Redesigning information professional competencies for cultural Websites

Sophie Felföldi
Web Manager
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)
The Hague, Netherlands

Introduction

My name is Sophie Felföldi and I am Web Manager at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

IFLA is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It is the global voice of the library and information profession.

In IFLA's environment a number of entities - such as Core Activities, Professional Groups, Sections (one of them is the Education and Training Section) - exist, all with their own web sites, all falling under the 'umbrella' of the institution and serving the mission of the organization.

Each group works on a specific area, doing research, studies, surveys and organizing seminars, workshops holding of meetings. They also work on projects, publications, standards and guidelines and publish them on IFLA's website - called "IFLANET".

IFLANET is built **by** collective effort, shared intelligence of librarians and information professionals from all over the world. The purpose is to serve the same group, providing them with information about new technologies, trends, and policy issues they're facing. IFLA's "secret ingredient" is our network of people.

I work closely with this network and coordinate, organize, implement and maintain the information on the website to ensure effective, efficient and optimal performance of resources within my scope of control.

To do this job, competencies such as knowledge of programming fundamentals, and relevant technology for websites, data bases, content publishing, and related net technologies and protocols etc., are needed.

Jobs and roles are often described in terms of competencies. That is, a combination of behaviors which serve the purpose and the mission of the organization. Preferably it also leads to a higher performance level.

In other words, competency assessment is focused on the desired results.

1. What are the *Competencies for Information Professionals?*

To provide a brief overview on competency assessment is not easy and many papers and documents have been produced covering this subject. One of the key documents, developed by SLA entitled ***Competencies for Information Professionals in the 21st Century***, is available at their website (http://www.sla.org/competencies.)

First published in 1997, the document attempted to "synthesize and build on earlier work in the light of ongoing social, technological and workplace change." The current edition states that information professionals "play a crucial role in gathering, organizing, and coordinating access to the best available information sources for the organization as a whole. They are also leaders in devising and implementing standards for the ethical and appropriate use of information."

It states that "An Information Professional ("IP") strategically uses information in his/her job to advance the mission of the organization. The IP accomplishes this through the development, deployment, and management of information resources and services. "

Essential competencies matrix

Career Stage	Competencies: Professional	Competencies: Personal	Competencies: Core
Newly minted information professional	* apply tools and technologies * learn resources and services * learn the organization	* identify required skills * learn organizational behaviors	* continue learning * develop ethical foundations
Advanced information professional	* manage organizations * manage resources * manage services * train beginners in the application of tools and technologies	* demonstrate value-added for contributions * contribute to organization, clients, and profession	* share best practices * train beginners in tenets of professional excellence

Expectations and demands

New tools, applications, design principles and business models are constantly being created, driven by inventions of new technology.

To keep current and up- to date is a challenge. Users have high expectations, often based on what they experienced at wealthy commercial sites, designed to generate profit for consumer goods.

IP's experience a high pressure to go along, acquiring the knowledge and skills needed and simultaneously applying it.

How to respond

Remember the things that matter:

- Identify the actual need for information or new applications. Investigate, select and compare alternative solutions. Be critical. Identify human-related roles and technology oriented capabilities. Consider the impact on users, infrastructure and maintenance. Determine what is sustainable.

- Plan well. Make sure you are not only reacting to a sudden new demand, but also thinking about the medium and long term planning.

- Create better content. Even when the technology is perfect, content can make or break the effectiveness and efficiency of a web site. Words online do matter. This is a statement of the obvious, but even so, it is often violated in practice.

- Communicate and collaborate. We rely on information technology **and** on people. No one person knows it all. Use your network and learn to network better.

- Filter. Differentiate between quality versus non-quality material. What material is important and what isn't. We, humans, are "programmed" through evolution to believe that more is better, thus when we produce more, we generate surplus-value. It seems certainly be the case with information

Information greed

Print, film, magnetic, and optical storage media produced about 5 exabytes (EB) of new information in 2002. Ninety-two percent of the new information was stored on magnetic media, mostly in hard disks.

- *How big is five exabytes?* If digitized with full formatting, the seventeen million books in the Library of Congress contain about 136 terabytes of information. Five exabytes of information is equivalent in size to the information contained in 37,000 new libraries the size of the Library of Congress book collections.
(In decimal terms, an exabyte is a billion gigabytes.)

- *Hard disks store most new information*. Ninety-two percent of new information is stored on magnetic media, primarily hard disks. Film represents 7% of the total, paper 0.01%, and optical media 0.002%.

- *How much new information is produced per person?* According to the Population Reference Bureau, the world population is 6.3 billion, thus almost 800 MB of recorded information is produced per person each year. It would take about 30 feet of books to store the equivalent of 800 MB of information on paper.

(This study was produced by faculty and students at the School of Information and Management System at the University of California at Berkeley see at:
http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/execsum.htm#summary)

It's an ocean of data and this study doesn't say anything about how much of the information is accessed or how much of it is useful.

As **Herbert Simon,** Winner of the Nobel Prize in economics said:

"What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it."

Therefore, learn how to deliver more with less, evaluate, organize, select.

Redesign approach

Essentially, we have to be prepared to take responsibility. Be critical about what we do. Constantly learning and evaluating our profession and redefining ourselves as information professionals.

If, we don't ask, "What do we really want?" then we'll be pushed around by impulses ruled by commercial interests of the world.

I am here to learn from you and to hear your views to improve my ability to work and to understand. To find balance.

What I'm really talking about here is awareness.

A thousand-year-old Tibetan text describes the human realm as one of "continual activity and constant frustration," a never-ending sense that things are not quite right.

Don't use new technologies blindly. Don't use them just for the fun of it. Think about how all of your tools encourage certain behaviors and discourage other behaviors and make sensible judgments about whether you like those tendencies or need to be alert against their shaping your life, the life of others in a way you're not happy about.

No matter where you are, or what you're trying to do, slow down, reflect, pay attention, and take careful responsibility for everything you do.

Thank you