Anna Christina Rutquist
Project leader KUB project

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KUB project – a model for work-related learning?

Courses – a waste of resources?

When library managers and staff talk about competence development it is often synonymous with "attending a course". The course could be based on a theme which relates to the development of the library, but it could also be a reward for a job well done or contribute with new perspectives that could be useful for the library. Staff who have attended a course have interesting things to share with their colleagues. They probably get to talk about what they have learned at a work meeting etc. However, studies show that after that, not much happens. Usually the workplace is not equipped to make use of the staff's new skills.

From the point of view of the workplace, this is a big waste of resources. And the staff feel frustrated because they cannot use their new skills. That said, it should not be seen as pointless to send staff on a course. But if you want to see results, it requires that the library provide a supportive learning environment. To investigate whether the libraries can find a suitable model for this, four county libraries, together with municipal and hospital libraries, applied for ESF funding.

About the KUB project

The KUB project is an ESF funded project. Together, four counties, Värmland, Dalarna, Gävleborg and Uppsala, are trying to find one or several models for learning at the libraries.
Is it possible to conduct competence development in institutions that experience a pressing lack of time? Are there alternatives? Is competence development important for organisational development?

The KUB steering group makes the strategic decisions for the project. The group consists of librarians and library directors from the four county libraries along with the library manager of the University of Gävle. The latter has previous experience from a similar competence development project and the KUB project wants to tap into that experience in a formalised way.

The project has two observing researchers from the University of Borås, Cecilia Gärdén and Karen Nowé Hedvall. Their assignment is to do follow-ups on the project and observe whether or not it is moving towards the outlined goals. They will mainly be looking at learning methods and not individual activities. In collaboration with the steering group, they will present proposals for strategic reorientation when needed. The evaluators will also spread information about the project, mainly in-house. This will help the project to gradually improve in order to reach the goals.

Problem – lack of time and money

The project started off with SWOT analyses. They revealed many strengths, but also problems faced by the libraries. All of the libraries pointed to a lack of resources in terms of time and money as the biggest problem.

A number of libraries also disclosed that:
- There is a lack of information on workplace learning and lack of competence on how to run a learning organisation
- There are not enough resources to quickly respond to the demands of the public
- There is no comprehensive perspective on competence development
- There is no network for the staff to share knowledge
- Staff development does not correlate with the organisational development

Using the SWOT analyses, the staff and management at the libraries have been able to reflect on their own situation. Since the library managers want their staff to take part in competence development, but at the same cannot see that lack of time and money will decrease over time, the problem must be solved by reprioritisation and a new way of working.

Based on the wishes of staff and management, the steering group chose to prioritise four main areas: learning, customer service, IT and marketing. The group calculated that it would take five years to complete all the required training. The priorities were also set in accordance with ESF directives. This meant that areas like "reading promotion" were put on hold, despite many considering it to be an important subject. All activities within the project should uphold values of equality and accessibility.

The steering group stated at the start of the project that the libraries will always be able to refer to a lack of time and money, but that cannot stand in the way of competence development. The challenge is to make new priorities and change the way of working.

Theoretical perspective

Henrik Kock argues that the learning environment is either supportive or limiting. The environment is crucial to the result you achieve in the workplace. In a supportive learning environment you have a positive attitude to new ideas and knowledge. The environment provides support before and after a training activity, and enables for new skills to be applied in everyday work. A limiting learning environment works in the opposite way.

Kock speaks of two main tracks for competence development within organisations:

- The first one is an integrated strategy with focus on changing the organisation.
  Courses and training activities are governed by the needs of the organisation and lead to new ways of working. Theory and practice are interconnected in the workplace.
- The second track, the formal strategy, focuses on the individual and means the staff should develop through a variety of courses.

Kock argues that there are three different sets of motives for why an organisation initiates competence development:
- Organisation focused motives
- Staff driven motives
- Opportunistic motives

Organisation focused motives means that there is a need for competence development due to a pressure of change in the organisation. Staff driven motives means that there is pressure coming from the staff. Finally, opportunistic motives means that the organisation provides training because there is an opportunity to do so, e.g. due to financial funding. Forging formal and informal learning does not come without effort; it requires long-term strategies and clear leadership.

Henrik Kock points out that large amounts of money are being spent on competence development. However, it is usually about emergency efforts and less often about training aimed for the future. Most of the money is spent on courses. Henrik Kock says that people have an institutional trust in courses. The course selection is controlled by the course organisers and there is a big risk that they do not match the needs of the attending staff. Henrik Kock has conducted several studies on competence development in the workplace from 1995 onwards. He shows that most of the efforts to create competence development are a waste of money since there is no supportive learning environment in place to make use of and develop the new skills in the workplace.

Robert Brinkerhoff's 40–20–40 rule is also part of the theoretical framework of the project.
In order to guarantee learning, 40 % of the training should be spent on preparing for it – looking at needs, goals and motivation. Another 40 % should be spent on work post-training. The actual training should only take up 20 %. Without preparation and work post-training in line with this rule, the training will not have an effect.

The goal – to learn in everyday work

The steering group pointed out at the start of the project that there is a big risk that the project is driven by opportunistic motives. Thus, big efforts have been made to make sure that each member of staff takes part in lectures, activities where you learn from each other and local development processes. The project has taken into account that each library is different and subsequently has different needs. The aim is for every library to take a step forward in terms of competence and development based on the level they are at. A lot of responsibility is placed with the individual library and the individual member of staff. Theory and practice should be interacting all the time. When a member of staff has attended a lecture, the new knowledge should instantly be applied in practice through a development process at the library. In this process, reflection is an important ingredient. Individual learning should be in line with the development of the organisation. Most of the responsibility is held by the library manager who has a central role in creating a learning environment. The needs of the libraries have been mapped out using the SWOT analyses. Using this model, the steering group wants the projects to be motivated by organisation focused needs.

Together with the evaluators, the steering group has put together the project goals as follows:

- Management and staff at the participating libraries have created and implemented a model for continued learning in everyday work. The model has been adapted to the local context.
- Management and staff at the participating libraries have increased their competence within one or several of the prioritised areas.

In a "benchmark survey" made at the start of the project, 14 libraries felt that they already had a learning environment in place.

Learning seminars and leadership training – special management support

The project has formal meetings where managers and staff from the county libraries are invited. There is a learning seminar each term and leadership training with several meetings each term. For the learning seminars, managers from all counties come together. This is where the evaluators share how the project is progressing from their point of view, along with any problems or dilemmas that they have observed. The participants can also exchange experiences with each other and there is a lot of room for discussions. The leadership training is held by two managers from Stockholm City Library, Johanna Hansson and Elisabeth Aldstedt. Two thirds of all the managers signed up for the leadership training "Strategic and Personal: Everyday Leadership". The aim of the training was to strengthen personal leadership and provide conditions to develop strategies and tools for everyday leadership. One of the starting points for the leadership training as a whole is that leadership provides the structure and the participants bring content.

The role of the county libraries

The county libraries organise the formal training and function as tour leaders on the trips that are part of the project. They support the other libraries in the local processes if needed. They also do follow-ups at the local libraries by visiting them on site and discussing the progress and addressing any problems. It is easy to forget that competence development is based on a needs analysis of each library.

What can the participants expect from KUB?

The project is meant to give the participants the opportunity to gain the competence needed to work at the libraries of the future.
- Everyone has the chance to participate in the formal lectures – if you cannot make it in person, you can look at the recorded version. All formal lectures are video recorded.
  Everyone can make suggestions for training at their own library – there is funding set aside for this.
- Everyone is responsible for their own competence development, their participation in development processes and networking.
- Everyone should provide feedback and share their reflections in the network. Everyone has been given a project diary where you are encouraged to write down your thoughts and ideas.

All of the 751 members of library staff will take part in the planning and execution of workplace activities. The project aims to provide continuous, concurrent and clear information to everyone on how the project is progressing using a blog and newsletter. The web tool Adobe Connect will be used to facilitate participation across the county borders. All lectures are video recorded and posted on the blog so that geographical distance and time will not be an issue. The videos are protected by a password set by the lecturers.

The transnational element

Six study tours have taken place within the KUB project: trips to Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and England. The main aim with the trips has been to exchange knowledge and experiences as well as making new contacts for future exchange. Prior to the trips, meetings were held where the participants could discuss what questions to focus on.

Here are a few examples of questions:

- How is competence development connected with organisational development?
- How do you work with issues on customer service?

- How is gender equality and accessibility being integrated in the organisation?
- How are the library services presented using the physical space of the library?

In order to share the experiences and impressions from the trips within and outside of the project, the participants contribute with reflections, trend spotting and stories via a blog. A special publication about the trips is also available.

Method of implementation

The steering group wants to apply the integrated strategy presented by Henrik Kock. Focus is on the development of the organisation and the needs dictate what courses the staff should attend. Courses and practice will lead to new ways of working.

The four focus areas presented in the table are based on the needs inventory carried out by the libraries during the SWOT days. IT, marketing and customer service are now the main focus areas for staff competence. There is also focus on learning to develop the actual learning process and leadership training to provide management support. The participants will choose focus areas based on their own competence plan. Everyone will participate in the formal training, i.e. lectures, and in the "non-formal training in the workplace". Training held by the local libraries is seen as "non-formal".

Half of the funding for competence development is divided between the local libraries and the other half will be spent on formal lectures.

Type of training:	Formal	Learning from each other = Non-formal	Development project at the library
Responsible parties:	Steering group. Project leader and project team	Library manager and the individual member of staff	Library manager and the individual member of staff
Training – focus area	Learning 1- 4	*See below	
Training – focus area	Service 1 -4		

Training – focus area	IT 1- 4	E.g. Download e-books	E.g. Staffed IT corner
Training – focus area	Marketing 1- 4		

The participants will reflect on their learning process, preferably in a group. It should be possible to practically apply all training and therefore each library will start one or more development processes relating to the training. The project places equal resources on "learning from each other" as it does on formal lectures. Each library has a set annual sum to use for this objective. This means that library managers can invite co-workers within public administration as lecturers and connect them with their processes at a suitable time for the staff and the organisation.

It is the responsibility of the library management to make sure that the local competence development plan is in line with the individual competence development plans. In total so far, 125 development processes have been carried out within the four focus areas: Learning, Customer Service, IT and Marketing. These do not have to be innovative projects; libraries have in fact been encouraged to take small steps, for example by learning from other libraries. In the appendix you will find examples of three processes.

How is the project progressing?

The KUB project has been running for two years which is a short time to measure the effects of a new way of working. We evaluate all activities, and the formal lectures as well as the learning-from-each-other activities have received good feedback. The participants feel that they are improving their competence within the four focus areas of the project. We can also see that the individual development processes are having an effect. In many places, the physical space of the library has changed in accordance with the skills that the staff have acquired in the marketing training. IT activities aimed directly at the user are increasing and the staff feel more confident when it comes to downloading electronic media.

I order to change and improve the areas of the project so that as much as possible it correlate with the needs of the libraries and with what the project has promised ESF it will work with, the county libraries have done follow-ups by visiting and keeping an open dialogue with the libraries. Here are examples of subjects brought up on those occasions:
- Check the plans with the library funding provided by the project.
- Are all members of staff participating in at least one process? Is the process in line with the competence development plan? Also applies to managers.

- Discuss/encourage processes for everyone. Show what others are doing.
- Discuss the importance of the log book.
- Discuss the possibilities to reflect (or what are our priorities?). Encourage group follow-ups.
- Collaboration across municipal and county borders?
- Encourage people to write on the blog.
- Which processes have brought most learning?
- What is important to think about when it comes to processes?
- What are the ways to success when it comes to processes, what experiences have you gained?
- What is the best way to share knowledge about learning in the processes?

The project has received a lot of positive feedback. Some opinions:
- Co-operation has improved.
- High number of participants.
- Have become aware that more reflection is needed.
- We have a KUB notice board in the lunchroom. Very useful.
- Two colleagues held a seminar based on the learning processes.
- Changed the way the staff look at reflective conversations.
- Good that the KUB project has been applied to such a great extent in the everyday activities.

But there has also been negative feedback:
- Lack of communication.
- Unclear guidelines.
- Difficult to understand what is meant by "process".
- Takes up too much time from the everyday work.
- Ought to get more central directives on what to do in our processes.
- A lot of administration for the libraries.

Results so far based on surveys from the learning sessions show that
- the majority experience that they have acquired new knowledge, especially in terms of IT, marketing and learning.
- assistants participate to a great extent in the IT training.
- informal conversations dominate as a method to share knowledge along with reports on APT.

Observations by the evaluators

The evaluators follow three people's log books: a manager, a librarian and an assistant, which contributes to the quality of the evaluation.
Reflections based on what they have observed in the material:
- The variety in the everyday work – to see the bigger and the smaller

picture at the same time, see both the whole and individual components is a challenge. It is both the manager and the staff's responsibility.

- Sustainable learning – important not to continue as before, but rather demonstrate and apply what you have learned and learn to talk about it.
- Providing headings and "labels" – How do we name things? How can we see our own learning?

The evaluators have observed three dilemmas:
1. Steer or support?
2. Width or depth?
3. Individual or organisation?

At the learning seminar in August 2013, the evaluators said that the library managers have a difficult task when it comes to balancing *steering* and *supporting*. The staff expect the managers to have full control over the learning processes at the library. Many ask for clear directives. This creates a dilemma. The dilemma can also been found at management level. The library managers sometimes feel there is a lack of directives coming from the project management team. Some have expressed that if the project had more clear directives and a set framework, it could have started sooner.

Another problem observed by the evaluators is that it has been difficult to set up collaborations with other libraries. Many express the positive effects of working together with other libraries in the KUB area, however it seems unclear what they would work together on.

The third dilemma is about what or whom the development concerns. Is it the organisation or the individual? The best alternative is a combination so that competence development at the individual level leads to organisational development in the organisation or vice versa. The evaluators point out that there are challenges in terms of choosing strategy to facilitate sustainable learning.

Continued learning

The project has confirmed the thesis that learning should result in some kind of action in the workplace in order to connect the two. In this context, theory without practice is lifeless. Managers and staff need both support and steering, but also disruption in order for the organisation to develop. It is good to make use of your critical friends in a systematic way so you do not get stuck in your own perspective. You should think twice about what type of collaborations are important from a development perspective. The project has covered a large geographical area and communication takes time. You need to consider what the real needs are in order to meet across the county borders. To put emphasis on continuous learning there has to be one or several persons taking on responsibility. It is not always easy for the individual member of staff to apply course theory in practice. This is an important task for the county and public libraries to outline together.

Appendix: Three examples of development processes

"Process: **Model for learning**

Description:
We want to develop a functional model for learning. The model needs to be applicable in different learning situations where the library staff are to learn new skills. We want to look at the challenges and factors that impede learning and to find a model which takes us forward.

We take part in formal training sessions as part of the focus area Learning and reflect afterwards. We specifically make use of the 40-20-40 theory where the division of time to maximise learning means 40 % preparation work, 20 % training and 40 % post-training work. We have applied the 40-20-40 model at several courses/meetings, both formal and informal, by following a group of colleagues before, during and after the course.

Here are few examples of the type of questions we pose during the process:
Why should you attend a course?
How can you get results from the course?
How do we share knowledge?

In order to make things more concrete, we are working together with other on-going KUB processes at the city library, especially the IT process, to study learning and outline our model."

And another example within the area of Learning:
"Process: **Workplace-based learning from a knowledge-based way of working**

Description:
We are a team created after a reorganisation which took place in 2012. We went from one to three teams named Reading, Learning and Experiencing. We belong to team Learning. Many of the activities that are part of our team are somewhat unfocused, furthermore, many of us in the team have work tasks that could be referred to as inner work which can be difficult to include in the work with user contacts. We will be working in pairs with different questions regarding the articles we have read and keep a log book. We will also keep a log book covering the whole process. In November 2013 the team will spend a day working together on this. We will agree on how to work with work shadowing and digital participation for 2014. The idea is for us to work actively with newspaper clubs."

"Process: **Making digital technology available at the libraries**

Description:
We want to look into how the library in a smaller municipality with a low educational level can be a resource to lessen the digital rift. We are planning to market and offer practical use of popular digital technique to our visitors in the libraries. We take part in other libraries' practical experience, and we are learning to use useful techniques and social media. All members of staff will have the same foundational skills to be able to download e-books in different formats. We reflect on our own role and what groups we might meet in our work. We also look at gender equality and accessibility perspectives. We evaluate and decide whether further training is needed in the process."

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