

Leadership Competencies for Digital Library Management: Adapting to Change and Embracing Innovation

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of library management, necessitating a new set of leadership competencies to ensure continued relevance, innovation, and user-centered service delivery. This paper explores the critical leadership competencies required for effective digital library management in the digital age. Key competencies include visionary thinking, technological and digital proficiency, effective communication skills, innovation and problem-solving capabilities, collaboration and teamwork, and global cultural awareness. Library leaders must demonstrate strong human and conceptual skills while fostering collaborative teams, supporting professional development, and maintaining open communication channels to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. Additionally, technical proficiency with emerging digital tools and systems coupled with a commitment to integrating user feedback and leveraging data analytics, is essential for optimizing library operations and enhancing user experiences. By cultivating these competencies, library leaders can successfully adapt to change, drive innovation, and position digital libraries as dynamic, accessible, and responsive centers of knowledge in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords

Leadership, Competencies, Digital Library, Management, Change, Innovation

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State Chapter

Introduction

Generally leadership is seen as inspirational and influential power on others with the aim of achieving a collective goal. Leadership is all about giving of direction/guidance, ability of others to align with the given direction and commitment of the entire members of group. According to Martin, (2020) leadership in the library is all about getting or receiving an idea or vision on how library will look like or should be either in service delivery or structure or infrastructure wise and being able to share it with librarians under him/her which in turn will promote the library in all ramifications. Library leadership is the way library is been managed or governed with the aim of achieving its purpose of existence. According to Khuram et al. (2023), a library leader is crucial to the organization's development and adaptation. According to

Asfahani et al. (2024), libraries must adapt to change, govern it, and effect change. A team leader's relationship with his team becomes motivating enough to encourage them to work with enthusiasm rather than feeling compelled. Effective leadership in this setting is crucial to manage the intricacies of technology breakthroughs and to establish an atmosphere receptive to innovation and flexibility. It is of great importance for leaders in this digital age to possess some skills that will enable them function effectively. Duddu, and Dhanamjaya, (2018) in their work emphasized the need for leadership competencies in the digital age which include knowledge of digital systems, video conferencing, use of speech recognition and multimedia technology knowledge. The significance of leadership competencies in digital age cannot be over emphasized since it is

the bases for effective digital services and management. Digital library could be seen as e-library or electronic library which can be accessed across the world at any time. Digital libraries are to create speedy and timely access to information for the satisfaction of patron's information needs. In this digital age there are important skills that library leader need to possess for effective service delivery such as communication skill, user experience design, and digital content management. According to Duddu, and Dhanamjaya, (2018) some of the things that characterizes digital library services are as follow; multiple access, easily accessible, no physical boundary, space, twenty four hours available, additional value, strong preservation and conservation. There are things that actually characterize digital library services which are peculiar to them and they are known for that example; reference services are done electronically no physical contact, circulation services such as discharging is carried out with de-activation of chips. Cataloguing is online, indexing and abstracts are electronically done, archiving is also digitally carried out. All these services are carried out with computer and network.

In the same way traditional libraries are also known with certain features. Ari (2019) stated that traditional leadership of library was characterized with stereotypical guiding of dusty bookshelves. Manual cataloguing, filing, charging and discharging are the things that characterize traditional library leadership. Librarians in this digital age have adopted virtual library in order to fill the gap created by traditional library leadership. Digitization of analogue information materials will help in meeting up with the high demand of digital information. Ashishkumar, and Manubhai, (2019) explained that digital library means online organized stores house of information, library without walls or boundaries where users

have access to varieties of information. Abid (2022) is in support that digital library is the massive collection of electronic information which allows people to access virtually. According to Balcioğlu and Artar (2024), libraries nowadays need to adjust to the digital revolution of information services. As libraries evolve into digital information centers, demanding leaders that must master digital nuances to effectively manage dynamic teams (Ajmal et al., 2024). The digital era forces libraries to identify and enable leaders who can further digital goals in a setting characteristics by quick change and changing user requirements, as Marcum (2016) highlights.

If library leaders still want to be relevant in their profession, there is need for technological innovation in this contemporary day libraries. Naik, and Naik, (2023) insist that adaptation to modern information technology is the only thing that will make librarians to be effective in their profession. Users' demands are enormous and for librarians to meet up with information needs they need to deeply get involved in trending technology. Innovation in the library covers collections of electronic resources or conversion of physical resource to digital content. Dinkar, and Smt. (2023) maintained that because of several challenges librarians encounter in the cause of delivery services to users through traditional method, there is need for technological change and innovation in the library, so that users will be satisfied with their information needs. Due to influence of internet on information and different ways of sourcing information in these modern days, it has become important that libraries adopt modern library services.

The level of management determines how much of these tasks are carried out. Digital library management is administrative techniques of organizing electronic library are been organized for effective services to users. Nirmala, (2017)

explained that digital library management is all the strategies put in place for librarian to deliver services to the users and these include web-based or software application. These designed applications enable library clients to have access to electronic resources where they can use them immediately or borrow for later use. In the word of Memane, (2020) digital library management is the procedure a librarian uses in acquiring, arranging/organizing and disseminating information in virtual library with the aim of helping users to have access to online information. According to Khuram et al. (2023), a library leader is crucial to the organization's development and adaptation. Adimora (2024) emphasizes the value of a growth mindset in library executives, promoting adaptation and ongoing learning as critical characteristics for navigating the digital transition. Underscoring the complex nature of successful leadership in the digital age, the American Library Association (n.d) also highlights fundamental qualities for library executives, such as budget formulation, change management, communication skills, and teamwork. This management also involves monitoring and ensuring that users don't infringe copy right law. Some of the procedures include online cataloging, indexing, abstracting, full-text databases, audio and video recording. Additionally, leaders must be skilled in change management, innovation facilitation, and cooperative communication in order to integrate developing technology into library services.

Characteristics of digital libraries

This type of library does not have physical location anywhere but it is everywhere and can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Memane, (2020) stated that digital library is characterized with no physical collections of books, journals, magazines, maps etc. but a collection of electronic information resources. Some of the characteristics of digital libraries are as follows; they can be accessed anywhere anytime, millions of people can access it at the same time,

they are virtually located , occupy very little physical space, and web-based in nature. The major components of digital library systems are all the digital collections, software/internet and hardware structure. Nirmala, (2017) stated that what constitute digital library components are user interface design, database organizational system, storehouse and cloud storage system. Examples of digital contents are e-books, e-journals and articles in different areas of life. Digital tools are those apparatus which are used to carry out digital library services without them it will be very difficult to experience break through example are repository known as information warehouse, computers, radio etc.

Role of Librarians in managing digital resource

There are essential leadership skills required for efficient administration of digital libraries, emphasizing the capacity for creativity and change adaptation. It seeks to give a thorough grasp of the abilities and tactics that allow library executives to prosper in a digital world by looking at recent research and case studies. Ari, (2019) stated that in managing digital resource, librarians take the responsibility of validating information and making sure that they are reliable and authentic before allowing users to have access on them. Moonasar, (2023) affirms that librarians are fully involved in educating researchers on proper ways of sourcing for information and how to cite the source. In the bid to make digital information available for patrons librarians have become integrators of technology. As part of librarians' role in managing digital resource they help to connect library client to virtual environment where they can leverage technology for research purposes. They also collaborate and partner with digital information professional both within and outside their institutions.

The changing Landscape of Libraries

As a result of technological development in this digital age, there is a paradigm shift in what library used to be, currently the setting of

libraries are changing. Moonasar, (2023) is of the opinion that due to changes in information services landscape; libraries adopt digital reference services in order to embrace modern ways of service delivery that is generally continent to users. Libraries are copiously involve in updating digital collections and improve in their virtual possessions. The followings are areas that have experienced changes in the library:

- a. **Collections:** The collection of the libraries has changed with time, the method of collection as well as the collections itself has also been changed to the digital formats. Ari, (2018) observed that the method of library collections has changed drastically from collection of information material in hard copy to information materials in soft copy. Examples of digital collections are e-books, e-journal, audiobooks, and e-thesis. According to Ashishkumar, and Manubhai, (2019) acquisition and collections of information resources in the library are presently carried out in digital form, organized and accessed through assorted digital technology. In addition Hariprasad, (2024) stated that digitization of library collections have been used to transform special collection in the traditional library. Collection of information material has changed from physical to digital collections where university subscribes for e-resources and digital librarians make them accessible for patrons. Digitization of library collection is one of the changing landscapes in the libraries.
- b. **Building:** Libraries are no longer restricted to physical structures in this digital age because physical storage space is no more necessary. Memane, (2020) maintain that changing landscape of libraries has brought transformation in library building. The physical building is no more the only place to access information as it was in the

traditional era, since the information resources are now stored in digital format that can be accessed from any part of the globe such as institutional repository, OPAC, Z –Library etc.

- c. **Infrastructure:** Changing landscape in the libraries has also affected the organizational structure of the libraries. Diptin, (2023) is of the opinion that changing landscape in the libraries is from conversion of physical materials to vibrant, technology-driven centers for information. Libraries as a result of modern information landscapes have adopted digital platforms, and online databases for online services delivery. It is now easier for libraries to reach wider and global audience with the use of technology. The major infrastructural change in the libraries is that instead of browsing on the wooden cabinet card catalogue and physical shelves, users now do the browsing through OPAC using computers.
- d. **Staff:** Due to digital transformation in the library the staff require digital skills and competencies for the new tasks. Musaigwa, (2025) insists that as a result of changing landscape of libraries, staff that should be employed to work in the library must possess technical skills to enable them navigate the complexities in the digital environment. Library staff has actually changed from ordinary books gatekeepers to workers that guide or educate patrons to become conversant with information skill. It has also needs a staff that can teach users how to discover correct and reliable information sources amidst numerous sources in the net. Digital libraries need staff with data skills one that can analyze and interpret it.

The Evolving Role of Digital Libraries Managers

There are key library services that can be carried out effectively with the use of technological platforms in this digital era. Referral services are currently replaced with collaboration and partnerships. Ari, (2018) stated that lending service and audio-visual services are presently done faster with the use of technology instead of manual methods that waste a lot of time. Some of the library services that are done digitally are bibliographic services, current awareness services and reference service. According to Mole, (2023) physical reference services have been replaced with electronic reference service where questions are dropped on virtual reference desk and also receive answers asynchronously. Bibliographic services are now done virtually where researchers can browse using key-words, authors, subject, year, language etc. Current awareness services can be perfectly done using online several virtual publishing doorways. In technical library services it has been replaced with Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and reference library services are also done digitally which is known as Digital Reference Services (DRS). Because of technological advisement in recent time libraries have experience serious increase in service delivery.

Leadership Competencies for Digital Library Management

The competencies needed for effective leadership have changed as a result of libraries' digital revolution. Mbongiseni, (2024) insisted that leadership competencies for digital library management are very vital because they increase both internal and external productivity. To keep digital libraries current, creative, and user-responsive, recent research emphasizes the necessity of combining conventional leadership abilities with new digital-era talents. For any library leader to communicate effectively in any digital environment there is need to possess digital communication skills.

The followings are the core leadership competencies for digital library management:

- a. **Digital and Technological Competencies:** libraries need to keep up with the latest developments in technology and incorporate digital tools and platforms to improve library services in rapidly developing technological era, As a result there is need for every librarian to possess or develop technological expertise in order to discover proper way they can be used to produce a tangible result. In this digital age there is absolutely nothing that technology has not affected its operation and productivities. Coursera, (2024) indicated that applicants with technological skills which include: computer skills, Artificial Intelligent skills, data science and analytics, digital marketing and coding etc can be more employable than others. The implication of Courera's statement is that digital competency is an added advantage in the labor market. Any graduate that is digitally and technologically competence looking for employment has more opportunity to get job than other graduate that are not. Saad, and Sankaran, (2020) is of the opinion that for any leader to have effective integration of technology and being able to advance in productivity he should possess some elementary technological skills. Leaders have to take part in the digital development taking place in to enable them have smooth shift and proper application of new technology in their organization. Technological competences include ability to use digital tools, work on repository and archive born digital contents.
- b. **Strategic Vision and Planning:** For any organization to succeed in the future there must be leaders that think and

plan ahead. Ability to foresee or envisage what the future will look like will enable a leader to plan for a change and accept innovation. According to Mckinney, (2023) visionary thinking, ability to identify an opportunity, communicate it to others in a convincing way and ready to take the risk are important aspects of any leader that wants his organization to experience continues unimaginable growth in all ramification. To meet up with the goal or aim of an organization should be the desire of every visionary leader. Karwan, Hariri, and Ridwan, (2021) opinion visionary leadership entails ability of a leader to create or introduce ideas that are capable to move an organization forward despite any challenge they may stand to encounter in the future. Such a leader has a charisma that helps him/her to carry every member along which at the end allows libraries to achieve their expected goal which is effective service delivery to their clients. Libraries are becoming more than just book stores in the quickly changing digital environment; they are becoming vibrant hubs for community involvement, and information access. Library leadership capabilities need to be reevaluated since the digital revolution of library services has changed user expectations and operational paradigms. It is the responsibility of library leaders to think ahead and plan on how to meet up with digital information need of their patrons.

- c. **Change Management skills:** There are basic skills needed for an effective administration of any executive, every management that want to succeed need to possess adaptive skill which will enable him/her lead in current trend. Oketunji, (2017) change management, which is defined as a methodical and

proactive approach to dealing with change from the perspective of an organization and those in the workforce, is essential to transformation process, including transformational leadership. In the words of Du Venage (2018) there is a greater need for automation, robots, and new technologies, which may regrettably lead to job losses but are necessary to raise safety standards experiences. Iqbal et al., (2024) maintained that leaders with digital competencies and a forward-thinking approach can leverage emerging technologies-such as AI-powered tools and integrated library systems-to enhance services, accessibility, and user satisfaction. The job of a librarian demands that leadership should develop the ability to oversee personnel, collections, resources, and services (Kumar and Narang, 2016). This empathetic approach builds the trust necessary for sustainable change. Miusaigwa,(2025) maintained that change management skills are part of the core leadership competences required for effective leadership in this digital era. Nippa, Gilli, and Knappstein (2023) purported that management and leadership competencies which include attributes, self-concept, social role, knowledge, and skills are the cornerstone for effectively completing tasks or reaching objectives that call for coordination and professional expertise. Ranjan, (2024) pointed out that due to obvious move in digital time leaders are encouraged to shear ideas with other leaders which will help in accepting a change. Library administration changes with the new trend in information services, which includes digital training. Change management skills also include introductory change in administrative capabilities and styles.

- d. **Innovation and Creativities:** Innovation is a hallmark of digital library leadership. Leadership in digital libraries is characterized by innovation. According to Iqbal et al. (2024), leaders are supposed to promote innovative work practices, support experimentation, and put solutions into action that improve user experiences and organizational performance. Navigating intricacies of the digital world requires the ability to solve problems (Wong, 2020). Resource sharing, innovation, and the creation of services that satisfy the changing demands of digital consumers are made possible by collaborative leadership.
- e. **Communication and Collaboration:** Effective communication is still essential for leaders of digital libraries. A clear vision for digital transformation must be expressed by leaders, who should also enable information exchange and maintain open lines of communication (Wong, 2020; Thamaraiselvi 2018). Managing various teams and involving stakeholders in the library's goal need this competence. Regular, transparent communication reduces resistance and increases stakeholder commitment during change initiatives (Koskei, 2024). It is becoming more and more crucial to be able to form teams and encourage cooperation, both inside the library and with outside partners. One tactic for increasing effect in the digital world is radical cooperation (Thamaraiselvi, 2018). There is an urgent need to shift from rigid set standards and adapt to flexibility and inclusivity in order to cultivate an innovation-driven culture in digital library management.
- f. **Decision-Making and Problem-Solving:** Leaders ability to take a decision in order to solve identified problem in the library is one of the important skills needed for digital library management. Involving staff and users in decision-making builds ownership and supports successful innovation (Iqbal et al., 2024) It is important for digital leaders to have capacity of thinking ahead and looking for ways of solving an existing problems in this digital age.
- g. **Digital Literacy and Continuous Learning:** Leaders should promote ongoing professional development and adaptability to keep pace with technological and societal shifts (Iqbal et al., 2024; New Prairie Press, 2024). An innovation driven culture accommodate a vibrant workforce that enhances productivity. Constant training and retraining of staff must be encouraged as it gives the staff the opportunity to know more and to experiment what they have learnt. Due to technological advancement on yearly bases librarians organizes workshop and attends conferences in order to upgrade themselves. They always engage in digital literacy programs.
- h. **Embracing innovation in Library Services:** The landscape of library management is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by technological advances, evolving user expectations, and the imperative for continuous innovation. Recent literature highlights that effective library leadership is central to successfully navigating change and fostering a culture of innovation. Innovation is recognized as essential for libraries to remain relevant and fulfill their mission in a rapidly changing world (Hicks-Dible, 2024). Embracing innovation involves more than adopting new technologies; it requires a mindset shift toward experimentation, risk-taking, and continuous improvement. Leaders are responsible for cultivating an environment where staff feels empowered to innovate, learn from

failure, and contribute creative ideas (Hicks-Dible, 2024). Adaptive leadership frameworks, such as the ADAPT model, further suggest that libraries can thrive in uncertain environments by fostering agile organizational cultures, prioritizing data-driven decision-making, and encouraging participatory leadership (New Prairie Press, 2024). These approaches enable libraries to respond rapidly to both internal and external pressures and continuously iterate on services and processes.

Strategies for Adoption to Change in Digital Libraries

Collaborating with other organizations enhances resource sharing and supports innovative service delivery (Hicks-Dible, 2024; New Prairie Press, 2024). For effective innovative driven culture, there must be collaboration among libraries, institutions, and communities to achieve a successful innovation. When resources are pooled together through meaningful contributions from experts then services will be enhanced

Challenges in digital Library Leadership

In the rapidly evolving landscape of library services, leaders face significant challenges when attempting to implement change and foster innovation. (Oketunji 2017) 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. The problems associated with the transition in the case of libraries have both content and a process dimension. The reason is that not only the library operation has got automated but also at the same time there have been drastic changes in the way information content used to be

presented and organized. The tools and techniques that were suitable for traditional documents don't hold good for born digital documents. Resistance to Change as a Fundamental Challenge: Resistance to change represents one of the most pervasive barriers to innovation in library settings. Esse (2022) identifies that even when library leaders recognize the necessity of integrating emerging technologies, staff resistance can significantly impede implementation efforts.

Organizational Structure and Cultural Limitations:

Beyond individual resistance, organizational structures within academic libraries frequently hinder innovation. Wang, (2024) asserted that traditional academic libraries designed primarily as spaces for reading and storing information resources often maintain hierarchical structures that impede the agility needed for innovation. These rigid organizational frameworks often fail to accommodate the cross-functional collaboration required for transformative initiatives. . Esse (2022) identifies shrinking budgets as a significant constraint facing academic libraries seeking to implement new technologies and services.

Resource Constraints and Competing Priorities:

Resource limitations constitute a practical barrier that consistently challenges library leaders' ability to innovate. Resource constraint is a conglomeration of all the necessary materials that may be needed for carrying out an assignment. These resources include Fund infrastructure, and equipment etc. The financial pressure creates a challenging environment where library leaders must balance maintaining traditional services while exploring innovative initiatives.

Strategies for Overcoming Innovation Barriers

Collaborative Leadership: Research emphasizes that successful navigation of change requires a departure from traditional top-down leadership approaches. Collaborative decision-making

emerges as a key element in effective university library leadership. Collaborative efforts extend the library's reach, amplify its impact, and create a synergy that benefits the entire community. (Paul 2018) In the words of Esse (2022) strategic planning processes led by diverse stakeholder groups facilitate organizational change more effectively than directives issued solely from leadership building Adaptive Organizational Culture. Creating an organizational culture that supports innovation represents a fundamental strategy for overcoming change resistance.

Flexible and Adaptive Culture: This stands as a cornerstone strategy for library leaders navigating the complexities of an ever-evolving information landscape. Swapan, (2018) In a world marked by rapid technological advancements, societal shifts, and changing user expectations, in the words of Bashir et al.,(2024). Libraries must transition from traditional to digital perspectives in their operations and leadership practices the ability to cultivate a flexible and adaptive organizational culture is paramount for the sustained success and relevance of libraries.

Leadership Development and Succession Planning

Developing the culture of developing leaders and training for succession will help in innovativeness; regeneration of a new leader is needed in order to make the next leader of library ready to any kind of challenges which may face in the future. Libraries must adapt to change, govern it, and effect change. The level of management determines how much of these tasks are carried out (Oketunji 2017). This succession planning ensures continuity in change management approaches. Professional development programs specifically focused on change management and innovation leadership represent essential investments

Conclusion

In an era defined by rapid technological advancement and shifting user expectations, the

competencies required for effective digital library leadership have evolved significantly. This study underscores the importance of adaptive, visionary, and technologically literate leadership in navigating the complex digital landscape of modern libraries. By embracing innovation, fostering continuous learning, and cultivating strong communication and collaboration skills, library leaders can drive organizational transformation and enhance service delivery. As digital libraries continue to expand their roles as knowledge hubs, it is imperative that leaders not only respond to change but anticipate it proactively shaping the future of library services through informed, strategic decision-making and inclusive leadership practices. Ultimately, equipping leaders with these competencies ensures that digital libraries remain vital, dynamic institutions that effectively serve diverse communities in a digital age.

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