

# Librarian 2.0: It's All in the Attitude!

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## **Abstract**

In 2006 Stephen Abram stated that we must “become librarian 2.0 now”. But what is librarian 2.0? This paper will present the results of a project that identified the skills, knowledge and attributes required by the successful librarian in the web 2.0 world (and beyond!). Eighty-one Australian librarians participated in a series of 14 focus groups. Eight themes emerged: technology, communication, team work, user focus, business savvy, evidence based practice, learning, and personal traits.

## **Introduction**

Discussion and debate aimed at identifying and exploring the key competencies of LIS professionals are not new.<sup>1-3</sup> This study will build upon the existing body of knowledge that seeks to identify the skills and knowledge required by the contemporary LIS professional. It will provide one of the first empirically derived analyses of the key skills, knowledge and attitudes of librarian 2.0. Library 2.0 refers to the application of web 2.0 technology to the design and delivery of LIS services. Mackenzie suggests that library 2.0 has forever changed the “library brand”. Libraries are no longer about books or even information. Instead, libraries are about “facilitating people to participate, interact and create, to provide the means for

that to happen.”<sup>4</sup> In the last few years there have been extensive discussion and heated debate exploring library 2.0 in journals, conferences and most notably the “biblioblogosphere” (blogs written by LIS professionals). Much of this discussion has focused on developing a clearer understanding of what library 2.0 actually is. However, the discussion has also included an acknowledgement that regardless of how library 2.0 is ultimately understood, it will require a new type of LIS professional. It needs an LIS professional that is “better equipped and broadly educated than one just ten years ago.”<sup>5</sup> In the last few years blogging librarians have begun to compile their informal list of core competencies needed by librarian 2.0.<sup>6-10</sup> The call to the LIS profession is becoming clear: “it is essential that we start preparing to become librarian 2.0 now.”<sup>11</sup> Beyond the informal blog discussions few systematic studies have undertaken to identify the skills and knowledge required by librarian 2.0 so they may successfully provide library 2.0.

## **The Research Project**

### ***The Research Aim***

The aim of the project was to identify the current and anticipated skills and knowledge required by successful library and information science (LIS) professionals in the age of Web 2.0 (and beyond).

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**Focus Groups**

Focus groups were used for data collection as they allow for the gathering of qualitative data through “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.”<sup>12</sup> Krueger noted that focus groups are effective because they tap into the human tendency to develop attitudes and perceptions by interaction with people and that “people may need to listen to opinions of others before they form their own personal viewpoints.”<sup>13</sup> Focus groups are an appropriate choice for the current study because of their ability to produce concentrated amounts of data on a specific topic and because there is the opportunity for the clarification of responses and for follow-up questions.<sup>14</sup> In addition, focus groups allow the researcher to “obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning.”<sup>15</sup>

**Participants**

Participants for the current research project were drawn from public (including state and national), academic, school, government, and special libraries, LIS education and LIS employment services. They were drawn from different areas of Australia and were employed in a variety of roles, from library assistant through to senior managers. Eighty-one subjects participated in the study. A breakdown of the participant profile can be found in table 1. All participants were LIS professionals with industry experience ranging from four months to sixty years, and an average of 17.09 years spent within the industry. Participants’ ages ranged from twenty-four to sixty-six years with an average age of 44.8. Reflecting the current female domination of the LIS profession the gender balance of participants was skewed with only nine males participating in the focus groups. All library sectors (academic, public, school, and special libraries) were represented in the sample; however, the public and academic library contexts dominated. Although teleconferences were used to encourage regional involvement in the study only 28.4 percent (or twenty-three of the eighty-one) of the participants identified themselves as being located in a regional area. A combined

Total	81			
Gender	Female:	72	Male:	9
Age	Range:	24–66 years	Average:	44.8 years
Time in industry:	Range:	4 months–40 years	Average:	17.09 years
Employment status:	Full time:	70	Part time:	8
	Contract:	2	Casual:	1
Location:	Regional:	23	Metropolitan:	58
Sector:	Public/state/national	24	LIS education:	5
	School:	6	LIS supplier:	1
	Academic:	33	LIS employment:	1
	TAFE:	3	Special:	8

convenience and purposive sampling approach was selected as the most effective option for recruiting study participants. Personalized mails were sent to the managers of large libraries (i.e., academic, public, state, and national) inviting involvement in the study by their staff. E-mails were sent to the LIS professions e-lists.

**Data Collection**

The focus groups were conducted in February and March 2009. Fourteen one-hour sessions were held. Eight sessions were face-to-face and six sessions were conducted via teleconference. All sessions were audio recorded. Full ethics clearance was obtained from the Queensland University of Technology Ethics Committee. Participants were provided the opportunity to ask for clarification about the project at any time and encouraged to make honest responses. The general aim of the focus group session was to develop a greater understanding of the current and anticipated skills and knowledge of librarian 2.0. The focus group sessions were conducted by two members of the research team. Researcher one was the facilitator for six of the face-to-face sessions and researcher two was the facilitator for two face-to-face sessions and all of the teleconferences sessions. The focus group facilitator was responsible for ensuring the sessions ran smoothly and that all key points were covered. They were also responsible for ensuring that a permissive, nonthreatening environment was created “by not making judgments about responses or communicating approval or disapproval

through body language, and through encouraging alternative explanations.”<sup>16</sup> The following open-ended questions were used to stimulate discussion:

- What is Library 2.0?
- What are the skills and knowledge required by librarian 2.0 in Library 2.0 (and beyond)?
- You are about to appoint a new librarian to lead the charge in making your library into Library 2.0—what are the essential and desirable traits, skills, and knowledge you would include in the position description?
- Is it a fad? (i.e., Library 2.0, librarian 2.0)
- To what extent are the skills and knowledge of librarian 2.0 representing a new and different type of skill and knowledge set? Haven’t we always had these?

Unstructured follow-up probes were used to further explore points as they arose during the session. In addition, to stimulate the discussion, a handout was provided that outlined the key findings and reflections about librarian 2.0 from the current literature. The handout was developed by examining the current published scholarly writings within the LIS field as well as the more informal discourse found via blogs, wikis, and the like. The handout was provided at the start of the face-to-face focus group sessions and was e-mailed to the participants of the teleconference focus groups in advance of the session. The sessions ended with the participants being invited to provide any comments that they would like to raise about librarian 2.0 but have not had the opportunity to do so during the session.

### ***Analysis & Results***

The data analysis process undertaken in the current study was an iterative one, constantly grounded in the focus group data. The researcher spent time listening to the audio recordings and reviewing the transcripts. The researcher was seeking to identify the emerging themes and to determine the similarities, differences, and potential connections among keywords, phrases, and concepts within and among each focus group.<sup>17</sup> While each focus group tended to draw on specific themes of interest to that particular group of people, there was also a great deal of common ground. The eight key issues in the discussions are briefly outlined below. They are not listed in any particular order of importance. Quotes from participants have been included to elaborate on the points being made.

### ***Technology***

Not surprisingly, the role of IT or technology in the context of librarian 2.0 was discussed. Interestingly, there was a general consensus across all focus groups that while IT is important within the context of Library 2.0 and librarian 2.0, it is not the dominant or main aspect. It was generally acknowledged that technology was a means to an end and not the end in itself. Successful librarians in the Web 2.0 world (and beyond) need to be aware of, and have some fundamental understanding of, the emerging technology—what is available and what it can do and how to make it do what is needed—but they do not need to be IT professionals per se. As one participant noted, “I get concerned when I just hear about the IT sides of things, and I think that is just one part of librarian 2.0.” The difference between “IT skills” and “IT appreciation skills” was highlighted. As one participant observed, librarian 2.0 “makes technology their own.” Librarian 2.0 should not be “tied to technology because by the time we’ve convinced the powers that be . . . to buy it, a new ‘you-beaut’\* thing has been developed.” The need for librarian 2.0 to “talk the talk” with the IT professionals and managers was identified. One participant observed that “I see myself and what I can do as a bridge—translating techno geek.” Many of the focus group participants acknowledged that librarian 2.0 needed to have a Web presence, should “be out there” and have “visibility on the web.” Librarian 2.0 should be a role model; he or she should possess “knowledgeable credibility.” Interestingly one focus group noted the “elitism” that was emerging within the profession. One participant commented on the fact that we do not insist that all librarians like to read, so why then should we insist that all librarians have a Web 2.0 presence? One participant noted that “I am plugged in and connected but I can also walk away from it.”

### ***Learning and Education***

The need for librarian 2.0 to be interested in, and willing to engage in, lifelong learning was highlighted by all focus groups. It was acknowledged that the boundaries between IT professional and LIS professional were rapidly narrowing and that the skills and knowledge required by successful LIS professionals were becoming more complex and plentiful. Consequently, librarian 2.0 must “know how to maintain their own [ongoing professional] education.” Librarian 2.0 has an

\*Slang word for exceptional or outstanding.

inquiring mind, enjoys playing and experimenting and loves learning. He or she is also willing to share knowledge with colleagues and to mentor and coach others. As one participant observed, "Openness and willing to learn are the heart of web 2.0." Librarians in a 2.0 world engage in reflective practice, they "have a knowledge of oneself ... they know their own strengths." They are willing to grow with the job. These librarians are not only willing to be outside of their comfort zone but actually learned how to be "comfortable within being out of their comfort zone." The successful librarian in the Web 2.0 world is interested in what is happening around them, they scan the horizon and are aware of the outside world. As one participant noted, "Current awareness is not just a catch cry it is part of everyday work." Another participant went even further, "If they're not interested in learning new things ... if they are not engaged in the world around them there is no point really even having a conversation with them." The need for the LIS profession to have a compulsory professional development program was raised in one focus group. Librarian 2.0 is "not a clock watcher." He or she has the latest applications on a home PC and is willing to explore and practice after the workday has finished. A 2.0 librarian is comfortable with different ways of working. Librarian 2.0 is a professional not a worker. The more formal educative role of LIS professionals in regards to serving the needs of clients was also acknowledged. Web 2.0 requires librarians to take on the role of educator, trainer, or guide. They must be able to explain complex things and help individual users and communities to make the best use of the available technology within their workplace or everyday life. Librarian 2.0 understands how people learn.

#### *Research or Evidence Based Practice*

Research skills were seen by participants as being essential for the 2.0 librarian. Research is a way for librarian 2.0 to be making the best decisions, developing best practice and establishing benchmarking. Gathering evidence to demonstrate feasibility, and undertaking continual evaluation and assessment of resources and services being introduced in the ever-changing and frequently untested Web 2.0 world was seen as vital. One participant noted that "evaluation is one of the most important things we need to cover as far as web 2.0 is concerned." And more dramatically, "professional malpractice is not using evidence based research" in your professional practice.

#### *Communication*

All focus groups identified communication as being a core requirement for the 2.0 librarian. While communication skills include the ability to engage in written and oral communication in diverse formats and media, it also includes an array of more complex dimensions and aspects. Librarian 2.0 must know how to be an advocate and lobbyist for the resources and programs he or she wants to introduce, especially when faced with IT departments or senior management who have competing agendas or policies. These librarians need to be able to be good at negotiation and diplomacy and should be able to use whatever "language" is needed to persuade or influence the target audience to their point of view; "a good librarian is a chameleon." Librarian 2.0 should be good at marketing and promotion. He or she must be able to sell their skills and knowledge. Excellent presentation skills are essential.

#### *Collaboration and team work*

Almost all of the focus groups acknowledged that need for librarian 2.0 to work successfully as part of a team: "so much of what we are doing is done in multi-disciplinary teams." This point was raised because it was acknowledged that "you can't do everything; you can't go into all these technology." Collaboration is no longer just an optional extra: "we're not talking about an individual being a repository for all this information, we are talking about within a group there are the skills." Librarian 2.0 is also willing to build new relationships outside the library context. He or she works intimately with IT and other disciplines. Librarian 2.0 must be able to build relationships and partnerships and establish networks with individuals and groups wherever it is needed. He or she needs to be a team player and be able to work collaboratively across disciplines.

#### *User Focus*

Many of the focus group participants noted that Library 2.0 was requiring librarians to develop a new relationship with their users or clients. They had to evolve into a more synergistic and equal partnership that involved both the 2.0 librarian and the user working together more as equals. Librarian 2.0 loves working with people, values the diverse experiences of users, looks at things from the user's perspective and seeks to actively use the emerging technologies to provide their

users a voice. In the Web 2.0 world LIS professionals are driven by a focus on people, not resources. They help to create communities. As one participant noted, "What you don't want is some techie that wants to sit at their computer and doesn't want to get involved in the whole community thing." The 2.0 librarian has learned how to let go of a need to control. His or her role is to "encourage people instead of protecting" them. As one participant noted, "Web 2.0 enables us to interact with our users in a completely different way so that we are no longer the authoritative figure putting information out there." Interestingly, Library 2.0 is also developing different expectations on the user's role: "They now have the ability to and the responsibility to contribute content." Librarian 2.0 is no longer the gatekeeper: "The gate now opens both ways." Although it appears that old habits die hard. When discussing the emergence of library catalogs that allowed client tagging, some participants were still not convinced, stating, "But you could have a real mess!"

#### *Business savvy*

Many of the participants discussed the need for librarians in a 2.0 world to be business savvy. They need to have good project management skills. They should be outcome focused and able to multitask and manage their time well. Librarian 2.0 "knows how to get things done." These librarians are lateral thinkers who can prioritize and problem solve. They understand how organizations function and know how to influence, inform, and enable strategic decision making. They "understand the value propositions" inherent in their organization and their profession. They are not only open to and able to manage change but are the drivers of change within their library service, their governing organization and profession. They understand that the "ability to change is a vital thing" and are willing to "let go of the status quo." They are innovators who understand how to be entrepreneurial: "they go out and seek business." Librarian 2.0 is a leader.

#### *Personal Traits*

Participants unanimously agreed that the 2.0 librarian should possess a complex array of personality traits. One participant even declared that personality traits were more important than skills. Librarian 2.0 should be enthusiastic and inspirational. Librarian 2.0 should be able to clearly communicate an idea and through his or her passion, as one participant noted, "You should

be able to take a room full of people with you." These librarians have vision, spark, and creativity. They know how to lead and motivate. Librarian 2.0 is adaptable, flexible, persistent, and resilient. In short, nothing fazes them. Librarian 2.0 is a self-starter who has no fear and is willing to move outside of their comfort zone. He or she is proactive and willing to take calculated risks. The 2.0 librarian aims for excellence not perfection. It was noted that LIS professionals need to "get over ourselves." We need to realize that there is "no patient on the table" and be prepared to "release in beta mode." Librarians in a 2.0 world have an open mind and are willing to try new things and learn from their failures—their mantra is "just do it." They know that it is okay to feel like a novice. They are willing to let go of the rules and to deal with ambiguity.

#### *Discussion*

But haven't LIS professionals always been required to have these skills, knowledge, and attributes? Interestingly almost all focus groups responded to this question with, "yes, but ..." The acknowledgment that successful LIS professionals need to possess transferable skills and interpersonal attributes is not new. In 1936, Harriet Howe<sup>18</sup> noted that the "traits of the ideal librarian" included attention to detail, initiative, productivity in work, and effective relations with people. In more recent years, numerous studies have been undertaken around the world noting the need for, or the role of transferable skills within the LIS profession.<sup>19–22</sup> The results of the current study support this previous body of work. Overwhelmingly participants argued that the LIS industry needs, and has in fact always needed, its practitioners to possess a mix of generic capabilities and interpersonal skills. But participants in this study also commented that the speed with which things are changing in the Web 2.0 world was having a significant impact:

*It's a faster pace. I think people have to get use to dealing with a world that moves a much, much faster pace than what we are used to.*

*The speed has changed. Once upon a time the change was slow enough so that you could cope with it as just a part of normal life.*

*How do you free people up to have the time and the necessary support to actually be able to stay*

*current with everything that's going on and the ability to get out of the day to day detail?*

This faster pace is placing a new and unexpected emphasis on these “timeless”<sup>23</sup> skills and knowledge. As one participant noted:

*Even if you were flexible you have to be even more so, you have to be even more inquisitive, you have to be even more multi-tasked, more multi-skilled.*

It was also acknowledged that *all* librarians need to possess these skills, knowledge, and attributes and not just the one or two role models who lead the way.

*People who have these skills are 1 in 100, [the] challenge is to make it the norm.*

*Not just one person, everyone has to be there, we all have to be competent at a level.*

The idea of “survival of the fittest” was mentioned in a number of the focus group sessions. There was debate as to whether librarian 2.0 needed to possess *all* the skills, knowledge, and attributes or just some of them. While no clear consensus was reached in regards to this point it was acknowledged that the level of competence for each skill, knowledge, and attribute had become higher. Participants noted that “ours is an organic profession” and several participants talked about the “raising of the bar for the profession” and that there is no room for “average, mediocre librarians anymore.”

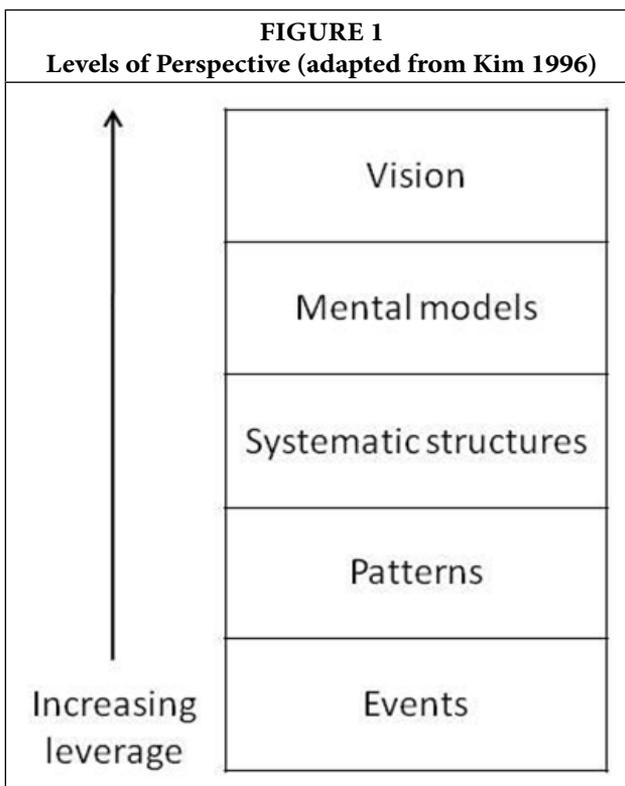
But perhaps the most interesting finding from the study is the idea that Web 2.0, Library 2.0, and librarian 2.0 are “a watershed” for our profession. Almost all of the focus groups spoke about how they are seeing and experiencing a cultural change in the profession. Librarian 2.0 requires a “different mindset or attitude.” It is “challenging our mental models” and forcing us to think about and perceive our profession differently. Librarian 2.0 is an attitudinal shift for the Australian LIS profession. Interestingly, it was noted that because of this shift not everyone in the profession is ready to be, or even wants to be, involved:

*In the education sector, we very much have an aging workforce. Now the aging part doesn't worry me, it's the minds that worry me.*

*If you want to do a job you have to change your mind set. Otherwise in five years time you won't have a job.*

*There's a massive cultural change in the library.*

The results of this study suggest that what it means to be an LIS professional in Australian is changing. The *Levels of Perspective Model* by Daniel Kim<sup>24</sup> offers one lens by which to consider this point. Kim articulated five levels or perspectives from which to study a system (see fig. 1). He points out that the further one moves from specific events toward mental models or vision the more leverage one has. According to Kim, “leverage” refers to small, well-focused actions that can produce significant lasting change. Leverage to alter a system can occur at any level but a key principal of systems thinking is that intervening at the higher levels (mental models or vision) is more likely to increase influence over future outcomes. A system is defined as “a perceived whole whose elements ‘hang together’ because they continually effect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose.”<sup>25</sup> Assuming that the Australian LIS profession can, under Senge’s definition, be defined as a type of “system,” it could be argued that the Australian LIS profession has



focused its time, energies, and attention on the lower levels of Kim's model (i.e., events, behaviours, and systematic). Indeed one participant noted, "We are very good at creating systems and processes," and that we "need to move away from this." The findings of this study suggest that we are witnessing a re-awakening of the Australian LIS profession as it begins to move toward the higher levels of Kim's model (i.e., mental models). The study suggests that the Australian LIS profession is re-conceptualizing who or what it is in light of the emerging Web 2.0 world (and beyond). New and different mental models of what it means to be an LIS profession in the twenty-first century are being identified and explored.

## Conclusion

The project outlined in the current article has provided some interesting insights into the skills, knowledge, and attributes needed by the Australian LIS professional in the Web 2.0 (and beyond) world. The study has highlighted that librarian 2.0 is less to do with technology and more about quality transferable skills and interpersonal abilities. Of greater note is the study's finding which suggests that librarian 2.0 is more about changing attitudes and ways of thinking than anything else. The real power of web 2.0 is not how it is changing the way LIS professionals design and delivery services and resources, or the new skill and knowledge that these professionals are now being required to possess, but how it is changing the ways in which the Australian LIS professional conceive of themselves. This study suggests Web 2.0 is the catalyst for a significant attitudinal shift in the Australian LIS profession. The challenge the profession now faces is trying to clearly articulate the nature and scope of this new professional attitude. The LIS profession in Australia must take stock not of "what we know and can do" but on "who we are becoming."<sup>26</sup> While it is beyond the scope of the current article to explore these questions in any great depth an obvious first step forward would involve undertaking further research that explores the existing cultures and attitudes within the profession and what it means to "become an LIS professional" in the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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