



Reference Competencies from the Practitioner's Perspective: An International Comparison

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Introduction

- Original U.S. survey: public and academic
- Collaboration initiated at Krakow Conference on LIS Education.
- This study examines the following questions:
 - Are expectations around reference competencies consistent across different countries?
 - If so, can an international standard or core list of competencies for reference librarians be determined?
 - Are there statistically significant differences among different nations with regard to reference competencies and qualifications?
 - If so, which competencies are preferred by which countries, and is there a discernible cultural pattern?

Survey

- 3 categories of competencies:
 - General
 - Technical
 - Interpersonal
- Indicate all important competencies
 - Select three most important in each category

- Predict which competencies would be important in the next ten years, and again which three in each category would be most important

International Participants

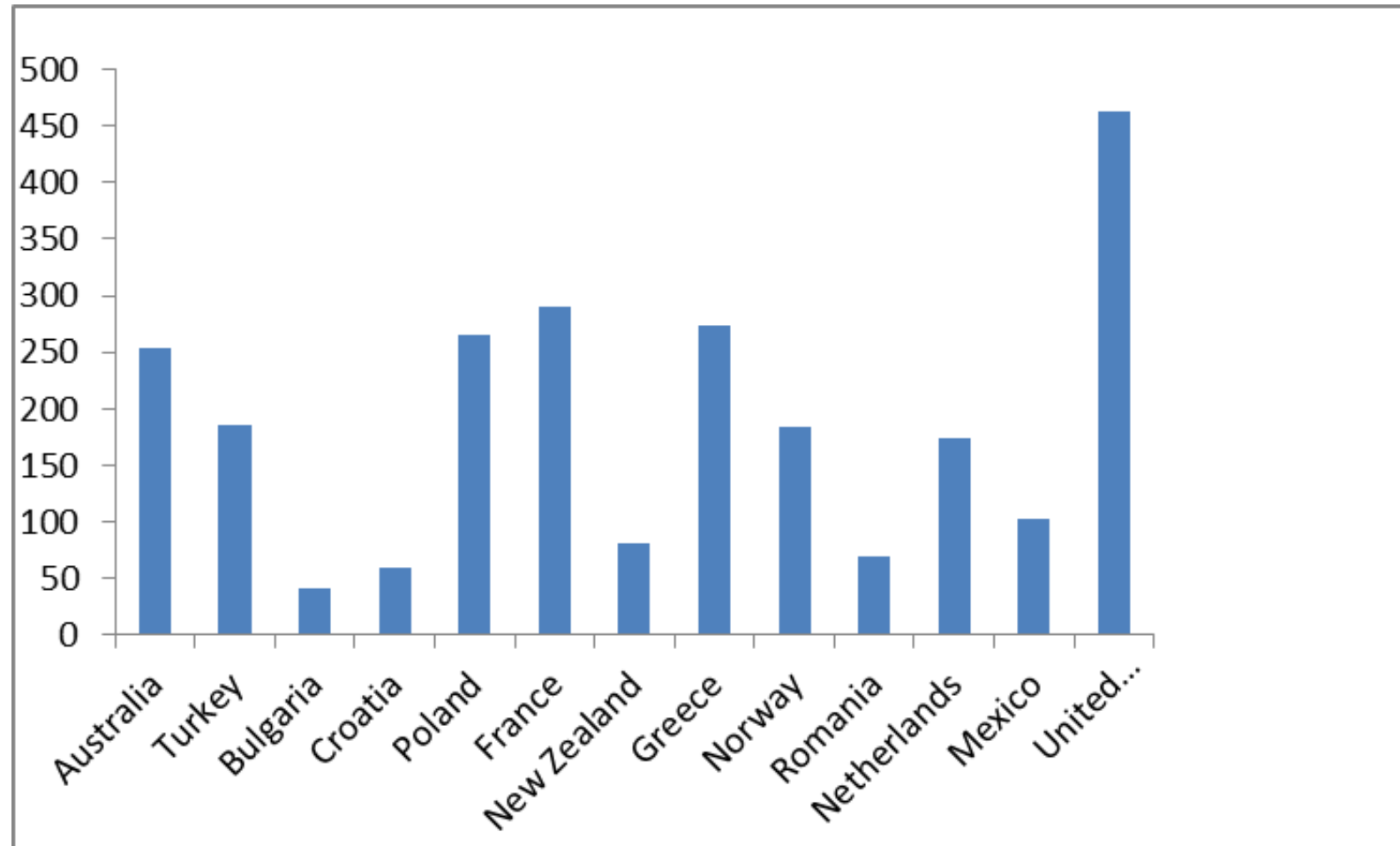
- Participants recruited through personal knowledge, recommendation, and outreach
 - 15 participants join
 - 13 submit data

Survey & Samples

- Original survey translated by participants
 - researchers made every effort to keep the meaning and intent of the original survey
 - all changes centered on demographic questions
- Original U.S. surveys were random samples. All others were a census.

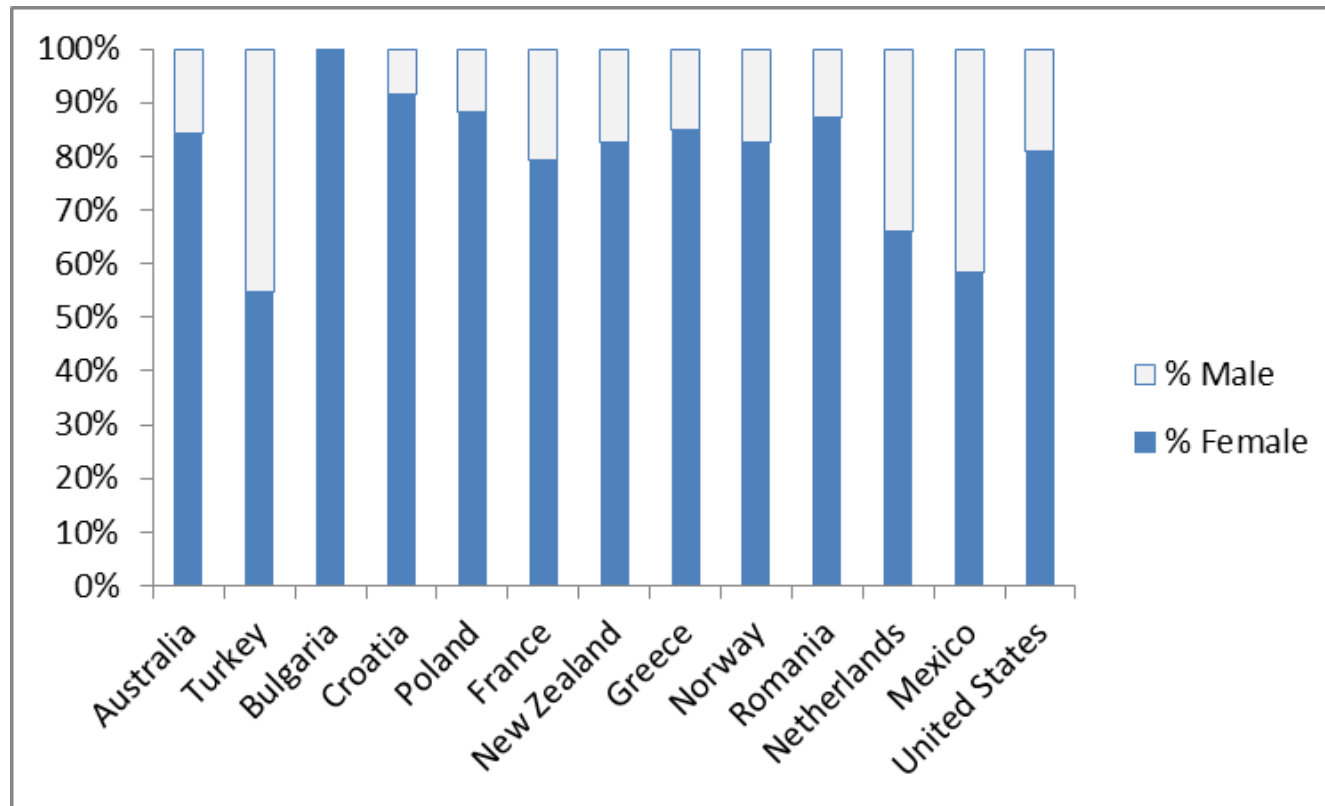
Demographics

2444 responses from 13 different countries



Males and Females

- 79.3% were female
 - Bulgaria had the highest percentage of female respondents at 100%
 - Turkey had the lowest at 54.8%



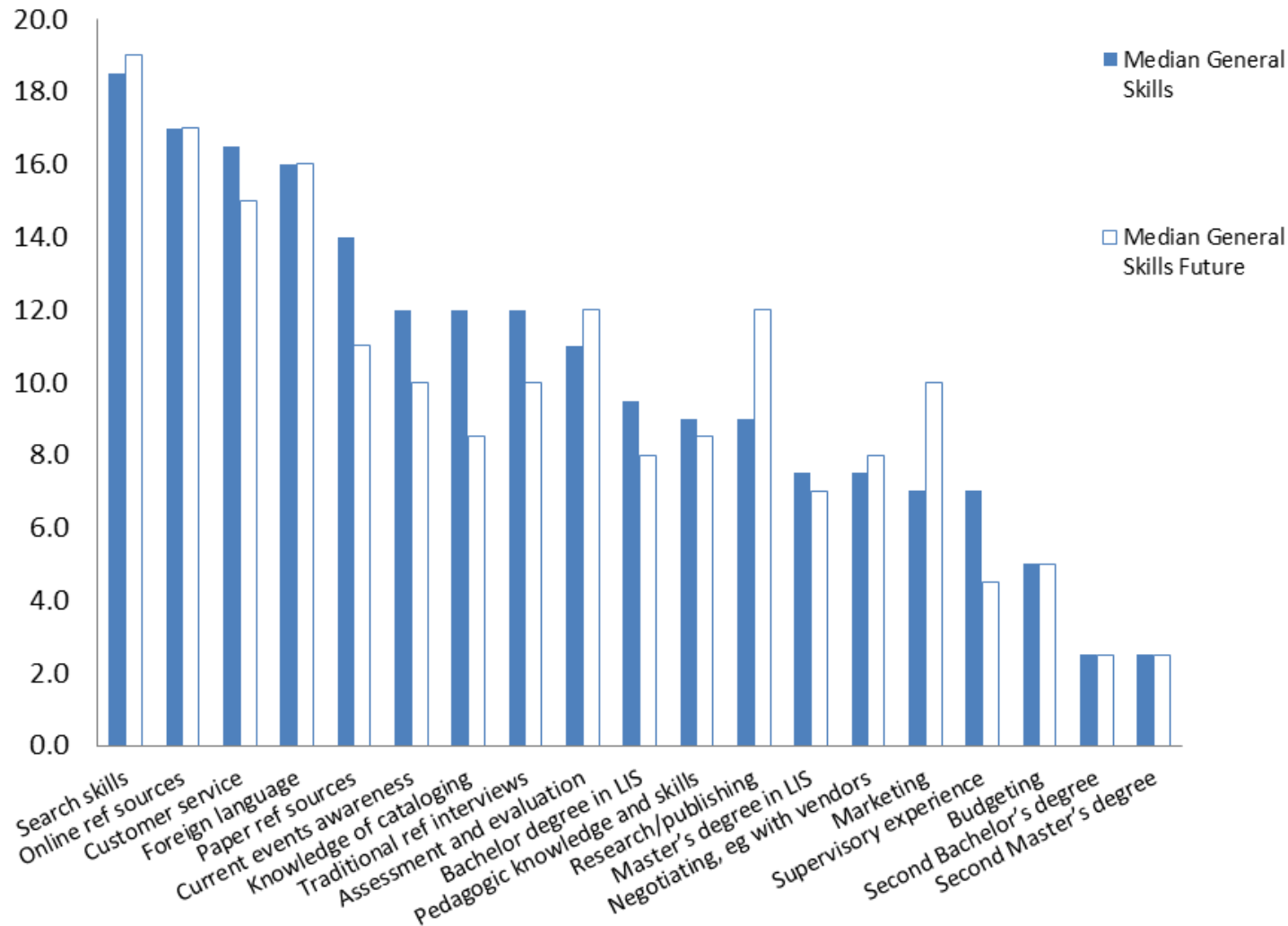
Age ranges

- The majority of participants were between the ages of 31 and 40 (28.0%)
 - the 41-50 age range (26.0%)
 - the 51-60 age range (24.3%)
- Turkey had the youngest librarians on average, at 34.9 years, while New Zealand had the highest average age at 49.4 years

General skills

1. Search skills
 - Ranked highest or tied for highest in ten out of thirteen countries
 2. Knowledge of online resources
 3. Customer service
 4. Foreign language
- A second Master's degree (or a second Bachelor's degree for those countries requiring only a Bachelor to practice) was the overall least often selected competency, followed by budgeting

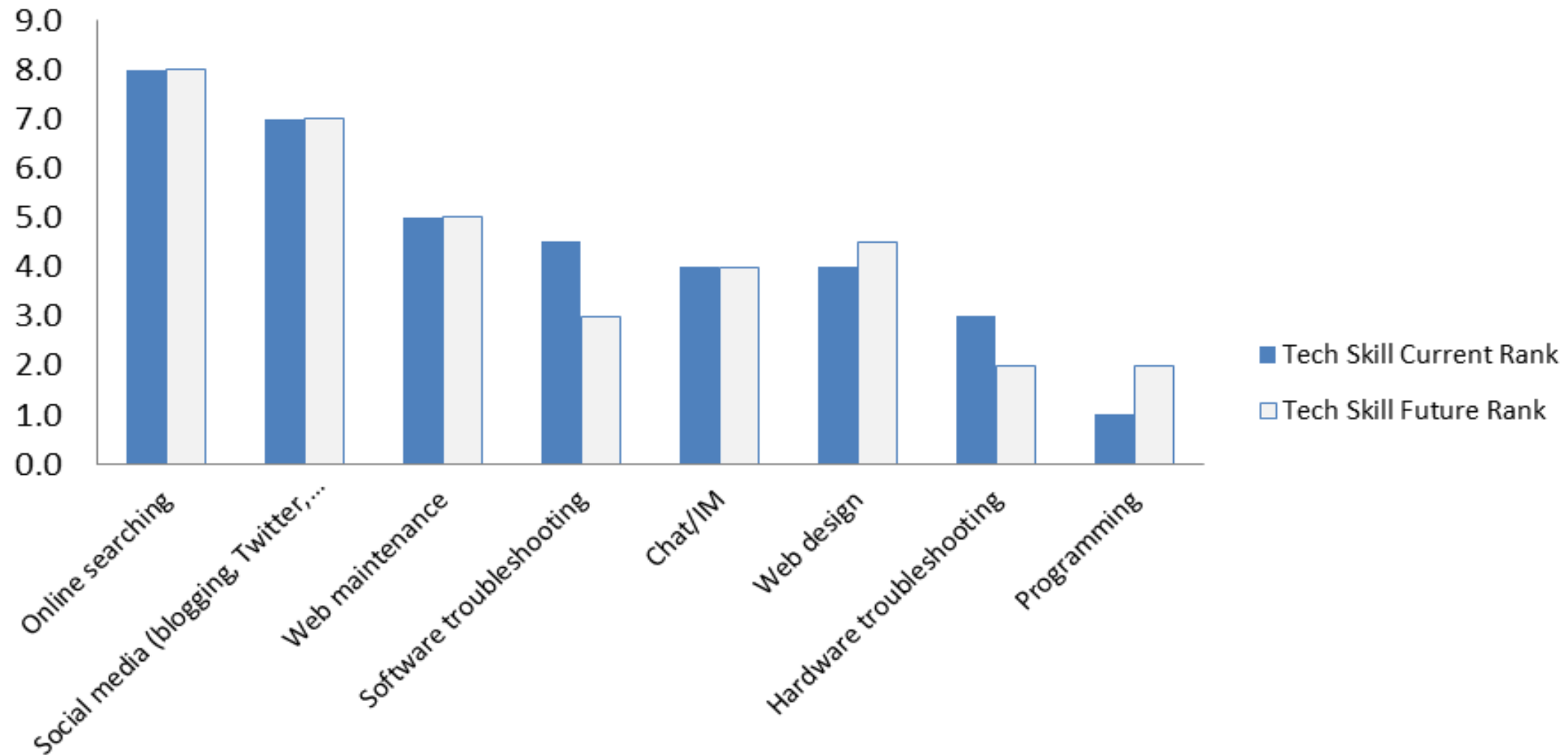
General Skills, Current and Next Decade by Median Score



Technical Skills

1. Online searching
 - Ranked number one by all thirteen countries
 2. Knowledge of and facility with social media
- Hardware troubleshooting, and software troubleshooting are ranked very differently by different countries, appearing among the top three in some cases, and the bottom three in others
 - Programming was the bottom-ranked skill

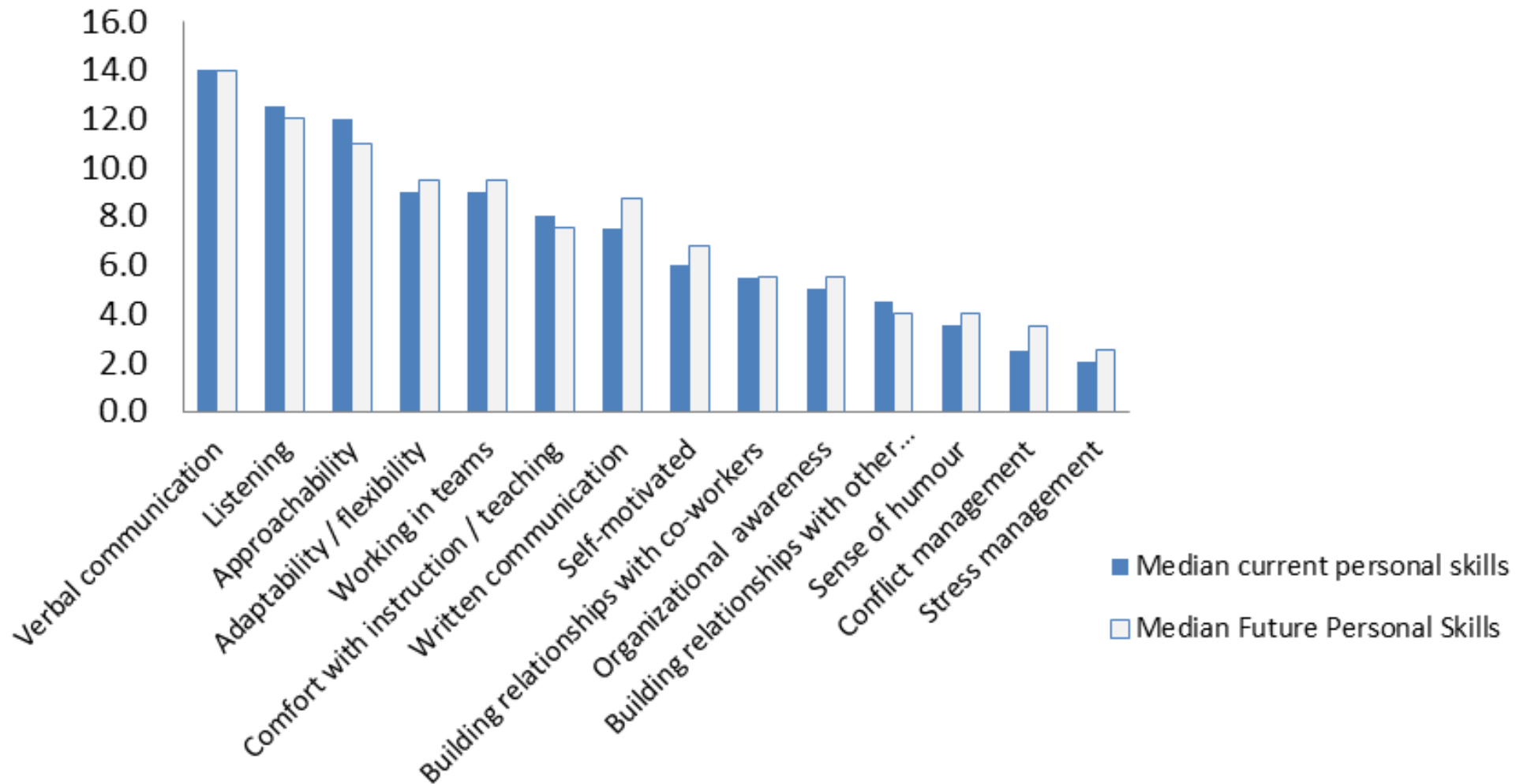
Technology Skills, Current and Future by Median Score



Personal skills

1. Verbal communication
 - Unanimously ranked first by all thirteen countries
 2. Listening
 3. Approachability
- Conflict management and stress management were consistently ranked as the bottom two

Personal Skills, Current and Future by Median Score



Across Countries

CONSENSUS & CONTRAST

Consensus

- **More consensus on hard skills:**
 - technical skills were likely to be ranked similarly across countries
 - certain general skills such as searching, and knowledge of online and print reference sources
- Core academic reference services are similar from one country to another

Contrasts

- **Less on soft skills:**
 - interpersonal skills including sense of humor, conflict management, and self-motivation show the greatest variation
- cultural differences in norms and expectations for interpersonal interactions
 - sensitivity to possible differences in how patrons and colleagues interact
 - the expected relationships between employees and supervisors
- Cultural differences influence expectations of the interpersonal interactions involved in providing those services

Conclusions:

Academic reference skills are transferable:

- Exchange programs such as Fulbright and Erasmus Scholarships
- Librarians interested in relocating temporary or permanent basis.
- Suggests that library science curricula could have similar focal points for reference courses
 - allowing some flexibility for transfer of credits,
 - study abroad programs, or
 - relocating after graduation

Final lessons

- Librarians can see the extent their international counterparts face similar challenges and expectations with regard to delivering reference services
- LIS Teaching faculty can understand reference competencies and expectations in other countries
 - teaching greater numbers of international students
 - consider collaborating with international colleagues
 - developing students who can compete in a global job market
- By identifying areas of commonality and difference in the area of academic reference services, this study might inspire further collaboration among colleagues from different countries to continue to explore cultural differences in the approach to reference services.