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Core competencies for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade (A.D. 2010–2019)

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Abstract This research aimed to develop core competencies framework for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade (2010–2019). The study consisted of two phases, Phase 1- the study of opinions about the roles of Thai academic libraries and information professionals in the next decade (Tanloet & Tuamsuk, 2011) and Phase 2- the development of core competencies framework conducted by using the Delphi technique. This paper presents Phase 2 of the study. The research conceptual framework on core competencies for information professionals was synthesized and adopted from several resources including Gulati and Raina (2000), Gorman and Corbitt (2002), Abels, Jones, Latham, Magnoni, and Gard (2003), Ashcroft (2004) and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library (2007). The subject of this small Delphi study included 21 experts from the following three groups: eight instructors of library and information science, eight administrators/practitioners of academic libraries, and five scholars who have had active roles in the library and information professionals. Data were collected in three rounds and analyzed by using the median, mode, and inter-quartile range. Results of the study were concluded and discussed on the three following core competencies for information professionals of Thai academic libraries in the next decade. 1) The Knowledge - consists of eight areas including knowledge of the foundations of information profession, information resources, information and knowledge management, information technology, library and information services, organizational management, research and user studies, and continuing education and lifelong learning. 2) The Skills – consist of 11 skills including user services, information resource management, information technology, marketing, language and communication, team working, analytical thinking, problem solving and decision making, management and planning, teaching and training, conceptual thinking, and knowledge management skills. 3) The personal attributes – consist of seven characteristics including the leadership, service mentality, morals and professional ethics, achievement motivation, accountability, self-management and adaptability.

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Introduction

University libraries, in the present decade, have seen changes from advances in information technology and communication to the multiple and increasing needs of library users. Although information technology is the major force behind the changes, there have been other factors, including the availability and emphasis placed upon increasing numbers of students admitted into places of higher education. The number of institutions increases, and hence there are more alternatives, the quantitative expansion is rapid, and the social attitudes towards education have changed (Brophy, 2005). University libraries in the future still have to face improvement and adjustments of their operations in many aspects, for instance, aggressive operations for services that respond directly and promptly to users' needs, flexibility of work, and provision of services that are open around-the-clock and a variety of access to information resources (Ramos, 2007; Stueart & Moran, 2007). It is clear that the future of information technology and communication processes will be based on integration of multiple sources and the implementation of them in media. The development of virtual universities in tertiary level institutions and government's policy all lead to the enhancement of lifelong learning. The information professionals in university libraries have to work in this ever and rapidly changing environment (Stueart & Moran, 2007).

Such changes have an impact on university libraries and the information profession. It has become necessary for those in this profession to learn and adjust themselves to the new environment, and catch up with the technological advances, in order to adopt these developments to the library work. As a result, Information professionals must acquire various roles, knowledge, competencies, and skills; and the emphasis of their role now is on management, services, and cooperation (Tanloet & Tuamsuk, 2010). The changing roles of university libraries and of information professionals result in their awareness of the importance of developing information personnel, so that they become a knowledgeable asset to their organization in the present, and are able to respond to any future changes. One of the human development tools adopted is called competency development. Intrinsic competency denotes knowledge, ability, skills, and characteristics shown as behaviors that lead to successful operations. Such concepts emphasize the long-term quality development necessary for future work (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Research studies will be conducted to predict the future core competencies of information professionals. These studies will be greatly beneficial to those related to the development and preparation of personnel in this field, including academic institutions, the professional associations, and university library networks. The results will be useful for the curricular development planning of future graduates and professionals in the information profession. The core competencies will be the framework for instructional development in the discipline, including, curricular improvement, development of course contents, and development of students' skills that meet the requirements of the labor market. In addition, the core competencies of the information professionals in university libraries will

promote a heightened opinion of and interest in the information profession. This will, in turn, result in readiness and competency of the people in the profession, enabling them to acquire visibility at an international level. Hence, a research study that develops the core competencies of the information professionals in the next decade indicates that advanced university libraries are helpful to the profession and the administration of university library human resources, who will then apply the core competencies for planning and preparing for the changes to administer and improve the qualities and skills of personal in the profession.

Objective

The objective of this study was to identify opinions about the core competencies of the information professionals of Thai university libraries for the next decade (A.D. 2010–2019) by using a survey questionnaire of a small sample of 21 individuals.

Literature review

Competency is an individual's inner attribute that can propel the individual to perform in a manner that is in accordance with the responsible criterion (McClelland, 1973). It is the quality within an individual that regulates the behavior of that person towards the goal under an organizational environment. It also regulates the person's determination towards the required outcome and ability to outdo others (Boyatzis, 1982). Competency is often defined in terms of relationships of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes affecting operation. It can be assessed and compared to standards. It can be enhanced by means of practice and development (Armstrong, 2006; Parry, 1996; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In terms of organizational services, the core competency is defined as quality, knowledge, basic ability possessed by every individual in the organization. It can be said to be a common characteristic of the organizational personnel and hence, the organizational culture. Thus, an organization's core competency may not be similar to another organization's core competency (Kongkasawad, 2007). With reference to profession, core competency is a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes which are the professional bases leading operation within the framework of the professional standards, in accordance with academic changes, marketing demands, and other environmental conditions that cause the requirements of professional knowledge and expertise to change (Abels et al., 2003).

The information profession has undergone changes regularly and at a high level due to the ongoing development of information technology, advancement of information management, and the ever-changing learning behaviors and needs of users. Consequently, information professionals need to be developed in terms of knowledge and competencies to be able to work in the changing conditions. This is especially true for information professionals working in university libraries where several surrounding factors differ from other libraries or information organizations, whether they are the university's visions

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