New demands – old skills
A strategy for bridging the competence gap
Building competencies in a daily working context

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Abstract:

The paper is a presentation of the national programme on competence development - an extraordinary effort undertaken in the wake of the new Danish Act on library services in 2001-2002. The programme involved a major push to integrate learning activities in the daily work in the organisation, to strengthen networking and project work on several levels and the nourishing of new leadership in the public libraries.

Introduction

One of the major challenges we face in all types of libraries is classical: the need to maintain professional skills and develop new competencies for a changing world. With the accelerating speed of the technological changes the problem has grown to dimensions impossible to repress.

There are various problems under my headline, but most of them derive from the fact that since the appearance of the online catalogue a growing number of work routines and procedures have been fundamentally changed and the breakthrough of internet services in libraries, of which we have only seen the very beginning, has lead to a complete change of paradigm.
Not only routines related to registration and cataloguing of materials, lending procedures, collection development and searching are changing completely, but also other core services

related to the ways in which to meet customer needs. There has always been a need for renewal of staff and skills, but during the last decade we have in the modern world moved from a situation where this process was more or less organic and secured by the 'natural' way: inclusion of new staff members from generations with updated educations and new professional skills to substitute and complement the old staff and help to adapt to quite another reality: This reality is – at least in my country with an average age of the late forties among librarians in public libraries– that the majority of staff members were educated not only before the breakthrough of the Internet but even before the OPAC. Of course they learned to handle the OPAC along the way, and the Internet as well to some extend (or else they retired early). But the question is to which extent the new skills reach, how integrated in attitudes and priorities? And furthermore the question is how to handle the problem in daily library management.

This paper deals with the development of a strategy for a national effort to implement a programme organised by the Danish National Library Authority[i] (DNLA) for skills and competencies development on a broad scale for the purpose of upgrading all libraries to the needs of the information society and introducing new ways of organisational handling of learning and competence-building.

Three types of insufficiency

Obviously you may meet many types of insufficiency in the average upcoming multi-media hybrid library. The focus here will be on three basic types that we identified and which can probably be recognised by any library director.
The first and most obvious is
- lack of basic technological and media skills - related to the above-mentioned gap between education and professional training and recent technological innovation.

The need is for a broad range of skills necessary to operate in a multi-media digital environment: elementary technical skills, skills for searching in databases and the Internet, knowledge of non-printed media etc.
The second type is related to
- appropriate handling of the changing needs of users in the digital age.

Widely recognised is the need for skills in ICT-training as more and more libraries as part of their core activities establish learning centres, primarily devoted to help citizens use the web (e-government, consumer's information, information on cultural activities etc.). Our assumption is that the need for consultancy-like library services will increase in coming years.

The third type is related to the
- ability to handle strategic development, incorporating new services, planning and implementing organisational and marketing changes.

Very often the lack of sufficient skills in this field is complemented by outdated or hostile attitudes to new theories. But such attitudes can often be seen as rooted in an inadequate understanding of the organisational implications of technological development.
You may also describe the three types of insufficiency as three different levels of needed insight into the new hybrid library[ii] concept: starting with the need to be able to understand and handle a new medium, moving to its potential for new services, and the impact the

pressure of new – networked- services has on a traditional organisational culture and the consequences for the priorities in the traditional library.

These types of insufficiency can be identified at national as well as institutional level in many libraries. Obviously action should be taken to overcome these.

A national or regional programme aiming at overcoming these weaknesses, barriers as they are in developing library services suited for the info-society, would also include a programme to develop new leadership, as skills and competence-building obviously is a responsibility of the leader.

The vision

Having identified the three types of insufficiency our ambition was
- to give each and every person working in Danish public libraries an offer to upgrade skills – in the first instance making them able to handle everyday user needs related to new media, including the internet services in the hybrid library.

Furthermore we wanted
- to increase the normal support of the National Library Authority for the development of new services by raising the general competencies in project work which normally is the perequisite of new services.

Thirdly we wanted
- to change the organisational culture that you meet in most public libraries.

This should in particular happen in two respects: We wanted to improve the libraries' ability for and participation in the networked activities and we wanted to integrate learning activities in the library organisations.

Our vision was inspired by the organisational thinking on learning organisations and action learning.[iii]

At that time the Danish National Library Authority (DNLA) had with good results been working on its own organisation with the help of external consultants to develop a team-oriented, value-based leadership, where a cornerstone in the values was the integration of learning in the organisation. We organised a broadly founded internal work on our visions for the future of libraries and our own role as an agency in this. We defined our role as frame-setting, policy-making and as supporting and maintaining library development.

Keywords in our policy work were: development of the hybrid library to a degree, where its digital services can work as a full virtual library, a constant move towards more differentiated services aiming at the personal library. Organisationally we focused on a move from an institution-centred organisational thinking to a far more open networking, team- and partnership based organisation, and we found it crucial for the future success of the library profession that it should succeed in creating new roles, within learning and cultural intermediation.

How could these theories and concepts be exported to the libraries? And how could we facilitate a change? Obviously our intention as a national authority was not to dictate a specific change or to define an ultimate organisational model. No, we wanted to stimulate the local libraries to consider what changes they needed to undertake to become partners in

national networked services, to establish new local offers and relations, and what should be done to create a new learning environment for staff and customers – in the local library.
As we wanted to attack all three levels of insufficiency we designed three major lines in the programme:

- training of trainers
- project management-training
- new leadership-development.

The training of trainers aimed at training experienced staff in libraries to act as trainers and supervisors for their colleagues in their own and nearby libraries. They should help to establish skills by action learning in the handling of music (which many libraries did not offer before 2000), multimedia and web-services, basic principles in the library as a learning centre. Trainers should be able to handle short introductory courses and work with colleagues in a music division or demonstrate how to organise a www-presentation for grandparents or any other public library target group.

Project management was chosen as a line because we considered projects as a means to develop new services as well as changing traditional organisations, because in project work you normally organise a decision-making team. Furthermore, experience from the last decade showed that libraries constantly working with projects developed faster than the rest and took the lead in presenting new services. The programme line project management would train a number of likewise experienced librarians in project management and would qualify them to support and advise on projects in their own and nearby libraries.

Under both these programme lines you may find the ideas of the learning organisation concept; the vision was a corps of colleagues acting as consultants in the everyday situation, sharing their knowledge by practical demonstrations - preferable in their colleagues' own daily working context.

The third line was new leadership. This was simply a good offer to all directors of public libraries to join at an extraordinary low price a new diploma-course in library management organised in cooperation between the Danish National Library Authority, The Danish National School of Management and the Association of Library Directors. The aim was to introduce the conditions for management and leadership in the information society and inspire to changes in work-organisation and priorities in the libraries.

The context

The special context for the Danish programme was the new Act on library services, passed by the Danish Parliament in 2000.[iv]

Denmark had its first Act on public libraries in 1920, which has been revised on several occasions. In 2000 the aim of the thorough revision was to establish frames for the hybrid library in order to meet the new needs from users in the information society and basically create a systematic integration of the Internet-technology and services wherever it was appropriate in the libraries.

The change in the Danish legislation means that it has become obligatory to all libraries to give access to internet resources and to help citizens use them; that access to all types of media are obligatory and introducing a new service, bibliotek.dk, giving access to search,

request and - for new books - order any title bought by a Danish library to pick up at any chosen library[v]. The spirit behind the act is to create a new kind of library, with a growing number of digital services and a more diversified and user-aimed service in the physical service spots.

The act granted the Danish National Library Authority an extra 20 mil. DDK (3 mil USD) towards the 'implementation' of the act by establishing programmes for skills and competence development in libraries' staffs and other relevant activities.

The context also includes the situation on the continuing education scene in Denmark, that compared to most other countries is really good. There are several players offering courses, with The Royal School of Library and Information Science in the lead with some 3-400 courses and 5000 participants on a yearly basis (total number of employed in Danish public libraries amounts to app. 5,100). The activities of the Royal Library School are well evaluated, twice a year a new catalogue on training courses and seminars is presented, always with new and hot topics. So the first decision was related to the ongoing activities in the field. We decided that the activities that we would launch, should complement the core activities in the field of continuing education and not at all be seen as an alternative, in particular as the programme would be a unique effort and not a lasting one, like the activities of the Royal Library School. Our effort can then be characterised as an effort to support an organisational change that can handle learning activities on an everyday in-house basis. This does not contradict the activities of the Royal School of Library and Information Science, which are obviously on a higher professional level.[vi]

An important point is that the offer in the development programme was free of charge for the libraries, while the continuing education activities at the Royal School are based on user-fees.

Implementing the programme

The competence development programme was part of a larger programme that was marketed as a 'special offer to all libraries' by direct mail to all the public libraries in Denmark. The elements in this programme were support for
- building and expanding collections of non-printed material
- development of new services and cooperations among libraries and their users
- competence development: training of trainers and project management
- new leadership
- a pr-campaign on the new access to all libraries: bibliotek.dk/library.dk.

The ambition of the whole programme was to make all libraries make a simultaneous jump into a hybrid library model. The programme was made possible by a single grant, and if the effort were to have a lasting effect, it had to aim at changing the way the libraries usually handle continuing education. In other words: the lasting impact should be on the way libraries plan competence- and organisational development, but at the same time there was an acute need for skills on a very basic level. The intentions, accordingly, for the competence and leadership programme were manifold. In the first instance to meet the basic insufficiency in handling new media, and in the intermediate perspective to accomplish organisational changes, taking into account the differences between a traditional institutional-centred library organisation and a networking, value-based, project- and learning oriented work culture. For DNLA it was crucial to establish partnerships closer to the individual library director and individual libraries than would be possible for the authority alone. The main partner was the

county libraries. In Denmark a county library is a municipal library that by national grants has integrated the task of county library, which traditionally primarily imply a role as part of the superstructure for printed material. The new library legislation also entailed new tasks, and a completely new way to organise these tasks that committed the county libraries to a much more proactive role in advising, coordinating, supporting and developing local libraries. And with the new act the DNLA implemented a new grants system in relation to the county libraries, based on activity goals outlined in a performance contract. In relation to the competence programme DNLA decided to divide Denmark into four regions with four county libraries in each and let them take the lead in the practical implementation of the programmes on training of trainers and project management. In each region one library was chosen as formally responsible, which made the conducting of the programme easy. DNLA had a close contact with the four responsible libraries, and made sure that there was a proper networking in the regions and that an ongoing sharing of knowledge and experiences between the four regions took place. The idea in the chosen organisational model was on the one hand to create a lasting network that would continue the work also after the cessation of extra grants and on the other hand to integrate the activities in the performance contracts with the county libraries. The county libraries in the four regions applied for the grants on the basis of quite specific plans, a major issue being that it should be easy for libraries in practical terms to participate and it should be easy for them to recognise the offers as answers to their needs.

What was done[vii]?

Each region decided how they would organise the training. One of the regions decided to do a proper survey to reveal the needs in the libraries. The result turned out to be very similar to the three other regions, where action was taken immediately on a spontaneous feed back from the libraries on the situation. The needs for improved skills could be divided in four groups:
- music-librarianship aiming at libraries new in the field
- the web as a professional tool for the librarian
- web-design, web-services for users
- introducing the www for various target groups

Recruitment of trainers and project-consultants was organised in order to cover the whole country. Each library should at least have a neighbour-library with a trainer in it. Everything was done to make this free offer for the libraries an offer they simply could not refuse.
The training of the trainers was done by professional consultants in the field and by the Royal School of Library and Information Science. Even if the training was organised differently in the regions the focus was everywhere on the very specific pedagogical task the trainers would have to deal with. Typically the trainers were trained for two weeks divided in two or three periods with practise and supervision in between.

The project managers or project consultants in general were trained less but basically in the same way: two modules lasting three days each with professional introduction to project-work with supervision and practise in between.

In simple terms of activities and numbers:
training of trainers: 53 librarians were trained as trainers – mainly in methods for knowledge-sharing and teaching. After their training they arranged 430 workshops for colleagues with 4,600 participants. These workshops aimed accordingly at imparting skills enabling the participants to handle new media in their daily library work: searching the web, building music collections, participating in running web services such as the national ask-a-librarian-

service but also their own homepages, and running workshops on introducing the Internet for various user groups.

244 librarians were trained in *project management* for the purpose of serving as project managers themselves, but also to act as trainers or consultants for colleagues in their own or nearby libraries. To implement new services, such as introducing the web, presenting a variety of offers from the library from introducing simple search to creating your own web-site and creating more demanding new services.

The *new leadership* programme was introduced as support for professional management-education. One offer was support for relevant master- or diploma-courses, for instance courses of good reputation as Master of public administration. Much to our surprise, there was hardly any interest in this kind of support. But success-full was a special programme designed as a one and a half year course in a cooperation between the Danish School of Public Administration, The Association of Library Directors and The Danish National Library Authority. The course was tailor-made but integrated a number of elements from the standard diploma courses in modern management and combined them with elements on the hybrid and virtual library and the organisational implications of the new library concepts. 85 library directors applied for the course, which was organised in four regions, 75 followed it throughout the whole period and 54 finished their final project. To understand the interest in this particular programme and the need for it, you must consider that until 2000 and the new Act on library services, only professional librarians could become directors in Danish Public Libraries. Hence the need for professional management skills was obvious.

In relation to the parallel activities for implementing the new act, it can be stated that a majority of Danish municipalities (the smallest ones) received state subsidies for building new media collections from the programme, a number of municipalities were supported in developing new partnerships, and a pr-campaign for the new web service, bibliotek.dk, was conducted with a postcard sent to all households in Denmark carrying the following text: Visit your library from your home on the address bibliotek.dk – as the most unique activity.

Did it work?

In 2003 the implementation of the Library Act was completed and an evaluation of the result was carried out based on interviews with librarians and a survey on the services offered by Danish public libraries. The result of the survey reveals that all libraries now offer internet services and give access to a broad range of media and services, to a degree that you may conclude that the hybrid library is indeed a fact in *all* Danish libraries. So at the first level: meeting the need for enabling the staff in the public libraries to handle a new range of media and services, there is no doubt that this has been achieved: Anybody who needed has got an offer to be upgraded by basic training.

A very important measure of success is that the training activities organised in the four regions by the county libraries continue and are considered very important by the libraries in the regions. DNLA continues to support these activities with a small grant, earmarked for stimulating new specific skills. To give an example - this year's topic is handling of music files for library loans, as a national agreement on the conditions for this new type of loans has been signed.

Turning to web services obviously a growing number of libraries are partners in the networks that run national services like the electronic ask-a-librarian-service, the children's virtual library, the internet guide etc, but the majority and mainly the smaller libraries are still not

taking part in these activities. It is approximately one third of all public libraries that contribute to national web services, which is not a satisfying figure. We are here in a field that goes beyond the mere training of skills, that demands new priorities and organisational changes.

As for the new leadership-programme the evaluation by the participants has been brilliant, but it is still too early to judge the impact of this effort. Obviously the need for 'new leadership' is not full-filled, which you can tell by some problematic attitudes revealed in the interviews in the above mentioned survey on the implementation of the 'Act on library services'. The problematic attitudes are related to networking and the necessary cooperation on future development. Obviously the value of independence (and their own 'freedom') ranges higher in the minds of many library directors than does the professional development. The conclusion is then: In the short term – the training effort, simple upgrading - we succeeded. In the longer term - change of organisational culture and values, integrating project work and networking activities - we pushed in the right direction, but the development (and new efforts) still has to demonstrate the necessity for change more clearly to convince all library directors. As to the efficiency of the project-managers I am convinced that far too many were trained on a too superficial basis. The idea of project-managers acting as consultants is good, but less should be trained and on a much more ambitious level.
It is also a clear conclusion that the trainers cannot create the same output as professionally planned continuing education provided by the library school, but well used it can be seen as a division of labour, solving daily needs in-house and leaving more sophisticated activities to professional partners.

[i] For an introduction to the government agency Danish National Library Authority and the Danish library model see: Thorhauge, Jens: Danish Library Policy. Copenhagen: Biblioteksstyrelsen, 2002
[ii] 'Hybrid library' is here used as a term for a library service, that combines a traditional library with acces to books and other physical media with electronic access to digital ressources and access to search and request traditional materials via the web.The term 'hybrid library' is widely discussed in the latest LIS-literature. See for instance: Brophy, Peter: The library in the twenty-first century. London: Library Association Publishing, 2001
[iii] Danish inspiration for instance from 'Den lærende organisation' af Vagn Strandgaard, Finn van Hauen og Bjarne Kastberg, who on their part are inspired by for instance James H. Shonk, L. Moran, E.Musselwhite
[iv] English translation published: 'Act regarding library services' .Copenhagen:Danish National Library Authority, 2001. Also available at www.bs.dk.
[v] For a further presentation of the bibliotek.dk, see: Andresen, Leif: Bibliotek.dk: visit your library from home. In: Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly, vol 35. no 1, 2002
[vi] The planning of the continuing education at the Royal School of Library and Information Science to support the implementation of the Act on library services is described in Larsen, Gitte: Developing skills for new electronic services in libraries. In: Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly, vol. 34 no 4, 2001
[vii] Reports on all activities available on www.bs.dk – but only in Danish.