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	<p>Preparing library staff for reference and information work in the hybrid library – the need for skills and continuing professional development</p> <p>Gitte Larsen, Royal School of Library and Information Science, Dept. of Continuing Education and Consultancy, Copenhagen, Denmark gl@db.dk – www.db.dk/kon</p>
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Abstract

What education and training needs emerge from the changing roles of the hybrid library and particular in the new context of reference and information work?

It is expected that library staff are qualified to offer high quality services to those users, who are visiting the physical library. Likewise, it is expected, that they have substantial knowledge and skills needed for developing and maintaining electronic services and for dissemination of relevant services matching the web-user’s needs and expectations. Serving remote library users on the WWW calls for additional competencies within *ICT, marketing, branding library services and communication via different media* as well as knowledge of methods of *measuring and evaluation of use and user satisfaction* with the services provided. Libraries involved in collaborative virtual reference services might also appreciate skills *in project management and abilities in collaboration across institutions*.

It is a challenge to the staff to match particular needs and demands from many different user groups and communities, but also to library management staff to ensure that sufficient professional competencies and skills are available in the organisation to match the needs of today’s user – wherever he might be located.

When preparing for new skills and competences, the following aspects have to be considered carefully:

- External impact factors, which might influence the development of libraries
- Core skills of staff in the hybrid library – what do we need
- Additional core skills needed for reference and information services – personal and virtual?
- Interrelation between knowledge, skills, personality and attitudes
- Training and continuing professional development - some critical focus points

This presentation will discuss these issues in brief and give some recommendations based on the author's experiences from the Danish Library scene.

New recruitments: Competencies: Knowledge – skills and attitudes

On new recruitments, library directors express that they want staff with a deep (and broad) theoretical educational background, combined with strong personal and social competencies. Staff profiles demanded from the Danish library directors of their future staff will focus on personal skills, such as *ability to advise, to structure, to communicate, to teach and to market library services*.¹ The following generic skills were mentioned as being desirable:

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	PERSONAL SKILLS	ATTITUDES
in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT (Information and Communication Technology) • Information retrieval • Information economy • Relevant subject knowledge • Pedagogical theories and methods • Project management • Statistics • Markering • Legal aspects / contract negotiation • Test- and measure methods 	for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Commitment • Prepared for changes • Personal planning • Personal management • Ability to learn • Stress management • Pedagogical skills 	Being able to /willing to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing • Cooperation • Work in teams • Conflict handling • Sense of humor

Research studies on recruitment profiles for new staff in U.S and U.K. studies i.e. by Bridges (2003) and Corral (2005) indicates similar preferences by library directors. More details the generic knowledge, skills and attitudes are reported by Larsen (2006)

Within the context of reference and information work, these generic skills might be regarded as highly relevant. In addition we could add the following to the list of personal skills and attitudes: *curiosity, flexibility, empathy, patience, service minded, willingness and interest to understand the users needs and tolerance for change*.

Since library managers are not in the position to replace all the existing staff with new staff, we have to ensure training and development that underpin the profile of a librarian of today,

¹ Data collected by Gitte Larsen: personal conversations, conferences, written statements in the Danish library press, etc. during 2005 and 2006

and focus on personal skills and attitudes in addition to updating professional skills and competencies.

There are some important aspects to ponder.

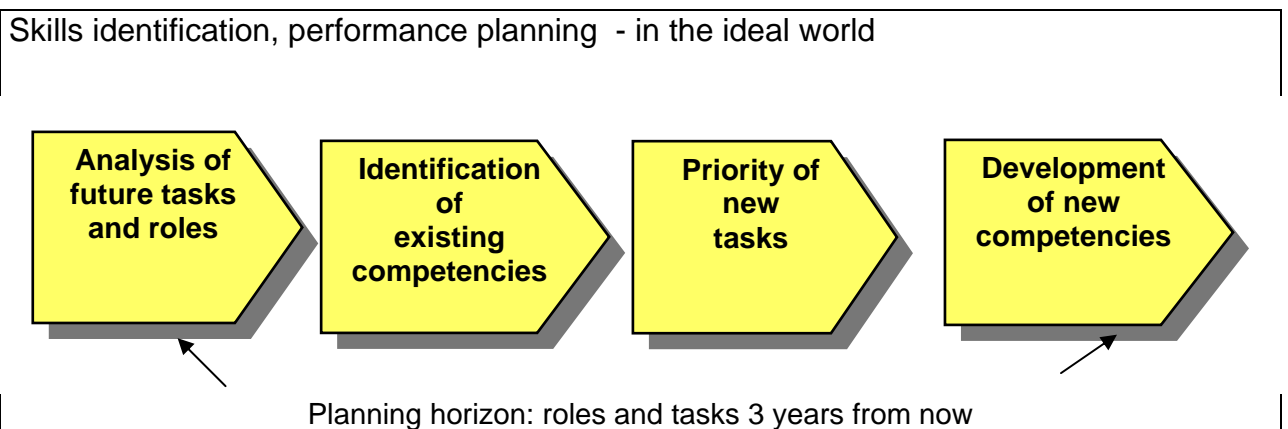
How to maintain competencies that might have been acquired a long time ago? In many Danish libraries, staff has been employed for more than 25 years and the average age is +50. How do we add new competencies for i.e. electronic communication, ICT and e-resources at the speed demanded by the user's preferences and behaviour?

How can librarians learn all these technical and communications skills, resources, delivery mechanisms, and all the other stuff we need to know to be a virtual reference librarian?

Library managers have to be committed to changes, far-sighted and concentrate actively on competence development. It is not enough to dispatch the staff to yet another continuing education course or a conference.

Planning for change

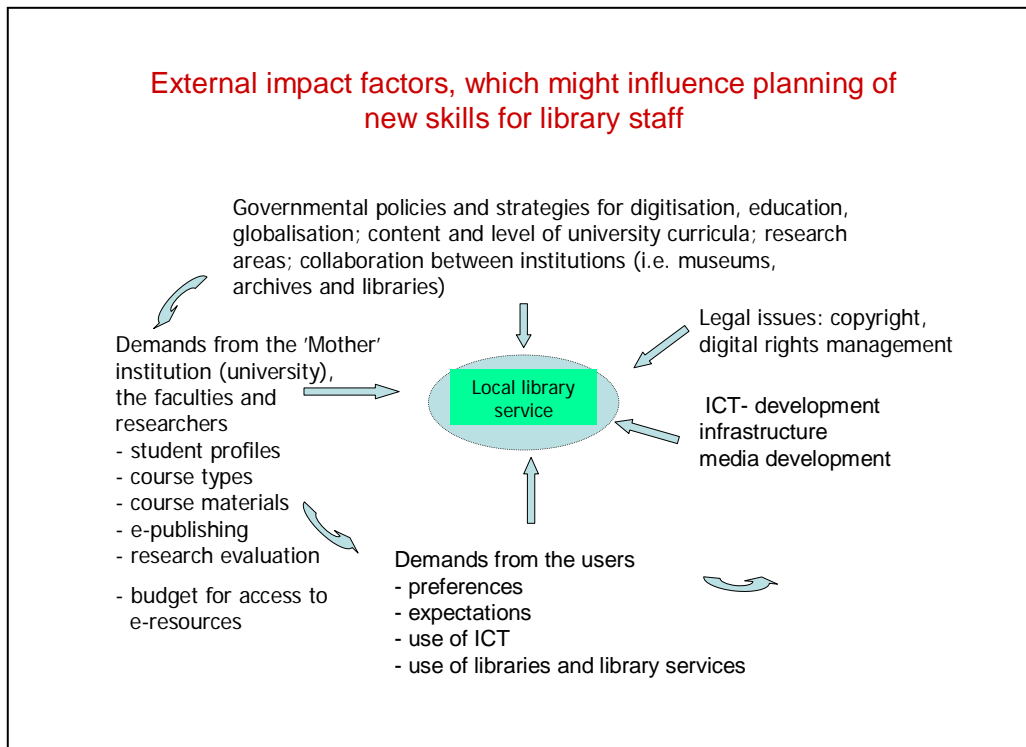
In order to make a successful staff performance planning, it is necessary to start with an analysis of future tasks and roles of the library, decide priorities and go through the four steps outlined in the figure below.



It is important for the library manager to consider what will be regarded as core skills of librarians in the hybrid library in her own local context within the planning horizon and to determine what additional skills needed for staff reference and information services.

But not even careful planning and good assessment of skills and training gaps might be able to predict and take into account the number of external impact factors that might influence the plans over a period of 1-3 years. Funding bodies, policy issues, technologies, e- resources, technological infrastructure, the user's needs and preferences might change much faster than the libraries are able to change their strategies for staff development and set up new programmes for training and education. The figure below is just an example illustrating a

number of external impact factors influencing an academic library – but similar scenarios can be drawn for any kind of library.



Meola and Stormont (2002) mention the following general skills for all types of live virtual reference:

- Core reference skills
- Real -Time chat techniques
- Software specific skills
- Live virtual reference policies.

Core reference skills are probably included in most library school curricula and further developed over a career of reference practice. We understand 'core reference skills' to include:

- In-depth knowledge of print and electronic sources
- Ability to conduct searches using advanced search techniques
- Evaluate sources for authority and bias
- Expertise of the art of conducting reference interviews.

Kovacks (2007) suggests librarian's reference expertise includes knowledge and skills to:

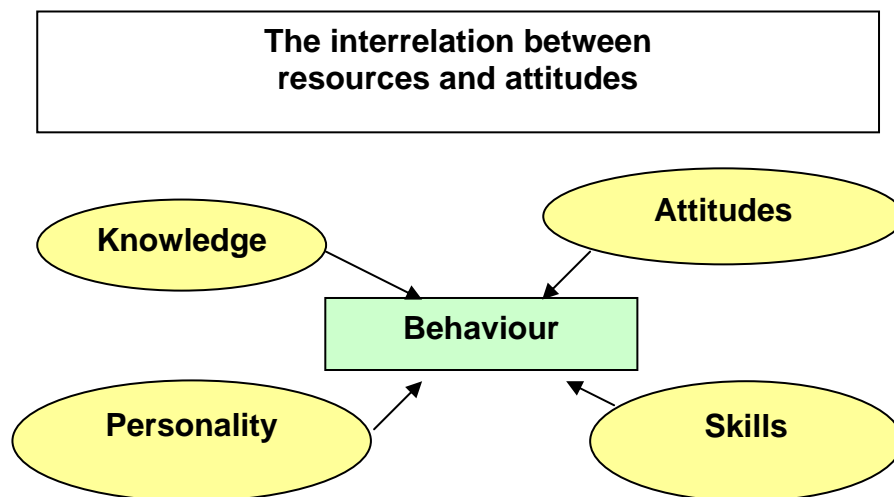
- Search sources
- Think critically
- Analyze questions
- Interview
- Organise information
- Locate specific reference sources, and
- Master advanced information-finding tools.

Within this context the competencies and skills include the entire process of the reference interview of face-to-face, chat and e-mail: analysis of a reference question; conducting a good reference interview; develop a search strategy; delivering the information.

Real-Time chat techniques are in the literature regarded trickier than face-to-face reference interviews and the differences should not be underestimated. In the live virtual reference, there are no visual and oral cues, communications is mediated through software, and reference is taking place on the WWW, using chat with various software platforms or Instant Messaging, where users have different expectations. The chance for miscommunication is greater. Neither person can make eye contact, use facial expressions, or get information from body language. There is a definite skill set that needs to be acquired and a set of techniques that can be learned.

Interrelation between knowledge, skills and attitudes – 3 competencies of equal importance

Competencies are in this context defined as the combined theoretical knowledge and practical experience that makes the individual able and willing to take the right decisions in the daily working environment. This definition is important, because it emphasises, that competencies are not equal to professional formal qualifications only. And the lesson to be learned from regarding the 3 competencies of equal importance is that it should be mirrored in the plans for professional development of staff in all libraries. The figure below shows a general model of the interrelation between human resources and behaviour – and explains why continuing professional development and training is important for further development of organisations.



Within the context of reference, Kovacks (2007) raises the following questions: Can good communication competency make up for poor reference competency? Can great reference competency balance poor communication competency? How far does being nice, approachable, listening, or always positive get you if you cannot meet or answer the information needs of your library users? How far can having thorough reference knowledge get you if you can't communicate your knowledge to the information seeker who will benefit from it? Both communications and reference competencies are important. These are the reference expertises that make the users consult a reference librarian instead of just use Google on their own.

Continuing Professional development in a Danish context

The Royal School of Library and Information Science (RSLIS) states in its performance contract with the Ministry of Culture, it 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 library development. A part of our current training courses aim to underpin The Danish National Library Authority's national strategic development plan for libraries named 'From Information to Knowledge' (2005).

On an annual basis, we offer a selection of app. 200 different training courses and seminars for all kind of library staff in addition to formal continuing education, such as our Master Programme in Library and Information Science. More than 5000 library staff participate in training courses and seminar annually, which is quite a high number for a small library community in a country with 5million inhabitants. Each semester, app. 30 new training courses are introduced - often developed on suggestions from libraries. Topics from training courses published in our course catalogue are used as basis for tailoring courses, seminars, workshops or presentations for individual libraries, organisations or interest groups.

The Department of Continuing Education and Consultancy invite all the academic staff from RSLIS (app.70 full time staff) to develop training activities. Further specialists from practice with special subject knowledge and freelance consultants are hired as training instructors.

In order to stimulate new skills and competencies, RSLIS offer a selection of opportunities:

New knowledge: RSLIS offer a Master of Library Science Programme as a postgraduate programme for those with a degree in LIS or an equivalent background. It leads to the award of the qualification of MLISc.

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

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 organisation

- The individual staff member
- The team / the unit
- The management level
- The entire organisation

The current development needs of the hybrid library as mentioned above are supported by the 3 first categories of our training courses.

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 that kind of hot topics which influence library issues - typically in seminars and conferences. Library organisations such as the Danish Library Association and The Danish Research Library Association will of course offer conferences on 'hot topics' of relevance for their members - but with more emphasis on the political and practical perspective.

During the last couple of years an increasing number of training courses deals with organisational behaviour. RSLIS organises practical training, seminars and workshops focusing on the organisation development, which have been one of the most demanded themes. Typical themes are: *scenario planning, establishment of common values, cooperation issues, conflict handling, motivation, coaching, stress management, team building, and senior staff.*

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

Many of these topics for training courses will of course be of relevance and interest to all staff in all kinds of libraries and to all level of staff. In the context of reference and information work the focus for training courses has during 2007 been concentrated on the following themes:

- Core reference skills
- Improving search skills and knowledge of search engines
- Web 2.0/Library 2.0
- User service
- Marketing of library services
- Communication
- Personal professional performance

Core reference skills: Practical training in the old classic face-to-face reference interview techniques has got a revival on our course programme - on suggestion from public libraries. After a period with heavy focus on virtual reference skills – and a period where many of our libraries have closed down reference departments and established general information desks there have been a need for refreshing the old core skills such as interview techniques.

Improving search skills and knowledge of search engines: Reference staff will have a life long need to improve and update their search skills – in particular when paper copies of library materials are replaced by electronic sources. Practical training sessions in searching all types' reference 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 the users very frequently start their information search in Google, Yahoo and other search engines. It is important that reference and information staff have a very detailed knowledge of search facilities, ranking algorithm, coverage and content gaps (i.e. Google Scholar) – in order help users finding more qualified information sources than they can do on their own.

Web 2.0/Library 2.0:

Social technologies will have an increasing impact on librarians' communication with the users. "We have to be visible and available where the users are on the WWW", is the driving key at the moment. Chat via Instant Messaging is an example of new communication that attract the younger generation of users more than traditional Ask-a-Librarian type of e-mails services.

Danish librarians are creating blogs for dissemination and communication with different user groups. Some also set up projects presenting themselves in social communities as MySpace in order to be available where the users are. A group of public libraries have entered the virtual space *Second Life* in order to offer real time virtual library services – i.e. reference. In order to stimulate a take up of social technologies we do provide a lot of our training during 2007 on themes such as: *Web.2.0/Library 2.0, Music Library 2.0, blogging, RSS and syndication, tagging, Second Life, Flickr, YouTube, Podcasting techniques*, etc.

Other core skills: 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. Current research projects conducted by University of Ontario, Canada by Nilsen (2006) document that many libraries do not market the virtual reference service clearly on their web-sites, or the site lacks instructions and service declarations. The study also indicates room for improvement of conducting reference interviews and follow-up to answers from the librarians site. Reference librarians, who want to improve their skills in virtual reference interview and chat sessions, would find very helpful examples and practical instructions in guidebooks i.e. by Ronan (2003) and Kovack (2007).

In order to meet the needs and expectations from 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? Houlson (2006) refers in a very

content rich article to a number of research studies demonstrating how useful it is to conduct detailed surveys of chat transcripts of virtual reference sessions...

From formal education and training to workplace place 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 high for the individual². For the entire organisation, however, it depends on the procedures for follow up /knowledge sharing – and many library directors still have a job to do in this area. Training courses organised locally for the entire staff or a department seems to have a measurable impact and stimulate new activities and change of attitudes.

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 library staff.

Broadening the concept of continuing professional education to that of continuing professional development and workplace learning has been acknowledged by IFLA when accepting this new section CDPWL in 2003.

This concept is taking in all aspects of a professional's role, and is recognising that education is only one of the ways in which the individuals continue to learn and develop as professionals throughout their working carriers and their professional lives.

The concept of 'workplace learning' signifies the inclusion of the different kind of development activities both the formal and less formalised and includes such activities as work-based mentoring and coaching. Beckett and Hager (2002) provide a detailed introduction to the concept and practice of workplace learning.

My suggestions of methods for continuing professional development below are not in priority order or exclusive – but simply because they work in practice. A number of the methods are supported by i.e. Brines (2005). Many of the activities will fit well to underpin the further development of skills and competencies for library staff working with reference and information.

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)

² Methods for measuring the effects (outcome) of training new skills and competences (including the 'personal and social skills') exist, but are not frequently used by Danish libraries

- Participation in external training courses - including distance education (i.e. language, IT-skills, communication, subject areas)
- Participation in conferences and seminars
- Study visits
- Job exchange
- Preparing a presentation for professional meetings
- Writing a paper for publication
- Preparing and teaching a course for library professionals
- Develop 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”)³
- Job rotation
- Reading professional literature
- Testing new products / services (i.e. features and validation of electronic resources)
- Mentoring programmes
- Supervision
- Benchmarking
- Trial and errors
- Good management

Resources needed

When planning for new skills and competencies it is necessary to take into account that sufficient resources should be made available in the institution. Participation in formal continuing education programmes, training courses and professional conferences requires separate budget allocations. Participation in external networks for knowledge exchange and conducting projects with colleagues from other libraries and across sectors seems to be very valuable for developing new competencies. Well-known in-house initiatives as listed above will also be usual for achieving new skills.

“What is the minimum of resources needed for continuing education?”

It is probably not possible to give an ultimate answer to this question. I have asked a sample of Danish research library directors on their average resource allocation for continuing education and training in 2005 and 2006. On this basis, I recommend the following figures:

³ A Learning 2.0 program which is developed by Charlotte Library, U.S. called “23 Things” is a step by step e-learning tutorial for Web 2.0 technologies. Widely user by libraries in U.S. and recently adapted amongst Danish public librerias

10% of staff's working hours as a minimum for training and professional development (external + internal activities).

In terms of budget, 25 -30 % of the total budget should as a minimum be allocated for the development of new services.

When considering the validity of this estimation, it is important to keep in mind, that the figures are reflecting the state of development of the Danish libraries – with decades of library automation experience, a well functioning national coordination strategy and strong state support for library development - and not least library staff in all kind of libraries with a professional LIS education and continuing education programmes of a very high standard.

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