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# Professional Development, Values and Strategy – the Means for Building Strong Libraries for the Future!

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## Abstract

The library and information sector is undergoing massive change. In a changing world we must create environments that promote strong development to ensure a viable future and a library that provides benefits to all our customers. Professional development is an essential component of this environment. It must be in line with the organization's strategy and values. Changes in customer expectations, behavior and technological development make it even more important to form the library's identity and prioritize our activities. Values, strategy and professional development go hand in hand with the development process. Staff participation in the development process produces a climate that is creative and a means of ensuring success in the future. At the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences University Library we have worked with professional development, strategy and values as well as the concepts of staff empowerment and leadership. This effort has included all staff members and the results have been excellent.

## Keywords

professional development, organizational values, organizational strategy, leadership, library development

The changes in the world around us, the transforming libraries as well as the shifting values, attitudes and behaviors, all have an impact on the way we do business.

In everyday life, we are moving increasingly in the direction of an environment characterized by high levels of disagreement and uncertainty about how the world around us will look in the future. In this context, it is essential to have an open dialogue with our customers as well as to involve all our staff to take an active part in the process of change and development.

The changing context implies a need for new attitudes, approaches and behaviors at work, as well as communications skills. We also need to focus on finding solutions and recognizing the possibilities instead of dwelling on problems. In my opinion, library work in the past has sometimes been overly rule-based, the time has come to reevaluate our rules and guidelines and improve our ability to adapt to the needs of the specific situations.

This demands improved and developed leadership both in relation to others as well as in relation to oneself. Leadership and empowerment are important concepts that we must apply if we intend to form a more holistic view of the work

we do, and obtain a better understanding of our own roles and skills, as well as those of our colleagues'.

But how do we accomplish this in our daily work? My view is that we need to focus more on strengthening our organizational values, develop and clarify our strategy and integrated in this improve our skills management and continuous professional development.

The strategy work should build on a clear process that involves all of our staff. At the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences' (SLU) University Library we have conducted a development effort involving 50 staff members, and with good results. This work has proceeded in a series of steps that have included establishment of our organizational values and strategy, and developing the staff skills and promoting empowerment.

In 2008 we started this process by establishing organizational values. To do so we used a web-based survey with just three questions, answered by all of our staff. In each question the respondent was asked to pick 10 words from a list of around 100 words connected to different values. The first question asked respondents to choose

values that were closest to their own personal values, the second question asked respondents to select values which were closest to what they perceived were the organization's existing values, and the third question asked respondents to identify the values they believed the organization would require to live up to its mission. The result were then transferred into our organizational values and discussed within the organization.

A year later, in 2009, we took the next step – to develop a new library strategy. Once again we involved everyone in this process. This time we chose a process method called LOTS (Logical Thinking System). By answering process questions you go through the different steps – analysis, vision, values, purpose, focus, objectives, activities, organization, cooperation and relationship, skills, resources, and finally reporting. An important part of this effort is also to prioritize our work and the things we wish we had time to do. We cannot possibly do everything we would like to, since all of our good ideas usually exceed our resources.

Included in this strategy process was skills management. Our personnel are among our most important resources. When examining library strategy and future operations, staff skills must coordinate with what is needed to fulfill the organization's objectives. Competence can be defined as the ability and willingness of an individual to perform a specific task by applying knowledge and skills. These skills can be of different kinds – personal, communicative, strategic as well as professional technical skills. All of these are needed to perform the job.

When developing a strategy it is essential to map the skills we require with those that are available. The gap between these two must be filled by professional development or by recruiting new personnel. To determine your needs, you must first begin with analysis. Once you know your needs you can move on to specify the job profile. At the SLU library we use a skills model that includes a list of different skills with definitions to help us analyze what skills are needed for a specific job. Different people can interpret words in many different ways. Having a list of skills with definitions ensures that we all share the same vocabulary, which is important when working together on a joint skills management or re-

cruitment project. After recruiting someone the continuous professional development begins.

Continuous professional development is something we must strive to work on constantly. Through performance reviews, follow-up dialogues, salary negotiations, introduction and closing **conversations** we can continuously identify our needs and make plans for how to proceed. It is important to realize that continuous professional development is something we build in our daily work, in communicating with others, by having a mentor or a coach, by surfing the Internet, as well as when attending courses, conferences, workshops and so on – the list can be long.

Continuous professional development is something we have always done in our work – what we were yesterday has made us what we are today. What we do today will have an impact on what we become tomorrow. One thing that is certain is that change will always be a part of our working life. The key to manage an environment characterized by high levels of disagreement and uncertainty about the future is increased involvement and participation, as well as to focus on *what* (we do) as well as *how* (we do it)! Through establishing strategies, values and promoting professional development, we will form the future of the Library and Information Sector.

#### **Note**

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<http://conference.ifla.org/ifla77>

#### **Short biography**

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