

## CHANGING AND CHALLENGING ROLES OF LIBRARIANS IN THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

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**Abstract:** *This paper outlines the changing and challenging roles of librarians in the knowledge-based economy. In a dynamic, information and technology-driven society, librarians can create new roles by accessing changes in their environment, the potential effect and ways to reposition themselves. New roles, changing roles, and the future of librarians have been debated on for many decades. In knowledge-based economy, there will always be changes in the environment, and these changes will affect librarians: their role, job opportunities, self-image, motivation and even survival. Librarians therefore need to find a solution to timely repositioning and role claiming.*

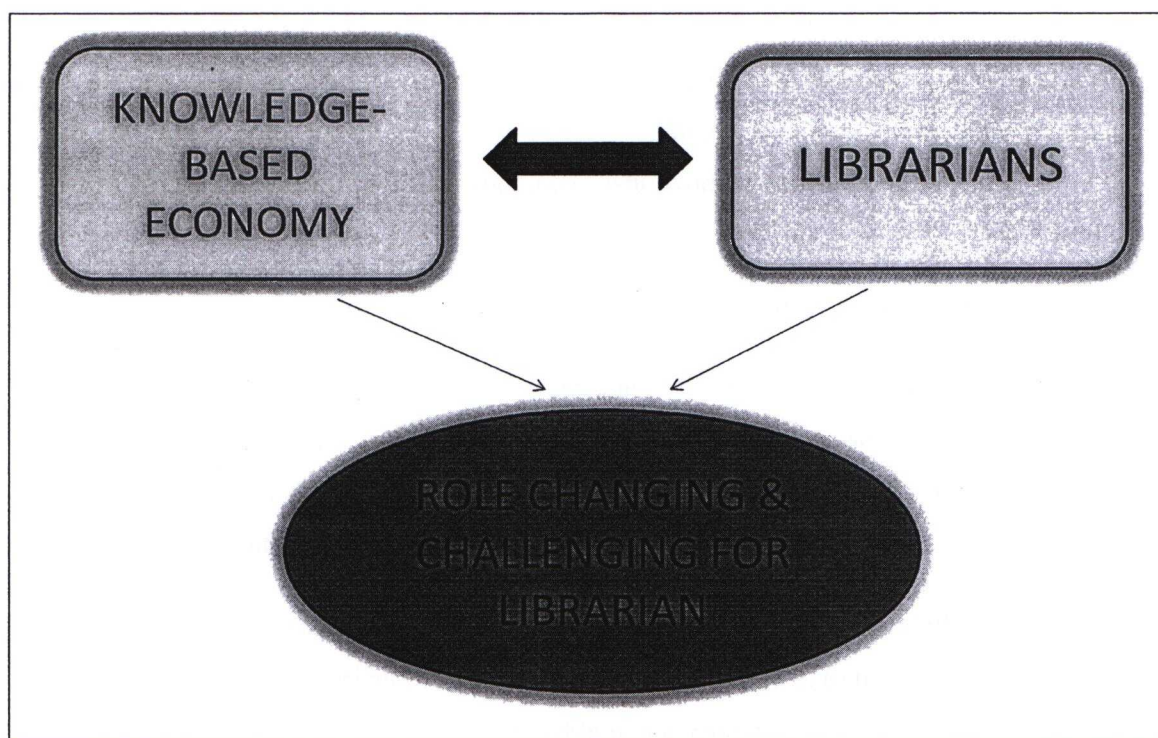
**Keywords:** *Librarians, Knowledge-based economy, K-economy, Librarianship, Roles of librarian.*

### INTRODUCTION

A librarian is an information professional trained in library and information studies, which is the organization and management of information services or materials for those with information needs. The word librarian come from the Latin word ‘*Liber*’ which means book. Traditionally when we talk about librarian, the first come in our mind is shelving the book. But, the reality in library environment, librarian not shelve the book. There are many roles of librarian for instance cataloging, automation, services, knowledge management and other else. But nowadays, in knowledge-based economy, the roles of librarian will change from time to time. It’s become more challenging with many type of material and many types of user to satisfied their need.

Knowledge-based economy bring a meaning people are currently divided into two groups: those who are “information rich” own the most powerful computers and have better internet access to powerful streams of continuous information, whereas the “information poor” do not (Cullen, 2003). Knowledge-based economy was known as k-economy. In dynamic, information and technology-driven society, librarians can creates new roles by accessing changes in their environment, the potential effect and ways to reposition them. So, in new environment k-economy, the roles of librarian will change and it’s become

challenging in order to provide sources of information for the users in variety formats of materials. In the information age, knowledge is a power. Knowledge is a resource as ingredients for economic development, education and human resources development. The k-economy is based on a paradigm that focuses on intellectual capital as a prime mover. And at the same time, the librarian needs to deal with the need of digital divide, information poor and the illiterate wireless access and also should find the balance between the traditional role and the new roles. New roles, changing roles, education and training and the future of librarian have been debated on for many decades.



**Figure 1:** The Relationship between Knowledge-Based Economy and Librarians in New Roles of Librarian.

## HISTORY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The history of libraries and librarianship begins concurrently to the history of the written records: as a human beings developed methods of recording information; whether this was done on cave walls, stone, tree bar, or other media; the accumulation of written records, including clay tablets, papyrus rolls, parchment, and paper, provoked a need for convenient storage, access and preservation. Such activities began with the invention of cuneiform by the

ancient Sumerians around 3000 BCE in order to facilitate record-keeping in clay tablets, such as those kept by the court of King Ashurbanipal. By about 2700 BCE libraries arose to house these records of the Sumerians, and later Babylonians and Syrians. Much can be said about the Greek and Roman contribution to libraries and librarianship. In the interest of space, let us only note the greatest library in the Greco-Roman world: the library at Alexandria, in Egypt. The library, founded in 300 BCE had as its purpose to collect every book in the world, so as to provide a copy in Greek of all known written knowledge.

Among its great librarians were Eratosthenes of Cyrene, Aristophanes of Byzantium and most notably Callimachus at Alexandrian library. Scholars such as these were typically the sole type of Greco-Roman librarians, though cataloguers and historian-paleographers tended to work for them; until the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius, when management of libraries became the task of political appointees who worked above the scholars.

#### **CURRENT DEVELOPMENT THAT INFLUENCE THE ROLES OF LIBRARIANS**

To predict changes of the roles of librarian can rely on scenarios, forecasting, literature surveys (to identify research reports and opinion papers), and analyses of job advertisements (Baruchson-Arbib and Bronstein, 2002; Croneis and Henderson, 2002). Following are the current developments that may influence the role of librarians:

- Increasing pervasiveness of the Internet and the rapid development of digital libraries
- A shift in service orientation from just case to just in time, to just for you
- Growing emphasis on client relationship management
- New information sectors and information users
- Increase in access to document delivery and customer services
- Move towards collaborative work and collaborative learning
- Increased demand for teaching by librarians
- Need for services for remote users and distance students

All of these will require librarians to rethink their action and the contributions they would like to make. A more important issue, however, is to think of the shifts that are still to come.

## NEW ROLE AND SKILL FOR LIBRARIANS

Our past is marked by a constant concern for the need for the future of librarians. Some view IT developments as a threat, while others see them as a golden opportunity and a challenge: *Many information professionals fear for the future of their jobs as a result of further IT implementation, corporate downsizing, outsourcing and other influences. However, the author feels that prospects for the profession have been better. Through the use of IT, the information profession will find a means dramatically to change the public perceptions of information professionals dramatically* (Hyams, 1996).

New roles for librarians do not just centre on the Internet, the digital divide and the needs of ordinary citizens, but also stress training and lobbying. The introduction referred to the flavors of roles and the need to find a balance between the highly IT-related roles and more traditional roles. In fact, roles should be seen on a continuum. Librarians should be able to access their own strengths and weaknesses and position themselves on such a continuum.

### *a) Cultural role*

Since early time's librarian have been associated with a cultural role in the promotion of reading. But it was change the role of librarian due to the k-economy which the librarian should change the promotion of reading to Web information-seeking.

### *b) Teaching role*

For a number of years the teaching role has been strongly promoted. It includes library orientation, bibliographic instruction and the teaching of information literacy, information research skills and media literacy. This role seems to be expanding to include the stimulation of social networks and collaborative information-seeking and use, the actual use of information in decision making, and training programmes for remote users (Erasmus, 2001)

### *c) Provision of access to information*

The role played by libraries in the past in providing information has changed to one of providing access to information. This requires the selection of information (e.g. for electronic collections, intranets and portals), the offering of access services to remote users, as well as new types of tailor-made information services. It reflects the move from just-in-case to just-in-time to just-for-you. This brings to the fore the need for electronic document delivery services.

d) *Space provision*

Although there has been a move from the provision of physical library buildings to virtual libraries there will still be a need for libraries physically designed to function in the electronic age.

e) *Negotiating / lobbying on behalf of user*

There is a strong need for librarians to negotiate for better infrastructure for the information poor, to see to generally accessible global information infrastructure, to take care of the information needs of the poor and to act as information advocates within organizations or communities.

f) *Publishing role*

Apart from Web site and intranets, librarians also have to publish Web training materials, help sheets, training manuals and subject guides.

g) *Advising role*

There will be a growing need for librarians to offer advice on issues concerning copyright and intellectual property, information standards, and standards for information organization, information management and knowledge management.

h) *Project management*

Effective time and project management is important in Web site design, intranet design and the development of digital libraries. This also requires the ability to collaborate with another role player (e.g. Webmaster)

i) *Information organization*

Subject access to a variety of information types is more important than ever before. These include access through Web site, intranets, Web-enabled databases and portals. This will require information organization through indexing, classification, cataloguing and abstracting, as well as tailor-made information systems for specific target groups.

j) *Information retrieval and researching*

Although the threat of disintermediation as a result end-user searching has been debated for many years (Fourie, 1999), there is strong evidence that information retrieval will be a core role for librarians – even more so with the growing demand for information in daily decision making and information seeking by ordinary citizens.

k) *Action research*

Action research and publishing should be linked to the task specifications of librarians. We should assess what we are doing, how we can learn from our mistakes and what changes have taken place (e.g. in the requirements of library user). How well do librarians know their users, and how well do the users know what the “model librarian” is supposed to offer? Faculty should also be actively involved in action research on the effect of their teaching approaches and students’ success in practice.

## **ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIANS IN THEIR NEW ROLES**

The key to implementing a role for librarians as educators appears to lie in partnerships with educationalists and technologists, and also between academic librarians and service librarians (Peacock et al., 2008). Active collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty on better integration of library resources with course content is important. One avenue for implementing librarians’ educational role has faculty working with “companion” librarians to create information management learning opportunities in their courses (Abbot, 1997).

Another way is to embed the librarian as a teaching assistant in an online course. This may, of course, necessitate a reduction of the scheduled duties (e.g. reference desk coverage) that librarians are assigned to do. An important advantage of using librarians in this way, “embedded librarianship is user-centric and brings library services and resources to the user, regardless of the user’s locale, and through various effective routes that will meet the needs

of the users, such as online, video conferencing, face-to-face, or via mobile devices". However it is important that distance learning librarians are aware of the need to inspire groups of librarians, faculty, distance learning staff and administrations to share their vision of bringing services to new possible and beneficial.

Sinclair (2009) also provided some useful suggestions:

- Librarians can be early adopters, promoters, proficient users, and supporters of instructional technology;
- Librarians should work with faculty to develop new programs and services jointly that focus on new ways of student learning;
- Librarians should provide and support specialized software (GIS, SAS, Mathematica, etc.) and hardware (multimedia, stations, plotters, scanners, etc.) needed for research and class projects in the learning commons;
- Librarians and it staff should create a technology and learning desk located within or in close proximity to the learning commons;
- Librarians should train students with advanced technological skills to assist fellow students (e.g. train student workers to refer complex or difficult questions to the professional librarian on duty); and
- Librarians should develop online tutorials and guides that allow students and faculty to learn at times of their own choosing and at their own pace

As librarians work to integrate information literacy into the curriculum and offer students' knowledge related to research and experiential learning, widening their vision by implementing critical thinking and carefulness in using information is more important than mere instruction on how to search a variety of information resources.

Librarians should also be aware that their performance and that of the library will be judged by various benchmarks and standards and by the cost of providing services. In the long run, the extent to which librarians become educators is likely to relate to the extent to which it can be shown that this increases the quality of library services and the efficiency of delivery, and lowers their costs.

## CONCLUSION

Librarians have always had some sort of educational role, even if it was only showing students how to use the library catalog, find various print materials, and the other basics of using a traditional library. New technology has enormously expanded the roles of librarians in teaching students to use information searching equipments. The role continually evolves because the technology to which it is yoked also does.

Therefore, librarians have had to become no longer just specialists in print media but also experts in storing, sorting and accessing, electronic records, including accessing databases and using search engine. Further, they have had to acquire expertise in providing online tuition.

In this era k-economy, changing technology, funding, and priorities in higher education, the shared vision – “librarians are also educators” – can guide librarians to take a stronger lead in the information world.

Even librarians who have coped with these changes will not be able to rest on their laurels. Technology continues to evolve. Librarians will have to continue to evolve with it, not just as people in the know, but as people who can share that knowledge, that is, as educators. They also should get formally involved in environmental scanning, research project on curriculum development and action research on the effect of their teaching approach and assessment methods. Curricula should reflect more that content related to new developments: it should also allow for survival skills.



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