

# Leadership Competencies for Change Management in Libraries : Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

*This paper is based on the assumption that leading and managing change is not a luxury; rather it is a necessity for the library and information professionals (LIPs) in the networked environment. If LIPs fail to take cognizance of the external and internal pressures on libraries to change, then they will suffer the destiny of dinosaurs. LIPs and libraries are at the crossroads. There is a fierce competition from other information providers and companies like Google. Information is available round the clock and unlike human beings; the Internet remains wide awake 24x7. The ascent information and communication technology (ICT), information and knowledge must be used for the ascent of man across globe. At this defining moment of history, LIPs are required to make critical analysis of the history of future. Otherwise, other stakeholders in the information chain will take the role away from them. LIPs must learn to lead and manage change to identify themselves with the end-users across frontiers. This paper highlights various leadership competencies needed to manage change in libraries, as well as underlines a few challenges and opportunities in the context of change management.*

**Keywords:** *Change management, Leadership competencies, Generational change, Adaptive Change, Conflict and resistance, Nature of change, Motivation and change*

## Nature of Change

It is a well known fact that change is the only constant. But more important is the nature of change, which is discontinuous and unpredictable. The ICT and the Internet have made a profound impact on the structure and functioning of different types of libraries. But the mission of all types of libraries, i.e. the preservation of and access to our documentary heritage is intact. Only the format of libraries and our response to external and internal pressures is changing. There is a paradigm shift from standalone libraries to library and information networks; from printed publication to digital documents; from ownership to access; from just-in-case to just-in-time; from 9x5 to 24x7; from intermediation to disintermediation; and from library

as a place to library as a concept. Besides technological changes, libraries are faced with educational, social, economical, and cultural changes. The most striking impact on libraries has been that of the technological and fiscal changes. LIPs are faced with a diametrically opposite situation with growing electronic resources on the one hand and declining budgets on the other. The end-user expectations are growing and the prices of publications are also increasing. But we cannot close our libraries as social institutions whose historical mandate is to preserve the past, to serve the present, and to facilitate to build the sustainable future of peoples and nations. The ascent of information and ICT must lead to the ascent of man by taking him to the next level of consciousness. That is only possible by developing independent learning and critical thinking skills among the LIPs, the library users, and other stakeholders across frontiers. In fact, it is a defining moment in the history of library as a social institution. If libraries and librarians are to be a face in the crowd of information providers, they will have to make a critical analysis of the history of the future. Hardly matters, if it is a digital library, virtual library, or hybrid library; the word library as a metaphor of memory of mankind refuses to recline into oblivion. The message is crystal clear, i.e. the future of library as a social institution is very bright. The only thing is that the role of libraries and LIPs is expanding. In the post-industrial society, library is supposed to become a local gateway to world's knowledge and information, and LIPs are required to open their closed mind-sets to facilitate globalization of the indigenous knowledge and information. They are also required to develop their leadership competencies for leading and managing change in libraries.

## LIPs Response to Change

As already stated, there is a shift from analog paradigm to digital paradigm. Instead of ownership of documents in libraries, we are buying access for the

information seekers. Shared subscription via library consortia, institutional and knowledge repositories, open access archives, regional library networks, such as *The European Library* are strategic responses of library and information professionals across the globe. But we must remember that change is of two types, i.e. generational change and adaptive change. The above said change mechanisms are the result of collective wisdom and leadership. But this wisdom and leadership is not commonplace, particularly in the academic libraries. In majority of the cases positions of librarians are either lying vacant or professors from other subjects, or deputy librarians are holding these positions. These professors do not have professional knowledge and expertise, whereas, the deputy librarians in majority of the cases either lack vision or their vision is impaired and also suffer from the leadership deficit. At the national level, we have National Knowledge Commission but no National Policy on Library and Information System. That is why the 'information and digital divide' is growing day by day. The Infflibnet was conceived by Prof. Yashpal to bridge this information divide both horizontally and vertically, but unfortunately has restricted its resources and services to academic library sector that too up to a limited level. DELNET is doing a good job, but even then both the networks have failed to narrow down the widening digital divide, as well as the growing gap between the tacit and explicit knowledge. That is why critical analysis of the history of future and development of sustainable policies and strategies is necessary to develop the level playing field for the information seekers and decision makers.

### Pressures for Change

Like other stakeholders across frontiers, library and information professionals are also under tremendous pressure to manage change in libraries and information centres. There are both external and internal pressures. Externally, the ICT, the Internet, the Google, and the commercial information providers are giving fierce competition to libraries and library personnel. Internally, organizational culture, declining library budgets, and lethargic and apathetic attitude of majority of LIPs to change are the critical factors for the present state of the art. The result is that the end-user is moving away from the library and is getting carried away by the commercial publishers and search engine like Google. It is high time that LIPs adopt a pro-active attitude, internalize team spirit, develop professional and personal competencies, and learn to be a face in the crowd of information providers. Librarians are the best professionals to organize knowledge and information to save the time of the information seekers. There is a lot of chaos in the public domain on the web. Librarians are required to retrieve pertinent information from the web, consolidate and repackage it for the benefit of the end-users. In the digital age, customization and personalization of information is the heart of the matter. That can be done in a professional way by LIPs by using the best professional practices, such as library classification,

library cataloguing, concept indexing, bibliographical control, and vocabulary control. But for doing that LIPs must be on sound footing with regard to the philosophy of library and information science, its theoretical foundations, and best practices.

### Areas for Change

The work of libraries has always been organized around the flow of information. Generation, acquisition, processing, storage, dissemination, and use are the six stages of information life cycle. Barring the first and the last stages, libraries and librarians are directly concerned with the other four stages of information life cycle. In this context, change must be managed in the following functional areas in libraries and information centres:

- Library outreach
- Reader services
- Collection development and management
- Library automation and networking
- Technical services
- Library building
- Library finance, and
- Library personnel

### Leadership Competencies

There is difference between a leader and a manager, as well as competence and competencies. A leader facilitates change but a manager maintains the status quo. Similarly, competence means mastery and competencies mean a set of skills. Competence comes with experience. But before that we must have a good commonsense and formal education. Then strategic professional learning must be internalized by the LIPs as a lifelong learning process. LIPs must be equipped with cultural literacy and information skills for learning. Similarly, a sense of responsibility and accountability along with team spirit, motivation, and interpersonal skills should also become a part of their mind, body, and soul. Only that way, the LIPs can make sense of the web-based chaos. Here one is reminded of the lines by T.S. Elliot:

*Where is the wisdom?*

*We have lost in knowledge.*

*Where is the knowledge?*

*We have lost in information.*

LIPs must learn to identify the domains of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. Data are stray facts in context, information eliminates uncertainty and facilitates decision making, knowledge helps in problem solving, and wisdom warns us about the consequences of our decisions and actions. Library leaders are also required to promote the use of knowledge and information. The Five Laws of Library Science by Dr. Ranganathan are more relevant in the

digital age where there is a lot of information deluge around the end-users. Information seekers are having more and more of everything but less and less of time. Ranganathan advises LIPs to save the time of the readers. Personalization is the only way out as information needs are highly personal. These needs vary from person to person, place to place and time to time. A reader requesting a dictionary is not interested in the whole dictionary; rather he is interested in the meaning of a single word. Do we have that attitude to serve the library user with that meaning? We must ask this question to ourselves. Perhaps we will get the answer and change our attitude. The information seeker is overwhelmed by the web-based chaos and the following line by Coleridge haunts him round the clock:

*Water water everywhere, but not a drop to drink*

Are we competent to provide the end-user with that drop of water in the form of pertinent information? One may put this question to all to find a suitable answer.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Growing electronic resources and declining library budgets, leadership deficit, widening digital divide, resistance to change, poor interpersonal skill, declining culture of reading and assimilation, lack of team spirit, and ascent of the commercial information provider and the Google are a few challenges to be faced by the LIPs and library leaders. But at the same time, the Internet is a massive storehouse of knowledge and information to empower the end-users. Knowledge networking, particularly the tacit knowledge networking, is the golden opportunity available via the Internet. But still a lot needs to be done to use the ascent of information and the ICT for facilitating the ascent of man. Library leaders and LIPs can do a lot to take the end-users to the next level of consciousness.

### Conclusion

National Knowledge Commission (NKC) is also focusing on expansion, excellence, and inclusion to bridge the education divide at the higher education level. Library leaders and LIPs can support the mission and vision of the NKC by providing massive real-time instant access to pertinent information to the end-users in a cost-effective manner to enable them to obtain their personal, professional, educational and social goals. But for that we will have to take a step back for a moment to make a critical analysis of the history of future. That is necessary because the past and future of libraries will depend upon the critical analysis of external and internal pressures on libraries for change management. LIPs must remember the golden principle, "lead, follow, or quit." There is no place for grumbling people on this planet called earth. The bottom line is that we must learn to manage change before it manages us and makes us dinosaurs of the memory of mankind.

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