Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Library Staff are More Motivated to Engage in Professional Development When Encouraged by Library Leadership

Johannessen, H. T. D. (2018). The need to grow, learn and develop – how does management affect motivation for professional development? LIBER Quarterly, 28(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10238

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – This study explores whether there is a correlation between academic library leaders' support for professional development and their employees' professional self-esteem and motivation to participate in professional development.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – Academic libraries in Norway.

Subjects – 1,637 full time equivalent (FTE) staff.

Methods – The theoretical framework for this study is knowledge management. The author defines this as "The creation and subsequent management of an environment which encourages knowledge to be created, shared, learnt, enhanced, and organized for the benefit of the organization and its customers" (Sarrafzadeh, Martin, & Hazeri, 2006, p. 624, quoted on p. 3). An anonymous quantitative survey was made available to staff working in Norwegian academic libraries. The survey included questions about to what extent their leader encourages them to attend conferences, to what extent their leader understands their skills and competencies, personal belief in their own skills and competencies to perform their

work tasks, and number of professional development activities they attended in 2015 (including conferences, continuing education seminars, and interdepartmental seminars).

Main Results – 626 survey responses were collected, for a 38% response rate. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Over 50% of all survey respondents reported high satisfaction with their professional skills and competencies. There is a difference when broken down by gender, with 77% of men reporting confidence in their professional skills versus 63% of women. Education level, on the other hand, does not make a difference. The study found a correlation between perception by library staff that their library leader has a "good overview" of their professional skills and staff members' confidence in their ability to perform their job well. Library staff with leaders who encouraged professional development were more likely to participate in external professional development activities. Participation in internal professional development activities was not affected by library leaders' encouragement.

Conclusion – When library staff are encouraged by library leadership to participate in professional development, they are more likely to do so. Library staff who perceive that their library's leaders recognize and value their professional skills and competencies have a higher sense of professional self-esteem. Library leaders can use knowledge management to come to a better understanding of the knowledge and skills their staff members already possess, and to encourage communities of practice and the sharing of knowledge in the organization. This recognition can result in employees who are happier and more motivated to learn.

Commentary

This study adds to the extensive literature on the role that library leadership plays in encouraging a culture of professional development in their organizations. In 2000, Shanhong argued that professional training and education among library staff would become an important knowledge management objective in 21st century libraries. More recently, some have argued that academic libraries should improve their use of knowledge management in order to increase knowledge sharing among staff (Koloniari & Fassoulis, 2017; Muchaonyerwa & Mutula, 2017). This study reinforces the value of knowledge management for contributing to employees' self-confidence and motivation to engage in professional development.

The study was evaluated using the "EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist" (Glynn, 2006). The methodology utilized is appropriate to studying the entire population of academic library staff in Norway. A few areas of the methodology could benefit from clarification. Although the paper states that a survey was conducted using the online program SurveyXact, it does not discuss how participants were recruited, and it is unclear whether the survey population includes all academic library staff or only staff with "librarian" in their job title. Since some academic libraries have different levels of professional development support and expectations for librarians versus non-librarian staff, this could have implications for the findings. Additionally, the article does not include the survey instrument itself, precluding the possibility of other researchers replicating the study.

A potential confounding variable that was not discussed in the article is financial support for professional development. If library leaders who encourage their staff to attend conferences are more likely to provide financial support for these activities, this could be a reason why these staff members are more likely to attend. This could also explain why staff participation in in-house professional development was not correlated with a library leader's encouragement. Overall, the article would benefit from a more thorough explanation of the study's findings.

This study will be valuable to anyone in library administration who is interested in cultivating professional skills and self-confidence among their employees. Using a

knowledge management frame, the paper makes a compelling case for why it is important that library managers not only familiarize themselves with the competencies and skills their staff possess, but make sure they are communicating to their staff that they are recognized and valued. The study indicates that social recognition goes a long way to improving employee self-confidence and motivation to learn, which benefits both individual employees and the organization as a whole.

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