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SWOT analysis of Centre for permanent professional development at Ljubljana City Library, Slovenia

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Abstract:

Knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes of employees are an important element for reaching various aims of (public) libraries. At Ljubljana City Library (LCL) various learning activities for library employees are merged under the frame of Centre for permanent professional development, called also LCL Learning Centre. Centre provides a wide set of learning activities for employees of the LCL, library staff of other Slovenian libraries and for the wider professional public (i. e. translators, editors, students) also. In 2018 120 learning activities (workshops, lectures, seminars etc.) were organised in a total duration of 400 hours, in which altogether participated almost 1.800 attendees. This paper presents and discusses the current organisation, situation and orientation of the Centre. In the introduction, institutional and theoretical background is described. The main part of the paper is structured as a SWOT analysis of the current state. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified, discussed and presented. From LCL point of view, the purpose of this analysis is to monitor and evaluate the current situation. This presentation of good practice is an example of how learning activities for librarians can be organised in public library with approximately 230 employees, with 35 library branches serving the population of approximately 360.000 inhabitants of central Slovenia region in nine municipalities.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Professional Development, Learning Centre.

Introduction

Knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes of employees are an important element for reaching various aims of (public) libraries. For qualitative professional work in (public) libraries, employees need to upgrade and develop knowledge generated through formal education (schooling, high schools, and universities) and regularly reflect everyday

experiences from the workplace. For the development of professional knowledge, employees at Ljubljana City Library (LCL) have the opportunity to participate in various learning activities organised by library or other providers. That is our right and our duty, defined in job contracts also. Various learning activities for library employees are at LCL merged under the frame of Centre for permanent professional development, called also LCL Learning Centre. For professional library communities, two aspects of organisation and activities of the Centre are relevant. First is internal knowledge management and development of library employees, in this case approximately 230 employees of the largest Slovenian public library. The second relevant aspect is the Centre as a provider of learning activities for library staff of other Slovenian and foreign libraries and for the wider professional public. This paper presents and discusses the current organisation, situation and orientation of the Centre. In the introduction, institutional and theoretical backgrounds are described.

Formally the Centre has been in operation since 2011, but its roots are in the long and heterogeneous tradition of permanent professional education in five previously independent public libraries of Ljubljana, which merged in a joint library in 2008, with 35 library branches. When the libraries merged, the area of professional education of employees needed to be set up in the new organisational context. Some of more significant characteristics are: (1) central human resource department for all employees, (2) library director and deputy director on central level, (3) cluster structure of middle management and organisation of employees (replacements, organizing work shifts turns, absence for sick leave, for education) which generally follows the structure of the five previously independent district libraries, and (4) intensive and extensive process of uniformity and equality of user services, library facilities and collections in all library branches of LCL, which were present in years after merger.

The LCL is the capital-city library and with approximately 230 employees, with 35 library branches serving the population of approximately 360.000 inhabitants of central Slovenia region in nine municipalities, it is the largest public library in Slovenia also. The LCL consists of five district libraries and 14 branch libraries including also the Slovanska Library, the Mobile Library and Trubar Literature House. The Centre of Lifelong Learning (CLL) manages education courses for library members and visitors of all age groups, LCL employees, and for a wider professional public and it consists of: (a) the Employment Information Service, (b) the Learning Exchange, (c) the Open Learning Centre, (d) Points of lifelong learning and (e) Centre for permanent professional development or LCL Learning Centre. The last one is the main research subject of this paper. Main statistical characteristics of the LCL for year 2018 are: Collection: 1.760.196 units; Circulation: 4.366.802; Visits: 2.384.793; Members: 84.592 (Poročilo 2018). The vision of LCL is "To understand the changes and to prepare the path to services of the future!" and by this vision, all activities are committed to permanent development an aim of becoming the most innovative Slovenian public library (Rijavec, 2018).

Basically, the Centre follows the model of permanent professional education as it was developed in the constitutional phase of the Centre's establishment. The model was developed based on relevant theoretical backgrounds and actual organisational properties and possibilities. In general, the main aim of the Centre is to influence the competences of staff in the broadest possible sense – to develop and upgrade knowledge, skills and attitudes. One of basic theoretical backgrounds of the model and current practical work is the human resource concept, which focuses on development of employees' potentials and talents, for achieving goals of organisation (Gazvoda, 1997). Included are also concepts of the learning

organisation (Resman and Šinko, 2013a, 3-6) and other approaches to adult learning and education – such as andragogy, knowledge management, proactive library, leadership etc. – that are present in Slovenian librarian and adult education professional communities and in international resources also (i.e. Varlejs, 2016). This paper is focused on practical aspects of Centre's work; theoretical and strategic aspects are not at the forefront.

According to model of permanent professional education work at the Centre, it is organized in six phases/elements (Resman and Šinko 2013a, 2013b): (1) identification and formulation of goals and aims, (2) competencies identification, (3) knowledge, (4) preparation of learning program, (5) execution of learning activities, and (6) evaluation. In practice, these elements are not strictly separated; they intertwine and don't follow each other linearly, and instead the relationship and connections between them are very flexible and fluid. An important element of work related to the area of learning and education is coordination and synchronisation of institutional goals, which are defined in strategic plans, vision, strategy, and annual programs of institution with personal goals, competencies in potentials of individual employee, which are monitored through system of annual interviews and everyday communication and cooperation between employees.

LCL is part of the library system of Slovenia - an organized network consisting of publicly funded libraries of all types – public libraries, academic libraries, special libraries and national library. Funding for library operations is provided by both state and municipal governments. The Slovenian network of public libraries currently consists of fifty-eight main/central libraries and their branch libraries. LCL is also one of ten central regional libraries, which perform additional duties for the regions they serve: for example, more resources and services that fulfil advanced user needs; general professional support for library employees, which also includes continuing education. Important national strategic background for the Centre's work is present in The Slovenian Public Libraries 2013–2020 Development Strategy, which puts great emphasis on the continuing education of librarians. In general, library staff in Slovenia has high degrees of formal (library) education. Some characteristics of external context LCL are described in subchapters Opportunities and Threats. For a detailed presentation of the library system of Slovenia, see Ambrožič and Žumer (2015) and The Slovenian Public Libraries for the Future (2012, 2013).

The main part of the paper is structured as a SWOT analysis of the current state. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified, discussed and presented. Strengths and weaknesses are understood as attributes of the organisation; opportunities and threats are defined as attributes of the external environment. From LCL point of view, the purpose of this analysis is to monitor and evaluate the current situation. For other libraries, this can serve as a best practice example, and also as an invitation for future work on common issues with LCL. This presentation of good practice is an example of how learning activities for librarians can be organised in public libraries similar to LCL.

Strengths

The annual program of learning activities is our main product; it is a result of our work and the tool for our work at the same time. This catalogue is published in January each year and contains descriptions of all learning activities for the current year. Descriptions of each learning activity include title, a short summary of the content, target group, mentors (lecturers, speakers), duration, price, date, hour and location. The annual program contains two types of learning activities. In the first group are learning activities for LCL employees

only and these activities are published as an internal document. Those are activities with contents which are relevant only in terms of LCL (i.e. module for middle management in LCL) or learning activities in »beta version«, also known as “pilot version of activity”, which means learning activities (i.e. workshop, lecture) that are in the first (or first two) executions and are prepared for LCL staff only; based on their feedback, the learning activities may be modified version in the next year for library staff of other libraries. The second group are activities in which LCL staff and participants from other institutions can participate. An important part of LCL work is also coordination of library staff study visits in foreign libraries and program of hosting librarians from other libraries (i.e. in a frame of Erasmus +, or exchange program in cooperation with Maribor Library). Preparation of the annual program is an ongoing process. While the actual one is prepared, ideas for content and improvements for the next one are collected. Preparation of program includes a great variety of activities, and a mosaic of them is crucial for final success. Here we speak about communication with mentors, preparation of learning activities descriptions, coordination of dates (to take in consideration holidays, school vacations, summer vacations, conferences of other providers, shift work, periods for annual planning, annual reporting in LCL), managing of places (for the Centre we use the same rooms as for learning activities for end-users), financial planning, designing the layout of catalogue, proofreading, publishing program on library website and library intranet. Those are very practical elements of the Centre work; although they look simple and trivial, they are crucial for fluent work and implementation of various visions and successful achievement of goals. The main part of work is done in November, December and January. The program is done for the whole year.

Team of internal trainers. An important part of learning activities is organized in the way, that our employees are trainers, lecturers and speakers. These are LCL employees from various workplaces, with specific professional knowledge, who are talented, motivated and skilled for knowledge sharing. Among around 230 LCL employees, there are some leading experts among Slovene public libraries with very practical experiences. In practice, that means that the web page editor prepares workshops about social media, that human resource department employees prepared education about law regulated promotion to expert titles in librarianship, and that learning activities about how to repair books, how to organize fairy tale hours for children, how to use MS Publisher for preparation of promo material, 3D printing, how to prepare conference poster etc. are delivered by our internal trainers. Simultaneously, some of them also teach on learning activities for our end-users. Internal trainers prepare the whole learning program; with employees of LC, they discuss length of the program, learning materials, and number of participants. For internal trainers, we had various pieces of training about adult education, didactics, group dynamics, learning methods, preparation of learning materials for adults, public speaking etc. Each year, we include these topics in a program of our Center, or we invite our trainers to go on workshops of other providers. In addition to the internal trainers in the program, we have also invited some external trainers, from other organizations. In practice, the Centre operates as a coordination point, coordinating and merging cooperation of various departments and employees, with the aim to provide optimal learning opportunities for as many LCL employees and others as possible and to ensure the flow of knowledge, the flow of ideas, and feedback information.

The needs assessment is a well-developed part of the Centre’s work. The most structured and formal form of needs assessment is an e-questionnaire for all LCL’s employees. It includes questions about content, topics, methods, and forms of education. It was performed in 2011 and in 2018. In 2011, employees expressed the biggest lack in knowledge of informational communication technologies; in 2018, they emphasized lack in soft skills and

social competencies for working with people – such as how to communicate effectively with users and co-workers, how to manage conflicts etc. The results mainly focused on the content selection in ICT knowledge and contemporary soft skills. A questionnaire, with minor adoptions, could be also relevant for other libraries as an instrument for needs assessment in continuing professional development. Participants can suggest topics for future education on evaluation sheets, and these suggestions are taken into consideration when the annual plan is prepared. Needs expressions and detections are part of the organizational culture in LCL. Through the years, we developed a positive attitude in employees toward learning activities, and cultivated their trust by creating a safe environment for them to express their needs. Employees are not afraid to express their needs in the form of: *Can you organize something from this topic ...*, *We have problems with ...*, *I suggest ...* *We want to know more about ...* Often needs expressions include also recommendations of lecturers, external providers etc. We consider this an example of a “learning organization”. During the year, various recommendations and suggestions come from colleagues from other libraries. Ideas and suggestions collected during the year are on various levels of concretization – i.e. more general as something about exhibitions preparation, or very concrete such as a workshop on how to prepare a video held by a specific expert. We are collecting them in a common table and we include what is possible in the annual plan; what is temporarily not possible to organize, goes in the table for next year.

Weaknesses

One of the basic weak-points is the **name of The Centre** in the Slovene language. It gives an impression that is simple and obvious, but in practice, it causes confusion at the internal and external level. Library provides learning activities for library users and for librarians in the frame of so-called The Centre of lifelong learning in Ljubljana City Library (Center za vseživljenjsko učenje); the **LCL Learning Centre** (Učni center) is only one part of this activities and the relation between them is not visible at first sight. From the general name, it is not evident which part is for which target group, so it is often used interchangeably. There are also issues with translations in the English language, which are inconsistent even in publications published by LCL. At the moment, we don't have any solution; we just detected issue.

A huge amount of learning activities organised annually causes various organisational problems. For example, there is overlapping of learning activities of LCL and overlapping with learning activities of other providers; there is also overlapping of learning activities with other activities in libraries (cultural events, business meetings, preparation of reports, plans etc.). Due to the shift work and opening hours in 35 library branches, it is hard to assure enough participants for each activity. As a result, sometimes we need to cancel learning activities or activities are executed with only a few participants. Each year, we organise around 100 learning activities – especially a lot of practical workshops for work with new library software. Some content of learning activities is general in nature, and is useful for all library employees, i.e. general computer skills (MS Outlook, Excel). Part of the program is created for special groups of employees (i.e. librarians at circulation desks) and some is very focused on activities for individuals (Resman in Šinko 2013, 26). Participation in some learning activities is obligatory, i.e. contents of safety at workplace, which is obligatory according to Slovenian legislation. Mostly participation is a decision of employee and head of his/her department/library. The program contains activities in various durations - of an hour, day, or more days; almost all of them are in branches of LCL. All are very practical-oriented

– such as computer knowledge (MS Office, open source application for web surveys 1KA), library-specific professional knowledge (search strategies, e-books), and other knowledge relevant for work in the library (how to moderate the event, business writing, business dress). The annual program includes the organisation of conferences and professional meetings focusing on various topics, usually two per year; Library: a heart of the city, April in LCL: LCL innovative for you and symposiums prepared by The Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship, which have larger numbers of participants and workshops where are only a few participants. This could be rationalized in future.

Not all potential of collected information's is used. We are collecting various information regarding continuing education of our employees and the Centre's work – such as a list of all participants, a list of all workshops, a list of all learning activities per employee per year, evaluation sheets, etc. We assume that a detailed analysis of collected data could give some useful information to improve the organisation. This may be useful for further planning of contents on a general institutional level, and more specifically on the level of various libraries/departments, and on the individual level of employees also. Further research is also lacking for answering the question: to what extent is the gained knowledge used in practice.

Advantages of the digital world are not taken in entirety. E-registration forms and e-evaluation sheets are not developed yet; e-learning materials are not used for all learning activities. For registration, we use e-mail (for participants from LCL), and scanned registration forms – scan with stamp via email, fax or regular post (for external participants) and mail registrations are archived in Microsoft Outlook. Later, details are entered in tables, created in Microsoft Excel. This is time-consuming and it is exposed to various mistakes. The Annual program of learning activities is on library's webpage published only in pdf format; in the future, a more interactive and flexible form could be developed. In Moodle, we have created an e-learning room and we have tested it for ICT content only; so there are still possibilities for the development of learning materials for other content. There is also a possibility for extending the practice of publishing videos from learning activities and more structured publishing of reports from various external learning activities, with the use of digital possibilities.

Opportunities

Networks and partnerships as opportunities for knowledge exchange in all directions: With a network of branch libraries and Mobile Library bus-stops, the LCL is the most networked cultural institution of Ljubljana. The library works in partnership with other libraries, cultural and educational institutions, local authorities, volunteer organizations, non-government organizations and local economy. LCL has a numerous (non)formal partnerships with libraries abroad, with partners from EU countries from previous projects, and from various other international activities. LCL as employer financially and organisationally supports attendance of employees for various conferences, meetings, pieces of training, study visits abroad, so we are able to include trends and solutions from abroad to our learning programme. We have experience with cooperation in different international projects and currently coordinate some projects on a national and regional level (Knowledge Exchange, central regional libraries etc.). With heterogeneous internal teams, LCL is able to host various individual and group mobilities/study visits of students and librarians from other (European) countries.

Our employees are often part of various professional activities at the national level, so we actively participate in the development of library professionals and we are well informed about changes, trends, and issues. As a learning centre, we are able to respond to requests and situations.

The main **target group** of the Centre's learning activities are (1) employees of LCL, (2) employees of other public libraries, and (3) employees from other types of libraries. Fifty-eight public libraries in Slovenia all together employ approximately 1.200 employees, academic libraries, special libraries and national library, and employ together further approximately 1.000 employees (Library System Development Center, library statistics web tool BibSiSt Online). Among (potential) participants is the wider professional public (i.e. preschool education experts, adult educators, translators, editors, students). The improvement of a percentage of participants from other (public) libraries can be one of the goals for further work; presentation and promotion for the Centre's programs among other librarians is a great opportunity for expanding the Centre's work and to gain more recognition in the library professional community.

Threats

Beside LCL there are two bigger **providers** of training and learning activities specialised for library staff – the National and university library and the Institute of Information Science in Maribor (IZUM). With both of them, the Centre cooperates by preparing the learning program, and employees of LCL regularly visit their learning activities. Several large libraries and professional associations also host occasional lectures and workshops to the interested public. Besides that, in Slovenia at the moment there is a relatively extensive offer of a variety of topics relevant for librarians (i.e. literacy), some of them available free of charge; some are provided by adult education institutions, schools, NGOs and associations. With limited resources (time, money) of libraries, this can be a threat for participation in learning activities of the Centre.

Conclusion

Permanent monitoring and revision of the Centre's work is crucial for ensuring qualitative and relevant learning opportunities for librarians. The Centre in LCL offers an opportunity for employees of various libraries and other professionals to upgrade their knowledge as participants in learning activities or to share their knowledge as mentors/lecturers/speaker in organized learning activities. Such cooperation can be the starting point for teamwork between libraries for development and implementation of (new) services for users on a national and international level. In this paper, only selected aspects of the Centre's work are presented.

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