

Professional development: a Danish case-study

This case-study provides an introduction to the training activities of The Department of Continuing Education and Consultancy at the Royal School of Library and Information Science (RSLIS) in Denmark. On an annual basis, the School offers a selection of around 150 different training courses and seminars for all kinds of library staff in addition to formal continuing education. Some years ago the Department became an independent business unit within the organization and some of the departmental and academic staff offer consultancy, with clients including public libraries, large private companies, banks, real estate companies and governmental organizations, who all suffer from similar problems. The School's expertise in knowledge organization and related areas has proved invaluable. The article concludes with practical suggestions, based on experience, of methods for continuing professional development within the library sphere.



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A profile of the Department of Continuing Education and Consultancy

The Department of Continuing Education and Consultancy at the Royal School of Library and Information Science (RSLIS) in Copenhagen has existed for almost 20 years, with changing goals and priorities over time. Some years ago the Department became an independent business unit within the organization.

The staff consists of three full-time consultants and two full-time secretaries to run the secretariat and course administration. It is a great team, where each of us is fully aware of how we complement each other, and we all appreciate the different skills and competencies in the team. Our working values are based on high professional standards, commitment to the job, a sense of humour, confidence, self-management and knowledge sharing. Being a business unit helps to reach a common understanding on goals, results and economic baselines, which are not necessarily the case in a traditional university culture.

This profile has been drafted in September 2008, when we have a lot of ongoing activities. The secretaries, Jeanette Laurberg and Karina Nielsen, are working like octopuses as practical conference assistants during the large international SHARP conference, which is held at the Royal School of

Library and Information Science this week. At the same time, they try to keep up with daily course administration and provide service to our training courses.

My colleague, Esben Fjord, is currently preparing to offer consultancy assistance to a project running in three public libraries. The department is able to offer consultancy to libraries, often on project evaluation or on assessment of the quality and user satisfaction with products and services offered by libraries. Esben's job also covers trend spotting and idea development, which we use in the creation of new training courses and seminars.

Some of the academic staff at the School also offer consultancy – primarily to private sector organizations. In these cases I negotiate the contract and conditions on behalf of the School so the experts can concentrate on matters relating to content. Amongst our clients are the largest private companies, banks, real estate companies and governmental organizations. They all suffer from the same problem. They make big investments in electronic systems of document handling (ESDH) and electronic archiving systems and convert all key documents into digitized form. An appropriate indexing system is, unfortunately, often not

implemented from the initial phase. When thousands of documents are stored, the difficulties over retrieval occur. The School's expertise in knowledge organization has solved a lot of troubles out there in the community, and many useful thesauri have been developed and tailored to the individual organization.

Camilla Riis Petersen, our youngest consultant, graduated from the school in 2006. She works primarily with sales and electronic marketing and is responsible for our website. Thanks to her educational background, she is very strong in research and evaluation methods, which are very useful skills for a library consultant.

Camilla and I work jointly on the practical preparation of our biannual catalogue of training activities. We also produce a printed catalogue as a supplement to the electronic course database, which we distribute to all libraries and other interested bodies.

And what else do I do? Sometimes I ask myself that question, probably because management is not always a visible product. But somebody has to do the budgeting, contract management and negotiation with all the freelance instructors, maintain and extend external networks, and not least, keep an eye on the baseline in all projects.

During the last couple of months I have participated in a leadership development programme with my colleagues from other departments at the School. We have a number of new members in our team of leaders. The training programme was therefore really helpful to all of us. Our new toolbox consists of methods for reflection in teams, use of appreciative inquiry, coaching, positive conflict handling, goal setting and staff motivation.

In the following section, I will try to give an introduction to our training activities and give an overview of the needs for continuing professional development of library staff, seen from my perspective.

Continuing professional development – in a Danish context

The RSLIS aims to consolidate the School in its position as the most important institution for continuing education and training within LIS and related areas relevant for the development of the library and information sector.



The team: Karina Nielsen, Camilla Riis Petersen, Esben Fjord and Jeanette Laurberg

On an annual basis, we offer a selection of around 150 different training courses and seminars for all kinds of library staff in addition to formal continuing education, such as our Masters Programme in Library and Information Science and Diploma Course in Knowledge Organization and Information Retrieval.

One aim of our current training course is to underpin The Danish Library Agency's national strategy for development of libraries. Right now the national strategy pays special attention to two focal areas: development of a new concept for children's libraries and the improvement of marketing of libraries.

More than 4,000 library staff participate in training courses and seminars annually, which is quite a high number for a small library community in a country with five million inhabitants. Each semester approximately 30 new training courses are introduced, often developed from suggestions by libraries. This ongoing demand for new training opportunities is a simple indication of how fast the libraries have to react to changes.

Topics from training courses published in our course catalogue are used as a basis for tailoring courses, seminars, workshops or presentations for individual libraries, organizations or interest groups. Around 50% of all our training activities take place locally and are tailored to the individual customer's need.

In order to get a feeling of how well we are meeting the needs of the libraries, we conduct customer satisfaction surveys from time to time amongst all Danish library directors. In 2008, directors representing different kinds of libraries were also invited to participate in focus group interviews and give their opinions on the results of our latest survey.

Planning training activities

The Department of Continuing Education and Consultancy invite all the academic staff from RSLIS (about 70 full-time teachers) to develop training activities. Some of them really appreciate the opportunity to meet 'real life' problems and have the dialogue with library staff during the training courses, whereas others prefer to research activities and communication within their professional networks. We do, fortunately, have such a large number of teachers that those who really like to participate in training courses are sufficient to cover the need.

Further subject specialists from the field and freelance consultants are hired as training instructors (usually around 35 per semester).

Training courses in RSLIS are developed in order to cover the following needs for new skills and competencies:

1. New practical skills (qualifications and personal skills)
2. Updating practical skills (qualifications and personal skills)
3. New inspiration
4. 'Hot topics' – orientation on ongoing policy and legal issues
5. Development of the organization
 - the individual staff member
 - the team/the unit
 - the management level
 - the entire organization.

Governmental policy issues often generate 'hot topics', for instance by changes in public governance and legal issues. In RSLIS we aim to pick up and influence the kind of hot topics which affect library issues – typically in seminars and conferences. Library organizations such as the Danish Library Association and The Danish Research Library Association will of course offer seminars focusing on more practical perspectives.

An example of governmental policy issues could be the decision on defining a method to measure the quality of published research. Many research libraries have taken a key role in this new task on behalf of their mother institution after participation in training courses in research evaluation methods. Fortunately, bibliometric methods have been a research area in our school for a decade.

During the last couple of years an increasing number of training courses have dealt with organizational behaviour. RSLIS organizes practical training, seminars and workshops focusing on development of the organization, one of the most requested themes. Typical themes are: scenario planning, user driven innovation, co-operation issues, conflict handling, motivation, coaching, stress management and senior staff. Recent change in the structure of Danish municipalities (merging from 275 to 98 municipalities) and the merging of many educational institutions into larger university colleges have created a demand for seminars on themes such as establishment of common values and team building.

On the further development of the individual staff members, popular themes have included: self management, efficient work planning and how to get new ideas.

Many of the topics for training mentioned above will of course be of relevance and interest to all staff in all kinds of libraries and to all levels of staff. In the context of reference and information work, the focus for training courses during 2008 has been concentrated on the following themes:

- evaluating e-resources
- improving search skills and knowledge of search engines
- Web 2.0/Library 2.0
- professional attitude to users
- marketing – in particular e-resources
- communication
- personal professional performance.

Core skills

Core skills of librarians are still relevant – if not more relevant – in electronic information provision. These core skills include information handling, training and facilitating, evaluation and customer service. Core skills like classification (knowledge organization), information retrieval, reference and information work and user education are fully applicable in an electronic context and all have a place in facilitating the effective use of the Internet in the changing information environment.

Improving search skills and knowledge of search engines

Library staff will have a lifelong need to improve and update their search skills – in particular when paper copies of library materials are replaced by

electronic resources. Practical training sessions in searching all types of materials (text, images, sound, film) in electronic form are essential as well as knowledge of different formats and packaging for distribution and download to various media.

Further, it is well documented from many studies that users very frequently start their information search in Google, Yahoo and other search engines. It is important that library staff have a very detailed knowledge of search facilities, ranking algorithm, coverage and content gaps (i.e. Google Scholar) in order help users find more qualified information sources than they can do on their own.

Web 2.0/Library 2.0

Social technologies have had an increasing impact on librarians' communication with users. *'We have to be visible and available where the users are on the WWW'*, is the driving key at the moment. In 2008 we have hosted two conferences on distribution of library services to hand-held platforms (mobile phones and iPods). Chat via Instant Messaging is an example of new communication that attracts the younger generation of users more than the traditional 'Ask-a-Librarian' type of e-mail service. In this context it is important to learn new routines and ethics for communication.

Danish librarians are creating thousands of blogs for dissemination and communication with different user groups. Some also run projects presenting themselves in social communities such as MySpace and Facebook in order to be available where the users are.

In order to stimulate a take-up of social technologies we are providing a lot of training throughout 2008 on themes such as: Web.2.0/Library 2.0, Music Library 2.0, improving blog communications, social tagging, creation of Wikis, Flickr, YouTube, podcasting techniques, etc.

Other core skills, such as marketing, branding and communication skills, are important competencies amongst library staff in the physical library. Serving remote library users calls, however, for additional competencies in using suitable techniques for meeting the user in the electronic environment, such as direct marketing, using chat software, co-browsing, communication via SMS and web logs, writing to the Web and Web design.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of the remote library user, knowledge of measuring and evaluation of the use of electronic services (usability tests) is important.

Do we know who the users really are? Do we know what they expect and whether they are satisfied with the services provided from the library or not?

From formal education and training to workplace learning

The outcome of participation in formal continuing education is, of course, quite simple to measure: a new degree. The outcome of training courses, conferences and seminars might be very significant for the individual, and methods for measuring the effects (outcome) of training new skills and competences, including 'personal and social skills', do exist. These are, however, not frequently used by Danish libraries. From the point of view of the organization as a whole, the outcome of training depends on the procedures for follow-up/knowledge sharing – and many library directors still have a job to do in this area. Our latest survey on training issues, conducted in January 2008 amongst all Danish library directors, shows that only a minority works systematically on follow-up procedures to individual staff training.

Training courses organized locally for the entire staff or a department seems, however, to have a measurable impact and stimulate new activities and a change of attitude.

In Danish libraries a variety of different methods are used for continuing professional development and training. We have, unfortunately, no research looking into which methods provide the most efficient results for training librarians.

The concept of workplace learning involves taking in all aspects of a professional's role, recognizing that education is only one of the ways in which individuals continue to learn and develop as professionals throughout their working careers and their professional lives. It signifies the inclusion of the various different kinds of development activities, both the formal and less formalized, and includes such activities as work-based mentoring and coaching.

My suggestions of methods for continuing professional development below are neither in order of priority nor exclusive, but are simply included because they work in practice. Many of the activities will serve well to underpin the further development of skills and competencies for library staff and show that training courses are only one of many options.

Suggested external activities for continuing professional development

- participation in projects across institutions/ across sectors (i.e. collaborative reference consortia)
- participation in professional networks /interest groups (personal and virtual)
- participation in formal continuing education programmes (including self-study and distance education)
- participation in external training courses – including distance education (i.e. language, IT skills, communication, subject areas)
- participation in conferences and seminars
- participation in study visits
- participation in a job exchange
- preparing a presentation for professional meetings
- writing a paper for publication
- preparing and teaching a course for library professionals
- developing a personal communication platform (blogs, web-site, podcasting service, etc.).

Suggested in-house activities for continuing professional development

- in-house training/instruction by colleagues
- knowledge exchange with colleagues (physical and virtual)
- action learning/learning by doing (i.e. “23 Things”)¹
- job rotation
- reading professional literature

- testing new products/services (i.e. features and validation of electronic resources)
- reflection in teams
- mentoring programmes
- supervision
- benchmarking
- trial and error
- good management/qualified leadership.

Conclusion

In this case-study, various aspects of training and continuing professional development have been outlined. But please be aware that the ball is ultimately in your court! The responsibility for keeping yourself employable is primarily yours.

Reference/note

1. A Learning 2.0 program which is developed by Charlotte Library, US, called ‘23 Things’, is a step-by-step e-learning tutorial for Web 2.0 technologies. Widely used by libraries in the US and recently adapted amongst Danish public libraries.

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