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STRATEGIC COMPETENCE MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

1. Introduction

Universities around the world have recently undergone fundamental transformations largely due to changes in higher education, advances in information technology and new funding models. University libraries have not escaped the impact of these changes. The changes in academia and the information landscape have placed an increased demand upon library leaders to pay great attention to the management of competencies within their libraries. This is important, because information professionals of the 21st century are required to be multi-skilled if they are to survive in their dynamic operating environment.

Apart from core competencies gained from library schools, today's information professionals need to possess an array of skills, ranging from managerial, technological, research, communication, financial and interpersonal skills. These skills will enable information professionals to make meaningful contributions towards achieving the vision and mission of their parent institutions. Referring to modern librarians, Kwanya, Stilwell and Underwood argue that "they should understand

the big picture and align the library to the parent organization's vision and mission" (Kwanya & Stilwell & Underwood 2012, 10). It is therefore imperative for library managers to not only understand the concept of competence management but to also assimilate and apply it in the management of human resources.

Competence management may be viewed as the method adopted by a particular organization to manage human resources competencies in an effective and efficient manner. Thus, competence management is an important strategy to ensure that the organization maintains a competent labour force in the right place at the right time.

2. Aims of the study

The main aim of this study is to discuss the concept of competence management at university libraries with special reference to the application of the competence management concept at the Tampere University Library and the University of Namibia Library. Another aim is to compare the models and approaches of competence management being used by management at these two university libraries. The method of the competence mapping project in Finnish university libraries is drawn upon to discuss the case of the Tampere University Library.

3. Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it provides useful insights into library managers in managing competencies in university libraries. The topic is likewise important because the changes in higher education and libraries demand new kinds of competencies.

Additionally, staff recruitment and continuous staff development have become critical success factors and competitive issues for university libraries. University libraries will only fulfil their functions and roles more efficiently when they recruit competent human resources and when library leaders manage competencies more effectively.

4. Literature review

While the review of the literature revealed that the topic of competence has been discussed widely in the information field, a great proportion of researchers focused mostly on lists of the competencies required by information professionals. There is a major shortage of research about competence management in university libraries. Competencies have been defined by different organizations in the library profession. The American Library Association (ALA) has defined the basic knowledge to be possessed by all persons graduating from an ALA-accredited master's programme in library and information studies (ALA 2009).

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) has also defined competencies for special librarians in the 21st century, which it revised in 2003 (SLA 2003). Other professional organizations in the USA have also produced lists of professional competencies for medical librarians, music librarians and law librarians. For example, the Association of South-eastern Research Libraries (ASERL) in the USA investigated the educational needs for librarians in order to support the research library of the future. ASERL has suggested both skills that are common to all librarians and those that are special to research librarians in higher education institutes. (ASERL 1999.)

The Online Computer Library Catalog (OCLC) has moreover been a partner in an interesting effort to compile different competency statements. They have reviewed competency lists of many library organizations and compiled them into a Competency Index. The

idea of the index is to help libraries with strategies relating to staff training and recruitment. (Gutsche 2009.) Ashcroft emphasised that new technologies mean that library and information science is currently characterised by fast-paced changes, with staff needing to be flexible in adapting and adopting new skills and levels of awareness. She further argued that new developments need to be marketed and evaluated, and these are additional skills for information professionals to adopt. (Ashcroft 2004.)

An interesting survey was conducted on 124 members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in June 2002. Sixty-five per cent responded to the survey. The 17 libraries in North America indicated that they had adopted core competencies between 1960 and 2003. However, these libraries found that developing core competencies is a time-consuming effort. For example, 60% of the respondents in this survey reported that it had taken them from six months to over a year to develop core competencies. Once developed, awareness of the core competences among library staff is maintained by means of information sessions and by publishing competences on web sites. In 16 libraries, supervisors were responsible for evaluating whether an employee had attained competency. Thirteen of the 17 responding libraries also considered the individual's self-assessment. The salary is tied to core competency according to nine libraries. For several other libraries, salary increases reflect overall work performance, which includes the attainment of core competencies. (ARL 2002.)

In Canada, a study was conducted on competence frameworks in public libraries. A questionnaire was sent to 59 libraries, of which 15 responded. Seven of these libraries had competency frameworks. Six libraries out of seven had identified core competency models, while the seventh library had developed a comprehensive competency framework to describe specific classes of jobs within the library. The study found that six public libraries had adopted core competency models for all employees. These competencies were used in performance appraisal and for the human resource management functions of recruitment,

selection and identifying training needs. Performance appraisal was usually carried out for evaluation purposes, i.e. to determine salary and bonus or to support promotion decisions, for development purposes, and to determine training needs. Employees were evaluated against the core competencies in the performance appraisal process. Unsatisfactory performance in any competency required an action plan to improve the necessary knowledge and skills. (Chan 2006.)

Another example of competence building in the daily working context is the programme by the Danish National Library Authority (DNLA). DNLA developed a strategy to implement a programme for skills and competence development for the public libraries in Denmark during the period of 2000–2003. The keywords for the programme were learning organization and action learning and the idea was that the programme should have a lasting impact. (Thorhauge 2005.)

5. Theoretical perspectives

Knowledge and competence have been the most important factor in the performance of the organization (Prahalad & Hamel 1990; Sanchez & Heene 2000). Success requires that the knowledge and competence should be created, developed and be taken advantage of and this requires competence management. Although competence management has been widely discussed in the scientific literature, there is no common theory in the area of competence management. There are several theories of different disciplines. For example economics, business management and personnel management provides literature on this subject. Competence management has been discussed in various respects, such as organization, learning, economic and management perspectives. Table 1 illustrates the differences in these research perspectives.

Table1. Research perspectives (knowledge and competence management)

(Source: Kirjavainen P. & Laakso-Manninen R.: Strateginen osaamisen johtaminen =Strategic competence management 2000, p. 12)

Research perspectives	Focus	Authors
Knowledge Management	Knowledge creation, conceptualization of the processes and developing procedures for their management	Nonaka, I Sveiby, K.E. Roos, J. & Roos, G. Davenport, T. & Prusak, L. Leonard-Barton, D. Stähle, P. & Grönroos, M.
Competence-Based Strategic Management	Way to understand the organization's strategy and competition, has also created new perspectives on how the staff development is connected to the strategy. The concept of core competence.	Hamel, G. & Prahalad, C.K. Stalk, G., Evans, Ph., Schulman, L. ym. Ulrich, D. & Lake, D.
Learning Organization	A comprehensive organization development philosophy, which is based on larger view of human as organizational actor. The social significance of the interaction. Continuous assessment self-development.	Argyris, C. & Schön, D.A. Senge, P.M. Sarala, A. & Sarala, U.

Knowledge management is one area that has been discussed in the scientific literature. The concept of “knowledge management” in this study is taken more narrowly than “competence-based management” or “competence management,” which implies a broader conceptual interpretation and capability building as well as the exploitation of empowerment. Knowledge management consists of data acquisition, internalization, application and experiential activity.

Competence management is defined as an intentional management activity aimed at encouraging the renewal of knowledge and development at all levels of the organization (Sanchez 2004). The organization's competence management requires the selection of core

competence, the creation, use and securing of competence (Hamel & Prahalad 1994, 25). The organization's strategic architecture is essentially a broad plan to derive advantage from new functions, new or existing qualifications by obtaining or modifying and re-shaping the customer interface (Hamel & Prahalad 1994, 107–126). Learning organization is a much discussed topic in the literature and many definitions for it have been proposed.

Strategic management is a systematic approach to take care of the main responsibility of management, namely to relate the organization to the environment in order to manage contingencies and to ensure continued success. The strategy as a concept is to determine the strategic intent, objectives and direction in which the organization is heading. (Ansoff 1984, 15–19.)

Competency is a set of skills that an individual can use to accomplish a given task (Sanchez 2001, 7). Competence is the ability of an organization to sustain the coordinated deployments of assets and capabilities in ways which help the organization achieve its goals. Sanchez emphasizes that the concept of competence has three essential elements:

- 1) The co-ordination of assets and capabilities
- 2) Intention in deploying assets and capabilities
- 3) Goal-seeking as the driver of the organizational action

Sanchez further clarifies the tasks of managers: “Competence is a property of an organization that depends on three inputs from managers: articulating the general goals of the organization, defining specific action that will help the organization achieves its goals and coordinating the use of resources in carrying out those actions” (Sanchez 2001, 7). He defines: “Competence building is the process of creating or acquiring new kinds of assets and capabilities. Competence leveraging is the coordinated use of an organizations current assets and capabilities in taking actions. Competence maintenance is the maintenance of an

organization's current assets and capabilities in a state of effectiveness for use in the actions." (Sanchez 2001, 7.)

Competence management often concerns the concept of capabilities. These capabilities represent the organizational output of coordinated actions and this consists of individuals with competencies that will be linked to the group (Sanchez, 2004). Core competence is a battery of skills and techniques which offer an organization the opportunity to produce a particular benefit to customers (Hamel & Prahalad 1994, 199). The organization's management must understand the management of core competencies as part of a management tasks by identifying the right core competencies, ensuring core competence acquisition, the construction and operation of know-how, and by safeguarding human knowledge management (Hamel & Prahalad 1994, 224).

6. Methodology

The study adopted a case study research design to describe and compare competence management approaches at Tampere University Library and the University of Namibia Library. It is a desktop study, which is descriptive and conceptual in nature. As such, a critical review of the literature also formed part of the research method. This method was deemed appropriate because of its strengths in investigating trends and specific situations much more rapidly. A key benefit of the study is that it presents an overview of competency-based management as implemented at these two university libraries. The core competencies that characterize the capabilities required in library staff are highlighted. Nevertheless, the study was limited by time and resources. One limitation of the study is that the number of libraries described for competence management is limited.

7. A Competence Mapping Project in Finland

The Competence Map Development project by the university libraries in Finland network started in 2004. Its aim was to provide an approach for continuous learning and development in the university libraries. The first step was to create a knowledge map based on the strategy of the Finnish university libraries' network. The idea was that the map would include the competencies needed in the network of university libraries now and in the future. The map will further provide tools for collaborative knowledge; provide structure for the development of know-how and help in staff recruitment. The map will also support the assessment of staff skills in various positions and facilitate the development of work planning, implementation and evaluation. Equally importantly the map project will provide opportunities for employees on self-assessment. (University Libraries Network 2005, 2–3.)

In this project core competence was defined as the typical, widely adopted knowledge of an organization which makes the organization superior. Core competence is difficult to replace or emulate and it has a long life span. The benefits are that it provides an organization with a significant competitive advantage, it can be applied to new services and the core competence may result in significant benefits for customers.

The project was based on **the competency scope** developed by Green (1999). Figure 1 defines competency scope. Competencies refer to both organizational and individual characteristics. Individual characteristics include technical knowledge and skills as well as the performance skills and competencies of individual contributors. These four blocks are adapted from Green.

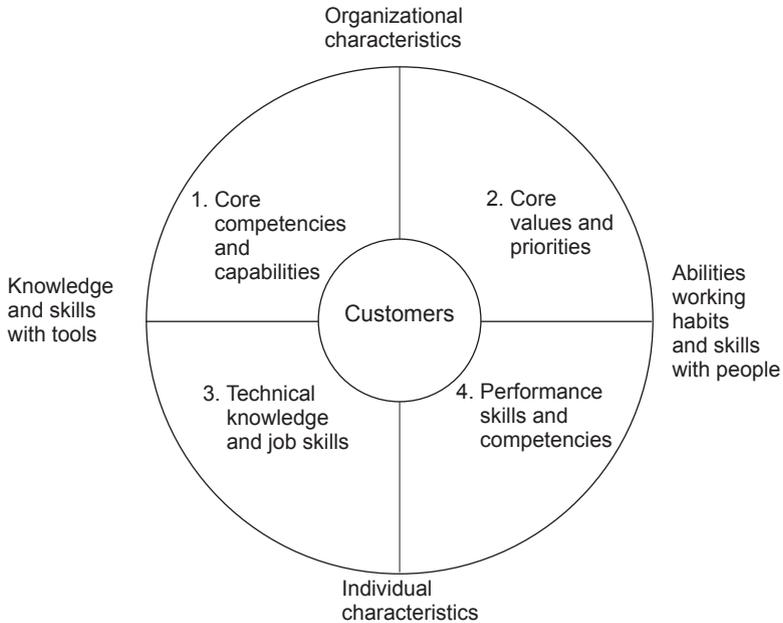


Figure 1. Competency scope adapted from Green (1999)

Organizational characteristics

1) Core competencies and capabilities

Green explains that the combination of knowledge and skills with tools is reflected at the organizational level in core competencies and capabilities. He defines a core competency as a range of technical know-how that is central to the organization's purpose and such capability is also important to the organization's effectiveness and is perceived to be valuable by customers. He then continues that core competencies and capabilities are usually defined in a mission statement explaining what the organization will do for its customers. (Green 1999, 23–25.)

2) Core values and priorities

Green deems core values important because they complement the technical aspects of work by explaining why the work is performed. This encourages shared beliefs of people in the organization. According to Green priorities reflect an organization's emphasis on the use of individual competencies such as working habits and people skills to make processes and work systems more efficient. Green adds that a statement of core values and priorities describes how people actually do their work. (Green 1999, 25–26.)

Individual characteristics

3) Technical knowledge and job skills

Green describes that individuals use their technical knowledge and skills with tools to carry out their job responsibilities. He clarifies that technical knowledge and job skills should be in support of the organization's core competencies and capabilities. (Green 1999, 27–28.)

4) Performance skills and competencies

In Green's view performance skills and competencies are not competencies attached to specific tasks, but are common in employment competencies. Green states that performance skills and competencies include work habits, communication styles, leadership and teamwork. They are easily transferred across different industries and jobs and they reflect a person's efficiency or effectiveness in using technical knowledge and skills. (Green 1999, 28–29.)

The Competence Map Development project by university libraries' network analysed and defined the competencies according the competence scope and they are listed here.

CORE COMPETENCIES selected:

- competence in the operating environment
- competence in collections and their content
- competence in the management of information resources
- competence in providing support for the production of information resources
- pedagogical competence
- competence in customer service
- competence in information technology and information systems
- creative approach to work
- competence in international activities

STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES selected:

- leadership competence
- financial competence
- legal competence
- process competence
- marketing competence

COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS selected:

- interaction and negotiation skills
- network competence
- written communication and online communication skills
- oral communication and presentation skills
- language skills

The project also defined the levels of the core competencies, so the know-how of the staff members can be evaluated within the scale between levels from 1–5.

- 1 – basic level
- 3 – expert level
- 5 – top expert level

8. The Competence Mapping Process in Tampere University Library

The Tampere University Library values were defined as early as in 2003, and they state that “we value knowledge and learning”. The Library’s strategy for the period 2010–2015 underscores that one of the critical success factors is “the continuous development of professional skills”.

The Tampere University Library had a competence project based on a common project of the university libraries. The library staffs were divided into working groups and the task was to review the core competence areas from the library’s point of view. After that, the staff discussed the competence needed in their respective departments and the needed competence level, so they had a shared vision of it, and this could be defined as the future level of competence.

In the second phase, each staff member discussed the competence levels with their head of department. The present levels of competence of the staff were agreed upon, and as a result, the mapping of the present knowledge was put together.

The mapping yielded a picture of the know-how of the whole library staff, which proved useful in planning the future. The competence map gives an overview of the competency level of an organization. Figure 2 describes the whole competence management scheme in the university library.

Figure 3 presents an example of the competence map of one department. This can be used in planning training and when recruiting new staff. The results of each individual can be taken into account when planning for further training of each member of the staff. The know-how and skills development of the staff are monitored in the yearly personal development discussions.

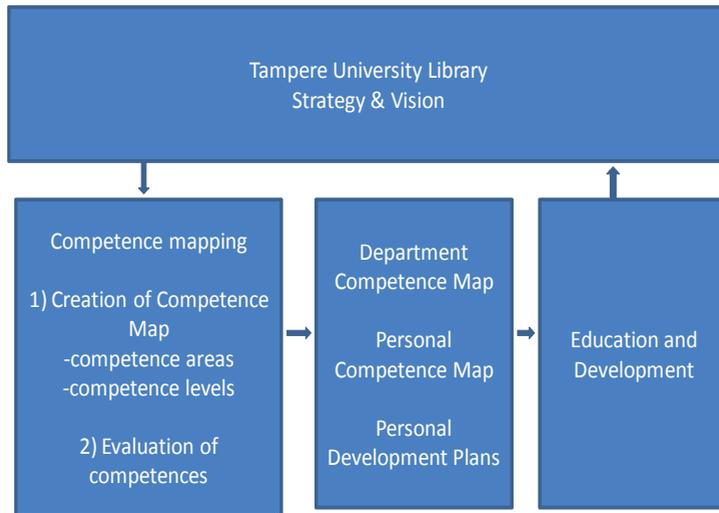


Figure 2. Example of competence management

An example of core competences' profile

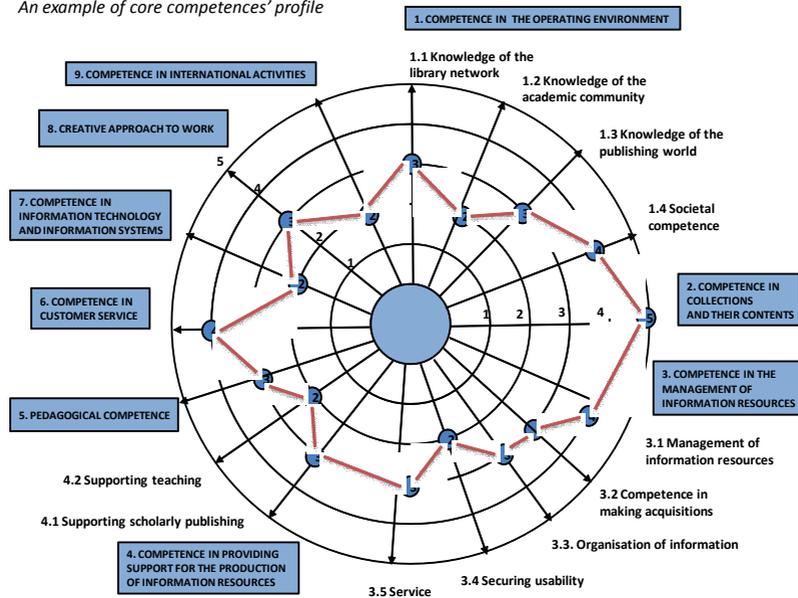


Figure 3. Example of the competence map of one library department

9. Competence management at the University of Namibia Library

Universities are complex and dynamic organizations which require professionals with multiple sets of competencies to achieve common goals. The achievement of university goals largely hinges upon the competence of its human resources, including library staff. It is for this reason that the University of Namibia (UNAM) Library attaches great importance to competence management. The Library has been making concerted efforts geared towards ensuring that the right people are deployed in right position. The aim is to place staff in a position where they can make meaningful contributions to the library's mission and vision, and ultimately to the university strategic objectives.

In 2009, the library formulated its strategic plan, which sets out clear objectives. With the strategic plan in place, two important issues became necessary. The first was to identify knowledge gaps while the second involves aligning staff competencies to the implementation of the strategic objectives. A major assignment was undertaken to identify the core professional and personal competencies required by all staff to execute their duties more effectively. While professional competencies were defined as the skills and knowledge to carry out the core tasks of the job, personal competencies were viewed as personality traits, values and attitudes that are essential in maintaining a healthy relationship with library users and co-employees.

After the formulation of core competencies, all job specifications and job descriptions were re-defined. The Library was careful to be more inclusive in this process in which a supervisor and subordinate sat together reviewing job descriptions. This process provided useful insights into knowledge gaps. Most notable was the lack of expertise in the application of modern ICT tools in library services. This has been a major concern with the potential to impede achievement of the library goal of being more responsive to users' information needs.

Staff development was then identified as a key strategy to address the identified knowledge gaps.

Through its Staff Development Policy, UNAM offers very good opportunities for its staff to upgrade their qualifications. It is clearly articulated in this policy that UNAM supports the continuous development of staff members and sees human resources as the single most important resource through which knowledge is created and enlarged. Every year, UNAM makes funds available for staff development. The Library takes advantage of this favourable condition to send its staff for further study and training. The long-term strategy adopted by the Library entails granting approval for study leave every year to at least one staff to upgrade his/her qualification at postgraduate level (Master and PhD). The short term strategy involves human resources capacity building by means of regular in-house training sessions by external experts in certain priority areas, as well as sponsoring staff to attend important conferences and workshops.

Two critical areas of great importance in the staff development efforts of the Library are the application of new ICT tools in the library services, and librarians' competencies in research methodology to enable them to engage university researchers in a meaningful manner. However, while the UNAM Library has implemented some strategies to ensure that competent personnel are retained and/or employed, it is necessary to consider a more formal and systematic approach to competence management, such as creating a database to catalogue staff competencies.

10. Discussion

University libraries are recognized as critical catalysts in providing relevant, adequate, up-to-date information services and resources to support the teaching, learning and research programmes of their

parent institutions. However, it is not enough to only provide relevant, adequate, and up-to-date information services and resources. In order to achieve the desired outcome, the library services and resources have to be managed by competent information professionals. Thus the importance for library directors to understand and apply the concept of competence management in university libraries cannot be overemphasized. Adopting a competence management model will enable libraries to better plan for human resources, and to devise capacity building strategies.

It is abundantly clear that both libraries discussed in this study have adopted distinct but useful approaches to competence management. For example, the Tampere University Library has adopted an approach which they termed “competence mapping”. The competence mapping means that the knowledge or know-how of each staff member is charted and also the level of competence is evaluated.

By contrast, the University of Namibia Library identified firstly the core competencies required to address its strategic objectives before it identified the knowledge gaps in the existing staff composition. The aim of each approach is to ensure that there are competent personnel to drive the library operations and ultimately achieve the Library’s goals. Nevertheless, it emerged that the Tampere University Library uses a more systematic approach to competence management because it monitors the know-how and skills development of the staff on a yearly basis. These performance comparison and external assessment of competence management at the two libraries have indeed been valuable. The descriptions of these best practices may well be beneficial to other university libraries around the world.

11. Conclusion

This study has attempted to summarize the concepts of competence and competence management in university libraries and bridge the gap between competence management and academic libraries. There is a need for research about competence management in academic libraries. The development of competence lists is not enough. These tools should be in everyday use in the libraries, but the listings of competencies clearly show that different competencies are more important for different types of work and in different environments. Professionals working in university libraries probably require different skills from those of librarians in public libraries. The study confirmed the view that librarians need to periodically assess which new skills they need to acquire and which skills need to be updated. With the development of competence management there is a great potential and opportunity for better knowledge among staff in libraries, which can be translated into better services for library users.

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