# Growth and Survival: Leveraging on Professional Development and Personal Enhancement in Library and Information Science

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**Abstract**

*Library and information science has become dynamic, strategic and innovative. This is the reason librarians must act exceptionally to survive in the workplace and the 21st century information environment. The assumption is that all professionals must understand the importance of career development but in practice, only few really adopt the approaches to take charge and remain proactively current. With technological advances and global changes in all fields of knowledge it is vital that librarians go beyond mere acquisition of basic training in tertiary institutions. Librarians need to gain the competitive edge in information field. Skills, initiatives and strategies are highlighted for achieving these.*

**Keywords: Growth, Librarians, Personal development, Professional development.**

## Introduction

The 21st century requires that every forward thinking professional takes into cognizance the need for career growth and sustainability. With many library schools all over the country awarding bachelors' degrees to hundred of professionals each year, a smart librarian ought to go beyond his degree, leverage on his personal strengths, using more of what he is good at (aptitude) to get more of what he want - career growth (Caroline, 2014). Today's challenging economic environment especially in a developing country such as Nigeria, has made young librarians to realize that the availability of jobs cannot just be taken for granted. Young professionals therefore need to make extra efforts to learn and develop in their chosen fields so that they can compete successfully for the few available job openings as there is an overwhelming numbers of learned, ambitious *young professionals* who are eager to climb up the career ladder.

Also challenging is the inclination of professionals to become complacent and stagnant when one gets a job. The urge to advance in learning about current best practices wanes, curiosity about the practice of the profession in other climes dies. However, strategic approaches need to be acknowledged and appraised for behavioral changes in such situations as that should be the time to increase one's market value and to continuously acquire new skills and new experiences. This entails taking charge of one's career as Brown and Copcutt (2009) rightly pointed out, 'no one else is going to do it for you'. Professionals who refuse to learn and unlearn in the 21[81] century become redundant, irrelevant

and overtaken in knowledge, skills and expertise by others. According to Maister (2003), the real keys to success are not being smart or acquiring so many qualifications or even belonging to a brand-name organisation. Rather, success is derived from courage, drive, energy, passion, ambition, enthusiasm, excitement, initiative, and discipline, push to continue improving in all necessary areas, to be relevant in the chosen field of endeavor and to have enough self-confidence to keep trying to get better. This intrinsic motivation is the hallmark of achievers (Lou, Yulin, Lim and Peng, 2012).

Without the constant enhancement of professional worth, a librarian or any other professional might find himself in the dust of 'irrelevance and ignorance' left behind by peers as they race rapidly past in learning and acquisition of new knowledge and skills set. (Halmind, 2015). Furthermore, it is these peers that would get new juicy jobs, postings, promotions and the recognition one had always yearned for. This leads to lack of job satisfaction and non-productivity. Again, Brown and Copcutt (2009) argue that every professional has potentials. However, one needs to be proactive, look beyond the current skill set and develop additional benefits that will add value and make one marketable even in a crowd of millions.

For librarians, the *21st* century information environment is most challenging and competitive. Computer scientists, data scientists, programmers amongst others appear to be poaching on the field of information storage and dissemination which used to be regarded as the exclusive preserve of librarians. Many would check the Internet for information before approaching libraries. In

order for librarians; the young and the not- so young ones to continue to effectively position themselves as the information experts they are, they need to strategize on how to learn and keep on been relevant in this Age. The belief that one's career progression needs to be charted by the employee ought to be totally thrown off. Times have really changed and continue to change, for that reason, it is imperative that librarians begin map their own careers irrespective of whether their workplaces sponsor them or not for further training so that they can reach the zenith in their careers (Pongo, 2015).

## The real information environment

Every librarian went through school, then from library school to graduation and many have jobs. For quite a number, it ends there. Nonetheless, Bilanich (2015), points out that the professional world has thoroughly competitive. Library School and postgraduate studies can only lay the basics for the professional world but the ability to thrive and flourish in that environment depends on one's initiatives, drive and passion. Obviously, it requires more than bagging the LIS degree to grow and survive in the profession. Young librarians usually find it disheartening to realize that there are no ready-made jobs in sight. This can lead to depression expressed through anger and frustration. However, the strong sense of growth and survival are the factors that actually determine whether one succeeds or not. Basically, attaining success is not an easy venture. It is about dreaming, motivation, personal initiative and taking the steps (actions) to keep on learning to grow professionally. Caroline (2014) had explained that beliefs that reinforce core values and innate abilities help gain resilience to advance. It must be this dedication to serve and remain focused on LIS career that spawned the "I love my librarian award" by the American Library Association which demonstrate that librarians are really taking charge and transforming the nation by supporting individual opportunities and communities progress *(Zalusky, 2015).*

## The corporate ladder of library and information services

Several studies have highlighted the importance of strengthening LIS career in order to remain relevant in information dissemination and services in the different library sectors. Examples of such studies were by Pateman (2014) and ALA (2015) who reflected that librarians must go much further than passive consultation and actively engage in providing information, presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. In the new trend, the library has shifted from the traditional model and transformed into hybrid model, focusing on information collected not only on books but also in all available electronic sources and formats. Working tools and conditions of librarians have all undergone changes with new technologies and modem library buildings and many of them are beginning to blaze new trails in information service delivery (Schwatz, 2013).

The modem librarian has become adaptable, dynamic, innovative, flexible, resilient, self-initiating and collaborative to accommodate and thrive in workplaces (Department of Education and Training, 2013). 7hey are not intimidated by the new technologies but have the 'effrontery' to always learn and keep on learning to better and improve ways of reaching their clientele all obstacles notwithstanding. They o get there, you have to be a librarian who do much more than just make sure the trains run on time but who presents their organizations with a vision of what they can be. This is what pushes every professional to be. The 21st century librarian is well equipped with capabilities that not only enhance information service delivery to respective groups and communities but also works with a clear vision of information management to push any organization he works in to higher levels (Osuchukwu, 2015).

## Platforms for winning in the information age

Today's librarianship has become dynamic, strategic and innovative. The rapid technological advances with international network of creating, seeking and storing information have transformed the ways information is disseminated. It is in this view that the global library and information environment of the 21st Century library emphasized the need to shift from library-centered to information-centered with the provision of service-oriented digital information resources (Quadri, 2012). Three main areas have been identified in which professionals of library and information science in the information age need to continue to learn about and grow in for survival and sustainability in their chosen field namely; skills, initiatives and strategies.

## Skills

These are basic skills every librarian must adapt in the new information society (Jiagbogu, 2011, Brown and Coputt, 2009) where emphasis is placed on information repackaging and access over ownership. This is because to remain relevant in an environment that has many alternatives for the clients, it is crucial to maintain top-notch skills. The skills ensure confidence, quality of information services, targeted engagements with stakeholders and power holders both at the local State and national levels of governance (Justice Development and Peace Commission, 2012; Mlanga, 2014). Hence, making an effort to grow professionally in skills acquisition will help one to succeed, both in the short term and in the long term.

Librarians need lots of skills to excel in this age. They are:

**ICT/Digital:** This is a must for high powered librarians as the level of familiarity with ICT will naturally set a smart professional apart from the mediocre ones. This is because technology continues to change the way the world works, and libraries are no exception. Librarians who want to remain relevant should learn how to use the internet as a tool in the creation, storage and dissemination of information thus, affirming the importance of digital literacy (Osuigwe, 2016).

**Lobbying and Advocacy:** These are new skills that define your capacities in clear public relations as it integrates your tactics to engage stakeholders in influencing library and information services development for best practices. No one can tell your story as yourself. Librarians need to gain skills in writing proposals, engaging with would-be benefactors and relating interesting things that happen in the library so as to draw in more people and establish the relevance of the library and the library profession.

**Facilitation:** The information age enables new interactions, dialogues and coordinating of activities with clients and partners on a wider forum. Librarians can acquire this fascinating skill that guides and directs the resources in organising and working with groups of people such as meetings, planning sessions and trainings. This has become necessary as many libraries are giving out spaces for such interactions.

**Public speaking:** A librarian with ICT skills should also learn to be a good public speaker who can enhance the library reputation, boost colleagues' self- confidence as well as attract countless opportunities. For example, you might have to talk about your organization at a conference, make a speech after accepting an award, or teach a group that meets in the library.

**Leadership:** Every librarian is a leader and this skill is important as the head understands the nature of job people under him perform in order to effectively interact with them (Ahmad and Yasem, 2009). While leadership skills may come naturally to some, most librarians need some form of practice, coaching, or mentoring to become high quality leaders. Leadership is about mapping out where you need to go to "win" as a team or an organization; and it is dynamic, exciting, and inspiring.

**Project management:** Librarians need this skill to articulate and navigate the art of identifying, planning, executing, monitoring and evaluating projects for sustainability of a library or information center. The importance of project management in the overall development of an organization cannot be over emphasized. There are many funding agencies and organizations willing to support literacy and information services. Librarians and libraries can benefit from this strategy and increase their services as they partner with such Bodies. Thus, the skills of writing proposals for projects to be funded by such partners and managing such projects to expected conclusions are needed.

**Initiatives**

Initiative and creativity lead to innovations that foster constant development in organizations (Kostanyan, 2014). This could be thinking on one's feet on how to better deliver a service or new services to meet identified needs. This is what pushes every professional to be adaptable, dynamic, flexible, resilient, self- initiating and collaborative to accommodate and thrive in workplaces as a valuable staff (Department of education and Training, 2013). It succinctly depicts the words of *Mary Kay Ash that* there are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened (Mindstool, 2015). Librarians show initiative by spotting and acting on opportunities that others have not noticed, especially young librarians. The concept of innovation is to draw librarians out from their comfort zone (Okello-Obura and Kigongo- Bukenya, 2011) and ensure that they keep up-to-date with developmental practices of the modem age. Smart librarians use their initiatives in opportunities. Some of them are:

**Created spaces:**
**a) Invited spaces:** they influence invitations to attend certain functions and talk about their services

**b) Claimed spaces:** since opportunities are hidden everywhere and could only be seen by people who prosper, librarians in the modern age use their initiatives and show unique professional abilities in activities or program that were not really created for such fora.

**c) Open space:** librarians in the information age never turn down public enlightenment programmes where other groups and professions are showcasing their importance.

**Librarians and libraries**

**Share and learn:** There is always need for fresh, powerful concepts to learn while sharing experiences with others.

**Never Stand Still:** It is only initiative that will make one

to run faster and faster, becoming creative and doings in entirely new ways to meet up with innovations of new era. Librarians could seek new partners or collaborators to work with in uncharted areas. Prof Kenneth Dike Library Awka collaborated with NDLEA (Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency). Library space was given to NDLEA for quiz activities and NDLEA planted trees in the Library.

## Strategies

This is a set of unique skills that determines how a librarian thrives in creating competitive advantage for growth in the information age. Many strategies exist for excelling. However, a few are highlighted for library and information science professionals.

**Volunteerism:** A librarian that volunteers her time, energy and intellect will naturally share her skills, make new friends, develop new skills, be involved in a project and find out more about collections and services (Leeds City Council, 2013). Young librarians who need employment can increase their chances through this strategy. *It also gives* the opportunities to practice work in a real-world environment, which makes the experience better than taking the coursework or training seminars (Grant, 2011).

**Passion:** is a very strong feeling about a thing. It could be honed into a skill whereby one loves the profession, exudes confidence in discussing all about the profession at every forum, learn and continue learning more about the profession. This would further equip the librarian to even learn more and be acknowledged as the person to go to when issues about the profession crop up.

**Collaboration:** This is an era where librarians need improved specialization and so need other's help to get things done through fast access to information networks and shared learning. The emphasis is to succeed in today's highly dynamic and networked world which every library requires in improving users' needs and library development (Vicker, 2010).

**Social media:** Being social media savvy and signing up to various on-line fora in librarianship and other allied disciplines is becoming necessary in the 21st century. The use of face book, twitter, You Tube, Instagram, should be encouraged among young librarians so as to know what is happening and what the world is doing. It can also be used to generate information and be visible as well as to advocate and create awareness about libraries and librarians.

**Professional Association:** Participating in the activities of the professional Association is a strategy that helps one grow. Attending seminars, conferences and workshop can be useful for interactions and networking with colleagues Professional associations create a fair playing ground for engaging colleagues who could help make one shine and attain the objectives of being a successful librarian. Nigerian Library Association as the umbrella Body of librarians in Nigeria provides such opportunities.

**Mentor or coach:** You may not get there fast on your own. Look up to someone who is skilled in the profession and has perception of other peoples' feelings. Coaching has been used in the public and private sectors to develop employees' skills and performance and to meet organizational goals. A handful of empirical studies have been done to show the impact coaching has at the business and personal levels, including increases in hope, well-being, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and improved interpersonal relationships (Green, Oades and Grant, 2006; Spence and Grant, 2007). Furthermore, coaching anchored in compassion versus compliance has a greater probability of promoting desired, sustainable change in attitudes and behaviors (Smith, Van Osten and Boyatzis, 2008).

**Cordial relationship:** Nigerian Library Association has the best warm hearted professionals who can help young librarians take their first steps in the profession and in making impact in their workplaces. Maintaining and building cordial relationships with professional colleagues is a strategy that works always as they are relevant to your job choices and would always have a healthy respect for your capabilities as a librarian (Gupta, 2014).

## Conclusion

Librarians are very smart people and can really achieve great things if they set their minds on it. Librarians can make things happen in the society. Librarians need to embrace the new trends, come out of our traditional comfort zone, think outside the box and build enviable information institutions that will cause traffic to the doors of the libraries. Information rules the world and aligning with groups of professional development platforms will put one on the right track to match the innovations of current professional ideologies. The old ways of thinking about what to do and when to do it are no longer useful. In order to survive in today's world of sustainable livelihood, everyone must know what he has to offer, realize his potential and take charge of his professional and personal growth.

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