



**Emerging Role of Academic Libraries:
Measures to Conquer Challenges of Pandemic
PROCEEDINGS OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**Managing Editor
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Chapter 5**Interpersonal Skills for Library and Information Professionals****Shubhangi M. Vedak****Abstract**

Interpersonal skills involve the ability to communicate, interact and build relationships with others. Often called soft skills or people skills, Interpersonal Skills tend to incorporate both your inborn personality traits and how well you can handle certain social situations. Effective interpersonal skills are revealed whenever we connect with people around us, and they determine our ability to build relationships and work with others. Having strong interpersonal skills can improve your ability to do well in interviews, at workplace and build productive, long-lasting relationships in your personal and professional life. This article attempts to highlight some of the prominent Interpersonal skills Library and Information Professionals should possess that will help them develop a good relationship and work in peace in any organization they may be employed at.

Keywords

Interpersonal Skills; Library and Information Professionals; Effective Library Management

Introduction

Success at work depends on how satisfied and peaceful one is. In a workplace you might have to work with people with a vastly different mindset, this difference in mindset might create misunderstandings, misinterpretations and the output at work might not meet the mark you set up for the team which could lead to frustration. Oftentimes this is where one might lose their patience. Dealing with such issues without bothering yourself with emotions of annoyance or anger and actually getting the work done is where your interpersonal skills come in handy. It is a law of nature that “when one thing comes to another, the first one goes away”. For example, when

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the light comes, darkness goes away, when we have good thoughts, bad thoughts go away automatically. Similarly when calmness comes anger goes away and you remain at peace. Hence interpersonal skills help to stay calm and composed. In 1970 the top three skills required by the Fortune 500 were the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1999 the top three skills in demand were teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills thus can be a powerful and unique means for enhancing relations between people at work and at home as well.

Interpersonal skills are everyday life skills we use to communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. With strong interpersonal skills we tend to build good relationships and get along well with others. These skills are required to be successful at work and in personal life.

Likewise, interpersonal skills are very important for library and information science professionals for effective library management [2]. Libraries are known to play an important role in education, scientific research and socio-economic development of a country. This envisages the need for professionally qualified personnel or professionally trained library staff to manage and run the library effectively and efficiently [4]. A well-groomed library professional good at many skills is an asset for any institution. Their multiple intelligence and interpersonal skills to deal with different kinds of people may bring drastic changes and positive impacts both in library scenarios and library services [1].

Review of Literature

A review of relevant literature indicates that interpersonal skills play an important role in this digital age to cultivate a positive bond between people working together in an organization. They have also reported different types of interpersonal skills required for library professionals for effective library management. Josef, HF (2016) emphasizes that librarians as the spearhead of the library must possess interpersonal skills like positive attitude, communication skills, empathy, active listening skills, handling conflict and so on. Koganuramath M & Angadi, M (2000) stress that these skills play an important role in establishing good relationships among users, vendors, publishers, staff and higher authorities to provide efficient and effective services as well as work in peace and in harmony.

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Tiwari, A & Srivastava, S (2016) & Dutta, A (2000) also highlight the importance of soft skills and support that these skills will enable library professionals to adapt to new and changing demands in society. With rapidly changing environments, Tiwari, A & Srivastava S (2016) & Moita, P (2015) have stated that it is not sufficient to be an expert in a field of knowledge, it's your interpersonal skills that will make you succeed at work, especially where you have to deal with people. They have also discussed various soft skills required for Library Professionals that would help them develop their interpersonal skills and their personality for effective library management.

Similarly, Dutta, A (2000) has provided different types of communication, the importance of communication, purposes and barriers of communication have highlighted ways and skills required to communicate with others. By providing ways to enhance various skills Dutta A (2000) reports that communication skills, interpersonal skills or soft skills which are used interchangeably will strengthen in effective management of libraries and information centers.

Aliu, IM & Eneh, AC (2011) have pointed out that librarianship as a service-oriented profession, thrives on effective communication and interpersonal skills, with its clientele of all kinds right from students, teachers and researchers to book vendors and publishers. Thus in order to achieve the overall objective of the library to provide effective and efficient services and as the bridge between the information resources and human resources, librarians must possess adequate interpersonal skills or skills that can manage information and human resources efficiently and build good relationships.

Moita, P (2015) emphasizes that library professionals must maintain good and strong collaborative relationships with the users. Dutta, A (2000) also claims that communication skills in the form of social skills, speaking skill, presentation skills and telephone skills will strengthen in effective management of libraries and information centers. Thus, the Literature review supports the need for Interpersonal Skills in Library and Information Professionals.

Need for Interpersonal Skills

In this digital age, interpersonal skills are becoming increasingly important for library and information professionals to enable them to adapt to the new and changing demands of society [5]. Even though digital and networking may have reduced human

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interaction, it is still **necessary to possess verbal skills** in order to work effectively with your authorities, colleagues and our users as customers. Good interpersonal communication is very important during change management efforts within organizations. Effective employee communication helps employees better understand the change, align with it and collaboratively work towards implementing the change successfully. Interpersonal skills also play an important role in employee satisfaction, motivation, collaboration and business success at the workplace [2]. The need for interpersonal skills involves as mentioned below:

Improving Power of Expression: Unless you express yourself, no one understands what you want. Hence you need to speak up. Having good interpersonal skills help us improve our ways of expressing our ideas and thoughts. Once you start voicing your opinion, your expressions and body language will start conveying what you want. As you express yourself clearly, over a period of time people around you know what you favor. Then even your gaze will speak. But first, you need to speak up.

Being Accountable

Gandhiji once said, “an ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of preach”. Set an example for others by showing your accountability in the workplace. Imagine a team full of people who didn’t take responsibility for any task – nothing would ever get done! Accountability in the workplace is about employees taking responsibility and ownership for their decisions, actions, performance and behavior. It is also about building trust and staying committed to doing the right thing for the institution consistently which leads to higher performance.

Improving Self-Management Skills

It also helps us in managing and disciplining yourself. *Self-management skills* allow people to control and regulate their emotions, thoughts and behavior effectively in different situations. *Self-management* is the ability to manage your workflow and productivity in the *workplace* without reliance on a supervisor, it is our ability to manage our behaviors, thoughts, and emotions in a conscious and productive way.

Using Stress to Win

Stress enhances motivation. *Stress* can build resilience and encourage growth. *Stress* can promote bonding. *Stress* is part of a meaningful life. Healthier employees operating under manageable levels of stress will be happier and more positive.

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Improved EQ

Besides intellectual ability, you also need emotional intelligence to achieve success in your life. Emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) will help you excel in your career. It involves four elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. How well you are acquainted with each of these aspects will improve your emotional intelligence which can help you adapt to any workplace environment to perform better.

Aspects of interpersonal skills

When employees possess good interpersonal skills, organizational culture becomes more synergic and positive. With bad interpersonal relationships **negativity, confusion, and conflicts** become inevitable. This ultimately ruins the work environment, reduces employee productivity, and adversely affects the company's bottom line. Librarians as leaders and managers of the library must be aware of interpersonal skills for that help them deal with different kinds of personalities and provide effective services to the users [3,4,6].

Being aware of certain aspects and imbibing them tend to develop and build good interpersonal skills which include:

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Being polite, understanding, and positively responding to a situation rather than being negative about it is important. For e.g. while maintaining the decorum of the library, speaking loudly on mobile phones by the staff should be strictly avoided. Proper etiquettes should be followed to maintain the decorum of the library.

Active Listening

You should be an active listener and understand what is said or communicated to us by our seniors, authorities, subordinates or our users. An example is once a user hurriedly came asking for a book on "Biochemistry" the library staff got a few books on chemistry. In another incident, a user asked for a book on "Management Protocols". A library staff searched and retrieved a book on "Biotechnology protocols". Hence one should actively listen and understand to avoid such mistakes.

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Responsibility

One should take responsibility or work with responsibility. At the workplace you should work as if it's your own company. For eg. You should safeguard the library as you would safeguard your own house. Users of various mindsets come to the library, some users may take good care of the books, some may not, and some might also take the book hurriedly without the staff noticing it or leave the book card without properly issuing the same. Many a time book cards are found without names, or books are left outside library premises. Staff should be alert and careful to notice the whereabouts of the book/s taken by the user/s. When we work with responsibility many errors are minimized.

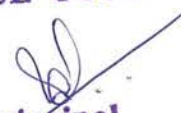
Dependability

You should create your importance such that people or users depend on you and trust you to deliver important work. In an academic library, although the principal and faculty knows that the Asst. Librarian has been assigned to order or procure books yet they will go through the Librarian for certain orders to be placed as they are assured of the work delivered promptly. Here I also remember a library attendant who was very good with Marathi Literature as he liked reading Marathi fiction, non-fiction and historical books like those on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Marathas. Hence, he would easily suggest books to the Marathi literature students and faculty for their projects, dissertations or Ph.D. Research. In spite of this, he would also try to help students and teachers of other subjects by understanding their queries and accordingly, with the help of the Librarian or other library staff retrieve the required book/s. As well as if someone was having a problem, he would always be there to help them and expect nothing in return. His helpful nature, polite and respectful behavior made him more popular amongst students and teachers and they would depend on him for every single thing and ask for him as they entered the library.

Self-Leadership

You should lead yourself to do good work or complete your work or lead yourself to a good career. As well as lead others to do good work, work harmoniously in a team and motivate them as well towards their career development.

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Motivation

You should always be motivated. If you stay motivated others too will be motivated. You will be successful at your inner personal skills too. You will work closely with your seniors, colleagues, and the users coming to your library and maintain good relations with them. You should also motivate your subordinates to take initiative or pursue their education or career.

Flexibility & Adaptability

Today's environment is changing rapidly. If you are not able to adapt to this environment, then you will remain where you are and if you mold yourself with the change, then you will go far ahead. It also implies that we should learn to handle things or situations with diplomacy. For eg. In this COVID-19 situation Librarians and library professionals have experienced being more flexible and adaptable. They have adapted to new technologies to satisfy our user needs or at times considered co-workers and worked in such difficult conditions of COVID-19 to help their user needs.

Patience and Perseverance

Your patience and continued efforts will pay you back one day. It is always said that the Library is not put to use, and readers do not come to the library. However, if you maintain proper records, the data will speak for itself. Your continuous effort to do or achieve something, even when it is difficult or takes a long time [May it be for space or budget for the library] Patience and Perseverance works.

Empathy

Put yourself in someone else place to see how one is feeling. Unless you realize what the other person is going through, you will not be able to understand them nor be able to help them. For e.g. during the COVID-19 situation due to the unavailability of transport, those library staff who stayed far off or were under quarantine could not reach their workplace. In such a situation it was very important that library staff staying closer by compensated and handled each other's work. The library staff and professionals who put in efforts to provide books to the teaching staff and research scholars at their doorstep who were under quarantine should also be appreciated.

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Teamwork

The success of any organization largely depends on the coordinated efforts of its employees. At times we feel that we can work better when we are alone. Things get faster but when we have to work on a larger scale what matters is how capable you are to work in groups. While coordinating with your subordinates, how well you delegate and complete the work also matters. Here your interpersonal skills will help you to work in sync, support, help and complement each other. Thus, leading to harmony and success at the workplace.

Sense of Humor

To live a harmonious and stress-free life you must have a sense of humor. The ability to enjoy and see the funny side of a situation instead of being serious and humiliating others. During workshops and training programs role plays and games like Chinese whispers and dumb charades lighten up the frame of mind of participants and also imply that in a hectic schedule, there should always be a room for a sense of humor.

Conclusion

The challenging task today is for people to be relatively liberal in applying the above interpersonal skills in everyday life. Wherever you are, at the workplace or at home if you are mindful and skillful enough to respect, understand, support and get along with people is a matter of interpersonal skills applied for work effectiveness. Interpersonal skills increase the EQ of library professionals making them approachable, flexible and empathetic and yet at the same time it also teaches them to be disciplined by giving them the qualities of dependability, responsibility and patience. It also makes library professionals sharp enough to pick up on verbal and non-verbal signs of communication and in doing so also become active listeners. Interpersonal skills help us in refining our personal traits and honing our people skills, these skills will in turn make us someone who others would want to work with.

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About Book

The present book 'Emerging role of Academic Libraries: measures to face the challenges of pandemic' is the outcome of papers received and accepted for publication after peer review. Each chapter of the book is offering new strategies and ways to improve library services. It also focuses on the skills that are significant for the academic librarian to acquire. The COVID 19 pandemic made us to rethink and redesign academic librarian role. The issues discussed in the chapters are germane to the pandemic situation. It is evident that the book will show path for all the academic librarians to redesign their role in the institution.

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