic point of view. In fact, the goals of our profession are still the same and they are affected from the expectations of the market, the working environment and ethics. Specialization or hybridization should not pose a dilemma, since the profession must be considered as a whole set that is constantly changing and revised (**Agha**, 2001**).** Regarding the "hybridization" of our profession, **Biddiscombe** (2001) believes that the hybrid library poses the need for "hybrid" information professionals. Although it's difficult for one person to acquire a large number of skills, he states that every modern librarian must be able to recognise informational needs, manage users and encourage people with different skills to work in the same team. Such "hybrid" teams will play an important role as far as management of future information systems is concerned.

Librarians should also focus on evolving their Internet skills and four basic points regarding that evolution should be mediation and assistance, teaching and training, partnerships, design and production (**Croud** [et. al], 2000). Also, according to **Pace** (2002) every online library experience should be consisted of quality, expertise, integrity and longevity.

Concerning the skills needed by a modern librarian, **Fisher** (2004) analyzes a set of skills and points out that at the same time with the traditional roles, the librarian will create organizational information management systems, will use the techniques of Information Architect, will manage access in digital documents and will support every possible learning procedure. A profile of skills and qualification is also demonstrated by **Partridge** and **Hallam** (2004), according to which qualifications are divided into technical and generic ones. **Ashcroft** (2004) identifies six basic skill categories and those are professional, marketing and promotion, evaluation, communication – negotiation – collaboration, censorship and personal transferable skills. In addition, **Marion** (2001) conducted a research on job advertisements and she concluded that a new category of "digital librarian" is not yet necessary and library is still a part of an evolving automated environment, rather than of a digital one. She also found communication skills to be the most wanted qualification. **Kwasik**'s (2002) analysis on job ads regarding skills for serials librarians found communication skills to be the second most desired qualification (second only to LIS degree). In general, she found traditional skills to be more desired than then ones originating from the digital world (such as metadata standards and markup languages).

The importance of ICT skills is underlined by **Biddiscombe** (2001) as he believes are necessary for any learning, educational or research procedure in a (virtual) learning environment, but at the same time, information specialists should maintain some of their traditional skills and qualifications. **Steele** and **Guha** (1998) also believe that ICT skills, along with communication and administration ones will be essential for every modern librarian. They also state that the use of many terms in order to describe the new librarian is the result of the uncertainty of what the role of a librarian should be.

Concerning the roles served by a modern librarian, **Fourie**'s (2004) literature survey identified several roles such as publishing, negotiating, teaching, advising, retrieving – researching and archival management. In addition, she suggested three more: environmental scanning, active identification of new niche markets and action research. Moreover, **England** (1994) states that the librarian will function as researcher, organizer and publisher, member of the digital library design team, teacher and consultant, while **Garrod** (2001) analyzes seven roles for a modern librarian, such as metadata specialist, marketing – public relations and learning facilitator. Finally, **Nageswara and Babu**'s (2001) research reflects some of the most current trends in LIS as impressed through the roles they identify**;** search intermediary, facilitator, trainer – educator, web site builder – publisher, researcher, interface designer, knowledge manager, shifter of information resources.

Research

200 job advertisements were studied from UK, Canada, Australia and the U.S.A. in 2006 and 2007[1]. The aim of the research is to have the qualifications and the skills of librarian's profession investigated, as they are impressed through the job ads. The elements of this research – substantially the qualifications and skills that the libraries ask for – were used so that a basic profile for a modern librarian would be created, which presents the skills through classes and subclasses[2]. The job ads concern positions in various types of libraries and their departments[3].

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[1] The data derived from the following websites: *United Kingdom Job Search* (http://jobsearch.monster.co.uk), *Jobsite* (http://www.jobsite.co.uk), *LisJobNet* (http://www.lisjobnet.com), *Jobs.ac.uk* (http://www.jobs.ac.uk), *BayNet* (http://www.baynetlibs.org), *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (http://chronicle.com), *LISjobs.com* (http://lisjobs.com), *ALIA* (http://alia.org.au), *CLA* (http://cla.ca), *ALA* (http://ala.org).

[2] It is pointed out that the categorization of qualifications and skills is a process that in certain cases "requires" the choice of a certain category, even if a qualification would suit in more than one. The probable identification of a qualification to more than one category is the result of the complexity of internal relation of the fields of qualifications, as to the complexity of the role of a modern librarian.

³ 38% of the ads regarded the technical services, 31.5% the reference services and 30.5% both or didn't specify. 50 advertisements were studied from each country.

Table of skills

Skills - Qualifications	Percentage
Degree in LIS	82%
Working experience	68%
Communication skills	65%
Collection development - management	53%
Service orientation	38%
Working in a team	38%
Administration – organizational skills	36%
Knowledge of current developments in LIS	32%
User education	30%
Digital collection development - management	27%
Use of software applications	27%
Library automated systems	25%
Creation – management of web pages	25%
Personal traits	22%
Knowledge of library's subject content	21%
Working alone	20%
Markup languages	16%
Databases	13%
Programming languages	12%
Use of p/c	12%
Sets priorities	11%
Networks	11%
Program management	10%
Problem solving	10%
Foreign languages	10%
Development of personal career	9%
Attention to detail	8%
Metadata	7%
Serials collections management	6%
Knowledge of current developments in ICT	6%
Marketing	5%
Critical thinking	5%
Multimedia	5%
Alliances - Consortia	4%
Administration experience	3%
Digitazion	2%
Typing	1%

Table 1. Skills and qualifications identified through job advertisements.

Findings

The findings of this research are:

➢ 38 skills and qualifications were identified through the job ads. Their percentage of appearance was recorded and it's the basic element for the final findings of this research.

➢ Degree in LIS and working experience skills were expected to be the ones with the highest percentage, and should be considered "de facto" for all librarians, without any further value into this research's findings.

➢ Communication skill appears in over 60% of the ads and should be considered a desirable skill for every modern librarian. We can assume that this need for communication skills, no matter if the librarian works in technical or public services, comes from the rapid development of the Web and the increase of possible ways and means of communication among LIS professionals and the librarian and the user.

➢ Development of digital collections skill appears in the 10th place. The "equivalent" originating from the traditional environment appears in twice as many advertisements. This finding is an important one regarding the need for development of a completely new set of skills that will originate from the digital world. Instead, it is concluded that the skills that the librarian has developed for decades and regard the knowledge and use of traditional library systems are still important.

➢ Interpersonal skills, in general, have a high percentage of appearance in the job ads.

➢ The need for administrative – organizational skills underlines that a modern librarian should have the ability to manage and organize weather it is about the library and its departments or research groups and projects.

➢ ICT skills often have a higher percentage than the "digital skills". Although ICT skills have a relatively low percentage, we can expect that this will change in the future. General use of software and the knowledge of creating and maintaining web pages are two of the most desirable skills in this category.

➢ Skills related with the management and use of digital content have a small demand and that was an interesting finding. Especially when compared with the "traditional" skills we can conclude that, at the time being, professional practice dismisses the need for a new category, the "digital librarian".

➢ Probably the most important aspect of professional development and advancement for the modern librarian is adaptation of current skills in new practices and motivation in acquiring new skills when needed.

➢ The qualifications and the personal skills a librarian must possess does not change according to the developments in technology, but goes along with the change in organisational and administrative structure of information services.

➢ Qualifications for a modern librarian are a mix of old and new ones and that synthesis derives from the need in organising documents and information in a hybrid environment.

➢ Social skills are important not only for professionals working in public services, but should be considered a distinct category of skills, along with professional skills, important for every modern LIS professional.

Profile

There has been an analysis in two major categories: professional and general skills. As professional are comprehended the skills that are directly interwoven with the working practices, the use of professional standards and the daily activity of the librarian regarding various technical services. In this category are included the practices of traditional librarianship, new tendencies that prevail in the management of digital content, the general ICT skills and, finally, various subclasses of general administrative and educational type.

In the category of general skills in which it would, rather, be more appropriate the term social skills, are included all those abilities that the librarian develops daily through his working environment without, however, being related directly with his daily occupation with activities such as cataloguing.

Basic Profile of Skills, Qualifications and Qualities for a Modern Librarian

Professional Skills

Process – Management of conventional materials
- Automated library systems
- Collection development
- Collection management
- Experience in selecting, acquiring and processing conventional material
- Serials collection management

Process – Management of digital materials
- Metadata tools
- Design and management of databases
- Evaluation of Internet informational materials, sources and services
- Collection Development
- Multimedia
- Digitalization
- Electronic Publishing

ICT skills
- Markup languages
- Design, creation and maintenance of webpages
- Technical knowledge in computers
- Use of software applications (O/S, Office etc.)
- Distance education software
- Programming languages
- Networks
- Ability to compare software, hardware and technologies

Administrative – Organizational skills
- Library facilities management
- Financial resources management
- Human resources management and evaluation
- Evaluation of library services
- Interviewing skills
- Marketing
- Projects management
- Understanding organizational structure

Education
- LIS degree
- Participation in conferences - seminars
- Participation in library associations – organizations
- User education – Online education
- Typing
- Foreign languages

Generic (Social) Skills

Personal traits
- Individual talents
- Critical thinking
- Attention to detail
- Problem solving
- Self marketing
- Ethics
- Business skills

Interpersonal skills
- Working in a team
- Communications skills
- Ability to work alone
- Understanding user demands and informational needs
- Leadership
- Service Orientation
- Participation – Development of library consortia

Experience
- Reference experience
- Knowledge of library's subject content
- Ability to accept change
- Administration experience
- Prioritize work
- Insight in transferring traditional operations in an online environment

Lifelong learning – Continuing education
- Planning personal career
- Ability to learn constantly
- Knowledge of current developments in LIS
- Knowledge of current developments in ICT

Table 2. Profile of skills and qualifications

The belief that was expressed in various cases, often by persons that did not originate from the traditional librarianship, for the necessity of developing a new set of qualifications and skills, directly and uniquely originating from the digital world, is erroneous. Even though the

librarians are facing challenges for new and emerging skills, the most important aspect of this change is to be able to adapt the existing skills - many of which are traditional librarianship skills - and the ability to remain flexible in a working environment that is constantly changing. Thus, we can talk not only about a new set of skills and qualifications, but, rather, about the suitable mentalities that should be developed and be adapted in the working culture (**Ashcroft**, 2004). The librarians need to maintain those skills that gave them respect in the traditional environment and they should, simultaneously, continue being open in new ideas, being interested to approach user needs and develop all those new skills they need, in order to ensure access to information (**Biddiscombe**, 2001). And we must keep in mind that the state of the evolving librarian is not a new condition, but rather a continuation of what librarians have always done (**Benson** and **Favini,** 2006).

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