

# Are Employers Asking for the Right Competencies?

## A Case for Emotional Intelligence

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**H**ow can librarians deal with massive changes occurring in the library environment of today, incorporate new technologies into their day-to-day work, deal with the huge amounts of information available, understand and stay on top of scholarly communication issues, keep abreast of all the new issues and trends in the information profession, pursue and establish successful partnerships with stakeholders, and succeed in the use of creative teaching methods to engage new generations of students? In other words, how can librarians do everything necessary to remain relevant to their users and in the profession?

One of the simplest and most significant actions directly involves a librarian's main asset: the professional staff. In spite of the ongoing discussion of the skills gap among practicing librarians, the gap can be minimized by acting on several fronts. This article suggests that emphasizing the development or enhancement of Emotional Intelligence (EI) competencies can give information professionals the edge needed to succeed. Daniel Goleman's assertion summarizes the rationale:

The rules for work are changing. We're being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other. This yardstick is increasingly applied in choosing who will be hired and who will not, who will be let go and who retained, who passed over and who promoted.<sup>1</sup>

Two of those rules include: (a) hiring people with the right competencies; and (b) implementing aggressive professional development plans that allow existing staff to acquire new or enhance existing competencies.

If cognitive intelligence and academic credentials are no longer enough to succeed, what does it take to be successful in the twenty-first-century academic library? The importance of behavioral competencies surfaces repeatedly in the literature on competencies for librarians. Further readings point

to the management literature on the subject of EI. Since most jobs still require the MLS or equivalent from an accredited program, this author assumes that the technical training and development of cognitive skills are accomplished through the completion of a library and information science program accredited and re-accredited periodically through the American Library Association's (ALA) Committee on Accreditation. These "hard skills" refer to technical knowledge pertinent to a specific discipline.

By contrast, EI comprises a variety of individual skills and behaviors also referred to in this article as "soft skills." Among the soft skills are cognitive skills: that is, higher-order thinking skills such as creative thinking, critical and analytical thinking, data manipulation and synthesis, and decision-making.

This analysis focuses on those kinds of soft skills by reviewing job postings published in *College & Research Libraries (C&RL) News* during 2005–2006, with the purpose of:

- determining the extent to which the job market is looking for soft skills or EI competencies;
- identifying the relationship between the level of the positions and the soft skills required or desired;
- identifying those soft skills or EI competencies most often required in current job ads; and
- determining whether job ads are asking for those competencies.

The notion of EI developed in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer was chosen as the focus of the present study; they defined EI "as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."<sup>2</sup>

### Review of the Literature

The concept of EI was expanded and popularized by Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, he published the follow-up text, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, in which he introduced the Emotional Competence Framework. Goleman's framework

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(see figure 1) groups competencies in two major categories: personal and social.<sup>4</sup> These two broad categories in turn contain five domains or clusters of EI competencies: (a) self-awareness; (b) self-regulation; (c) motivation; (d) empathy; and (e) social skills. Each cluster groups twenty-five specific EI competencies, each of which is a foundation for the next, so they are all intertwined. For example, self-awareness is crucial to manage our own emotions and subsequently, understanding those of others.

Management literature offers a wealth of studies focusing on EI and EI competencies. The concept of *core competencies* was first addressed in the library literature in a 1996 article by Nichols et al.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, Griffiths proposed five *critical characteristics* of the new information professional as key to career success. According to Griffiths, the information professional must be able to: (a) guide in the face of an uncertain future; (b) collaborate; (c) prioritize and maintain agility and flexibility in the face of changing goals; (d) empower; and (e) understand the core capabilities

**Personal Competence:** *determine how we manage ourselves*

- Self-Awareness
  - Emotional awareness
  - Accurate self-assessment
  - Self-confidence
- Self-Regulation
  - Self-control
  - Trustworthiness
  - Conscientiousness
  - Adaptability
  - Innovation
- Motivation
  - Achievement drive
  - Commitment
  - Initiative
  - Optimism

**Social Competence:** *determine how we handle relationships*

- Empathy
  - Understanding others
  - Developing others
  - Service orientation
  - Leveraging diversity
  - Political awareness
- Social Skills
  - Influence
  - Communication
  - Conflict management
  - Leadership
  - Change catalyst
  - Building bonds
  - Collaboration and cooperation
  - Team capabilities

**Figure 1.** Daniel Goleman’s Emotional Competence Framework

of one’s organization, work group, and colleagues.<sup>6</sup> In subsequent years, a number of studies have reported the necessity of specific competencies, most frequently for upper-management positions. Although definitions and groupings of competencies vary from study to study, what remains constant is the urgency of the need for them.

Professional associations and divisions have also made concerted efforts to foster skills and competencies required for successful careers in librarianship. A widely cited report by the Special Libraries Association defines professional competencies as those that “relate to the practitioner’s knowledge of information resources, access, technology and management, and the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information services”; and personal competencies as those that “represent a set of attitudes, skills, and values that enable practitioners to work effectively and contribute positively to their organizations, clients and profession.”<sup>7</sup> Other examples of such documents produced by consortia include The California Library Association and the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL).<sup>8</sup> Within ALA divisions, the Reference and User Services Association Task Force on Professional Competencies developed a document in which competencies are defined as “behaviors that excellent performers exhibit more consistently and effectively than average performers” at the specialized level.<sup>9</sup> The Art Libraries Society of North America defines its core competencies as “fundamental skills, professional knowledge, and philosophies generally acquired within the first few years in an art library or visual resources position.”<sup>10</sup> The American Association of Law Libraries and the Music Library Association offer analogous tools.<sup>11</sup> The results of these efforts have generally been used either to guide library schools in the continued review and revision of their curricula, or to inform practitioners of new or improved competencies they need and advise them on how to plan for professional development.

Presentations and workshops highlighting the importance of EI in the workplace are common at national and regional conferences. Furthermore, the Association of Research Libraries, through the Office of Leadership and Management Services, offers online courses, workshops, and seminars on various EI aspects, such as power dynamics and influencing skills, conflict management, motivation and performance, and commitment to and leading change. Additionally, at the individual, institutional level, comparable initiatives have resulted in useful documents. For instance, Yale University Library and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries have created their own lists of core professional competencies.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, previous studies have been conducted using data obtained from library job advertisements. For the most part, these studies have focused on new skills required to perform in a specific position, such as technical services, reference, or instruction librarians. The changing nature of library work and its essential skills is well

documented in a 2001 article by Lynch.<sup>13</sup> This work also reports on the emerging importance of behavioral skills, particularly interpersonal skills in the content of selected job ads. In his brief 1998 article, Tennant proposes a list of personality traits that candidates for digital library positions must possess.<sup>14</sup> In 2006, Herson and Rossiter identified the most important leadership traits vis-à-vis EI which they define in terms of leadership.<sup>15</sup> Although their study used a research method similar to the one used by this author, their analysis only covered director-level positions. In the present study, leadership is included under the EI umbrella and the analysis of job ads covered five distinct job categories: director, assistant director, department head, experienced, and entry-level positions.<sup>16</sup>

## Research Method

The EI concept was chosen for this study because it provides insights into human behaviors and helps organizations understand and predict people’s performance, including actions such as how individuals behave when working in teams. It has been well documented that EI influences organizational effectiveness in many areas including efficiency, commitment, morale, innovation, and creativity.<sup>17</sup> Studying information professionals’ competencies in light of an EI framework poses distinct challenges. Goleman’s framework is utilized here as a tool that permits analysis of the data supporting the hypotheses of this research, but it is not intended to engage in the larger debate about the validity of EI vis-à-vis other theories in the psychology field.

Job advertisements posted on the *C&RL News* Web site between November 16, 2005, and February 15, 2006, were collected and scanned for relevance, resulting in a sample of 260 individual ads. This excludes ads for positions that did not provide any level of detail regarding qualifications, those which led to broken links, or ads for temporary positions. Each job ad was assigned to one category, as illustrated in figure 2, which shows the number of positions analyzed and their distribution amongst the various levels.

Terminology associated with soft skills encountered in the job ads was matched with a suitable emotional competency in Goleman’s framework and translated using a “conversion table,” shown in figure 3. The information was entered into a spreadsheet that listed each job ad (rows) and the EI competencies from the framework that were referenced in each ad (columns).

The following are examples of job ads requiring EI traits (in bold):

1. Libraries seek an **innovative, energetic, and service-oriented** professional to join a staff of seven librarians in the Science & Engineering Library. Core responsibilities include developing and managing collections, providing reference services, establishing departmental information literacy programs, developing collaborative relationships with academic departments, and creating new programs and initiatives that respond to trends in scientific research. Required qualifications: master’s degree from an ALA-accredited library school or an advanced degree with relevant experience; **excellent communication, presentation, and interpersonal skills; demonstrated creativity, initiative, and self-direction; ability to respond effectively to changing needs and priorities; ability to work both independently and in cooperation with colleagues and library users in a service-oriented, collaborative environment.**
2. A position advertised as the “librarian of the future” requiring: master’s degree in library and/or information science from an ALA-accredited institution; working knowledge of blogs, wikis, online gaming environments, podcasting, RSS, and other Web-related technologies; experience in multi-platform (Unix, Windows, and Mac) environments; demonstrated ability to manage technical projects within a large library setting; **demonstrated commitment to customer service; demonstrated understanding of the transformative possibilities of technology in the classroom; demonstrated collaborative skills; ability to think critically in analyzing problems and developing resourceful solutions; ability to manage a complex workload, prioritize tasks, and complete work on time with minimum supervision; strong communication and interpersonal skills, and ability to work well as part of a team.**
3. A middle-manager position requiring: **highly developed interpersonal** and teaching skills, mature **judgment**, and **initiative**; the abilities to foster **teamwork** and to work

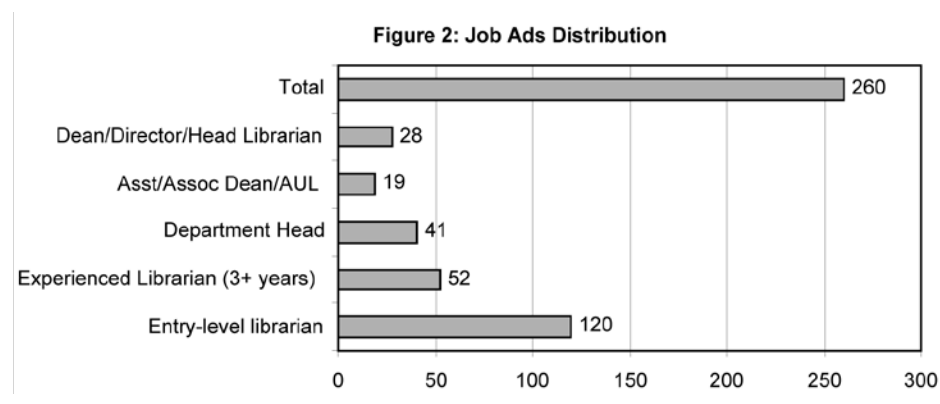


Figure 2. Job Ads Distribution

**energetically and imaginatively** with all constituencies in an **academically ambitious** community. A **broad perspective** on the work of academic libraries and the challenges and opportunities they face; the ability to translate personal academic commitment and understanding of student and faculty cultures into strong service programs; superior oral and written English-language communication skills and the **ability to thoughtfully articulate the goals and work of the library** to its several constituencies. **Demonstrated ability to lead groups of colleagues, recognizing the importance of and differences among individual contributions while promoting the interests of the library as a whole; demonstrated ability to conceive, design, and implement policy and program initiatives; demonstrated ability to work across campus departmental and institutional lines. Evidence of continuing professional development, creativity, flexibility, and resourcefulness.** Evidence of

commitment to the goals of a liberal arts education and a willingness to become involved in many aspects of the life of the college community. **Ability to maintain a flexible schedule**, including some night and weekend hours.

A common thread in these advertisements is that they address EI competencies. Some job ads for librarians now provide links that refer applicants to specific documents listing sets of competencies that must be met, for example, and a few ads mentioned that candidates should possess the ASERL's Competencies for Research Librarians.

### EI Competencies: What the Data Show

The following are some of the key points derived from the analysis and language conversion of the sample job ads:

EI Competence	Job Ads Terminology
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	
1. Emotional awareness	Handles stress; understands impact of own emotions in the workplace
2. Accurate self-assessment	Applies new learning; open to feedback, self-development, and continuous learning
3. Self confidence	Decisive; assertive; voices unpopular views
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	
4. Self control	Positive; stays focused; good time-management skills; sets priorities
5. Trustworthiness	Works independently; displays honesty, integrity, accountability; builds trust
6. Conscientiousness	Dependability; meets deadlines; organized
7. Adaptability	Flexibility; adapts to changes; handles multiple demands; multitasks
8. Innovation	Innovative; creative; open to new ideas, information, technology, approaches; takes risks; generates ideas
<b>Motivation</b>	
9. Achievement drive	Goal-oriented, results-oriented; committed to excellence; strives to improve
10. Commitment	Embraces organization's goals and vision; resilient; goes extra mile; has sense of purpose
11. Initiative	Energetic; dynamic; proactive; cuts through red tape
12. Optimism	Positive attitude; persistent; enthusiastic
<b>Empathy</b>	
13. Understanding others	Good listener; interested in others' feelings and concerns
14. Developing others	Supports staff development; mentor; timely coach; gives constructive feedback
15. Service orientation	Customer-focus; user-focus; customers' needs come first
16. Leveraging diversity	Respect for others' views/beliefs; challenges bias and intolerance; works well with diverse customers
17. Political awareness	Politically savvy; aware of internal and external atmosphere; takes advantage of social networks
<b>Social Skills</b>	
18. Influence	Advocates; inspires; builds rapport; encourages; builds consensus; persuasive; convincing
19. Communication	Articulate; excellent written and oral skills; shares information openly; transparent
20. Conflict management	Negotiation skills; diplomacy; problem solver; encourages debate; pursues win/win solutions
21. Leadership	Sets example/role model; guides others; sets vision; leadership skills; sets direction for future
22. Change catalyst	Anticipates and manages change; removes barriers
23. Building bonds	Establishes and maintains relationships and partnerships
24. Collaboration and cooperation	Collegial; participatory; inclusive; empowers others; shares information
25. Team capabilities	Fosters team environment; team player; shares vision and goals

**Figure 3.** Conversion Table

- A relatively small percentage of job ads refer to specific EI competencies; however, many of the qualities sought in applicants are comparable to them.
- Leadership competency is cited most often in the categories of dean, assistant/associate dean, and department head. It is used in the sense described by Cherniss and Goleman, that people with this competency “articulate and arouse enthusiasm for a shared vision and mission; step forward to lead as needed, regardless of position; guide the performance of others while holding them accountable and lead by example.”<sup>18</sup> The job ads usually require “leadership skills” without further details, or simply state that the individual must “lead” the work of some sector of the library. This variable was also used when the job ad called for ability to provide vision or set directions for the future.
- “Collaboration and cooperation” is the second most frequently cited competency, and given the acknowledged need for librarians to work collaboratively, its importance is understandable. Collaboration encompasses collegiality, participation, inclusiveness, shared decision-making, shared goals, partnership, and so on. Likewise, “service orientation” is quoted with relatively high frequency, as are “initiative,” “innovation,” and “team capabilities.”
- The ads often seek applicants who possess “good communication skills,” without further elaboration. According to Cherniss and Goleman, individuals with this competency “are effective in give-and-take, registering emotional cues in attuning their message; deal with difficult issues straightforwardly; listen well, seek mutual understanding, and welcome sharing of information fully; foster open communication and stay receptive to bad news as well as good.”<sup>19</sup>
- Although the framework includes twenty-five individual EI competencies, no position matched more than fourteen individual competencies. The averages are much lower. Figure 4 depicts these data for each level of position advertised.
- Figure 5 shows the frequency (percent) in which each of the twenty-five EI competencies were mentioned in the job ads.
- Figure 6 depicts the number of phrases matching criteria in each of the five clusters of competencies in the job ads. Figure 7 shows the same information as a percentage of the total number of advertisements studied.

## Discussion and Conclusion

There is a growing awareness of EI’s importance. Soft skills, traditionally most valued in upper management, are now essential at all levels of the professional workforce. There is evidence, for example, that academic libraries are increasingly using teams to achieve projects. Teamwork brings all members to the same level; hence any behavioral

gap becomes apparent and hinders the work of the team. Emotionally intelligent individuals are necessary in any organization where work relies heavily on collaboration, development of partnerships, incorporating changes in the workplace, and leveraging a diverse workforce.

Although acquiring or keeping up with EI competencies needs to be an ongoing goal of every professional, the responsibility for ensuring that this happens is shared. For obvious reasons, library schools have traditionally focused on developing cognitive and hard skills. Today, they are looking for ways to expand and enhance the curriculum by incorporating soft competencies into programs. Motivation comes from the ALA Committee on Accreditation’s Standards for Accreditation which specifically speaks to how the curriculum should foster the development of soft skills that will be needed by successful future professionals.<sup>20</sup>

How does evaluation of soft skills or EI take place at the point of hiring, when it’s most important? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is beyond the focus of this article. Most pertinent studies mention that institutions tend to address the lack of soft skills after hiring, through professional development programs. The question still remains: How are these qualifications measured or validated? This most commonly happens by using more extensive interviews and appropriate testing to determine which of the qualified job candidates have the highest degree of these competencies. Examples of EI measurement tools include Informant EQ Test: Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) 1999, designed by Richard E. Boyatzis, Daniel Goleman, and the Hay/McBer training group; and Ability EQ Test: Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) 1997, designed by John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso. How these might be applied is an area for future research.

When the assessment does not occur prior to hiring, institutions may rely on staff development programs to compensate. In order to enable their staff to develop and improve EI competencies, libraries need to commit to ongoing professional development. This requires extensive resources and supposes the presence of an assessment mechanism to determine needs. Many institutions have already implemented competency-assessment programs to assist in this endeavor.

The University of Arizona Library provides a model wherein several steps have been taken in these directions. Job ads are carefully crafted to convey the need

Dean/Director	3.9
Associate/Assistant Dean	5.3
Department Head	4.8
Experienced	4.2
Entry Level	4.4

**Figure 4.** Average Number of Individual EI Competencies in Job Ads

for highly-motivated applicants who possess these soft skills or the interest and potential for developing them. Interviews of applicants now include a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit information pertaining to EI competencies. In addition, an extensive New

Employee Orientation program consists of five foundation sessions for a total of twenty hours of training. Its purpose is to orient new employees to the library systems and to develop specific competencies required to succeed in a team-based organization. The program

	<b>Deans/ Directors (%)</b>	<b>Associate/ Assistant Deans (%)</b>	<b>Department Heads (%)</b>	<b>Experienced (%)</b>	<b>Entry Level (%)</b>
Emotional awareness	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Self-assessment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Self-confidence	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Self-control	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.7
Trustworthiness	0.0	5.0	12.0	17.0	27.0
Conscientiousness	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Adaptability	0.0	10.0	29.0	29.0	28.0
Innovation	43.0	47.0	44.0	31.0	39.0
Achievement drive	0.0	10.0	2.0	0.0	8.0
Commitment	0.0	16.0	12.0	12.0	23.0
Initiative	36.0	26.0	44.0	33.0	36.0
Optimism	0.0	0.0	10.0	19.0	8.0
Understanding others	7.0	5.0	5.0	0.0	1.7
Developing others	7.0	21.0	12.0	13.0	1.7
Service orientation	25.0	31.0	44.0	38.0	43.0
Leveraging diversity	14.0	26.0	22.0	31.0	33.0
Political awareness	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Influence	7.0	26.0	15.0	4.0	6.0
Communication	43.0	47.0	32.0	42.0	55.0
Conflict management	7.0	10.0	17.0	19.0	9.0
Leadership	75.0	84.0	68.0	31.0	21.0
Change catalyst	14.0	26.0	7.0	6.0	0.8
Building bonds	21.0	26.0	17.0	10.0	5.0
Collaboration and cooperation	61.0	79.0	54.0	46.0	56.0
Team capabilities	10.0	26.0	34.0	40.0	33.0

**Figure 5.** Percentage of Job Ads Referring to EI Competencies

<b>Level</b>	<b>Self-Awareness (%)</b>	<b>Self-Regulation (%)</b>	<b>Motivation (%)</b>	<b>Empathy (%)</b>	<b>Social Skills (%)</b>
Dean/Director (28)	0.0	2.4	2.5	3.0	8.8
Associate/Assistant Dean (19)	0.0	2.2	2.5	3.4	7.8
Department Head (41)	0.0	7.2	7.0	6.8	12.5
Experienced (52)	0.0	8.0	8.3	8.6	12.8
Novice (120)	0.0	23.0	22.8	19.2	45.8

**Figure 6.** Average Number of Ads Mentioning Clusters of Competencies

<b>Level</b>	<b>Self-Awareness (%)</b>	<b>Self-Regulation (%)</b>	<b>Motivation (%)</b>	<b>Empathy (%)</b>	<b>Social Skills (%)</b>
Dean/Director (28)	0.0	9.0	9.0	11.0	31.0
Associate/Assistant Dean (19)	0.0	12.0	13.0	18.0	41.0
Department Head (41)	0.0	18.0	17.0	17.0	31.0
Experienced (52)	0.0	15.0	16.0	17.0	25.0
Novice (120)	0.0	19.0	19.0	16.0	38.0

**Figure 7.** Percentage of Ads Mentioning Clusters of Competencies

includes sessions on decision-making (especially reaching consensus); strategic (big picture) thinking; focusing on the customer; living the values of flexibility, integrity, diversity and continuous learning; and working in teams and facilitating team meetings. Competencies are borrowed or transferred across the library to where they are most urgently needed, thus adding fluidity to individual assignments and allowing for staff mobility depending on institutional priorities and individual needs.

The present study demonstrates that a significant percentage of job advertisements are not designed to attract emotionally intelligent individuals, but rather those with specific hard skills. On the one hand, the profession is clamoring for these missing soft skills. On the other hand, employers are not soliciting them at the point when positions are advertised. This can have a negative impact in the size and diversity of the pool of candidates attracted to the jobs and represents an issue that the profession should address globally. New models for assuring that EI competencies are cultivated within librarianship are needed to address these concerns.

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