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Human Resource Development: a strategic approach

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Introduction

This paper aims to discuss human resource development (HRD) in the context of the learning and growth perspective of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach to strategic management in university libraries. 'Learning and Growth' perspective is one of the four perspectives of the BSC which is a strategic management and measurement tool. Many organisations, including libraries use BSC to integrate strategy and execution. This perspective focuses on the organisation's ability to continue to improve and create value for its stakeholders. The paper will explore human resource development in the context of the evolutionary process involving a shift from training to a learning orientation in libraries in order to create value for their stakeholders.

My proposition is that libraries as non-profit organisations need to create value for their institution's stakeholders. The concept of 'value creation' is used rather than 'return on investment' as libraries do not in general generate income in accounting terms and can not demonstrate return in dollars on the investment made by their parent organisations. According to Kaplan and Norton who created the BSC in the early 90s, the learning and growth perspective "describes the organisation's intangible assets and their role in strategy" (Kaplan 2004, p 54). Therefore, it is important to look at the value of intangible assets, in particular the human resource capital in order to understand their contribution to strategy in the process of exploring human resource development in libraries.

Value creation

The shift in value from tangible assets (property, plant and equipment) to intangible assets (brands, intellectual property, people) has been evident for some time in many organisations. In the case of libraries, great physical collections, number of journal titles, size of the reference collection, number of seats in reading rooms, number of microform sets etc have defined what made great libraries, or what differentiated them from others. Yet these are input measures which do not contribute to the strategic development, growth and differentiation of an organisation from its competitors. The intangible assets in libraries include services, particularly innovative services, level of integration into the organisation, human resource capability, level of success in collaboration and partnership with targeted customer communities, usage of the collections, (print and electronic) and how responsive and proactive the staff and the services are to the needs of the customers. Stakeholders of libraries which include customers (students, staff, teachers, parents, general public), the senior staff of the organisation, such as vice-chancellors, deans, principals, governing bodies, community groups and so on have different expectations regarding the value they expect the libraries should create for the

organisation. Furthermore, different stakeholder groups have different expectations which may contradict each other from time to time. The concept of value is a function of expectations which is a relative concept and changes over time.

The following table illustrates the shift in the business world in terms of what is valued, what is important, what matters (Miyake 2002, http://www.dmreview.com/article_sub.cfm?articleId=5788).

| From | To |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Production Driven | Customer Driven |
| Functional (Silo) | Process (Integrated) |
| Tangible Assets | Intangible Assets |
| Top Down | Bottom Up |
| Incremental Change | Transformational Change |
| Management | Leadership |

The challenge for libraries in recent years has been managing the shift from being internally focused, production driven towards becoming value-driven organisations. The next challenge is the creation of new measures, to replace the old input measures such as the number of books on the shelves, the number of loans and so on. What value are the libraries creating for their stakeholders? Libraries are only one of a great number of alternatives available to information consumers. They are one of the vendor stalls at the information marketplace. Libraries need to find not only new ways of adding value but also new ways of demonstrating it to their stakeholder communities.

The British Library recently used a team of economists to do an independent economic impact assessment of the BL to measure BL's direct and indirect value to the UK economy (<http://www.bl.uk/pdf/measuring.pdf>). The economists used a contingent valuation technique. The findings were quite significant. For example, for every £1 spent by the British government on the BL, £4.4 was generated in terms of value for the British public. Studies like this are very rare in our profession as they are very costly to fund and complex to organise and communicate clearly to the stakeholders. The cost-benefit and overall impact of such large studies may not justify the effort and investment for smaller libraries. However, measuring the value of intangible assets in libraries is a strategic approach to help us demonstrate the value created to our stakeholders. It would also assist us manage our assets for higher return on investment, better asset utilisation, and higher productivity leading to a bigger share of the market.

Human Resource Development

A well-prepared and motivated workforce is possibly the most important of the three intangible assets to support an organisation's value creating processes. The other two are information/technology capital and organisational capital. According to Peter Drucker 'The most valuable asset of a 20th century company was its production equipment. The most valuable asset of a 21st century institution will be its knowledge workers and their productivity' (Drucker 1999, p79). The human resource capital along with the other three intangible assets underpins all activities, ranging from management of internal processes and operations, funding, budgets and customer services.

A great deal exists in the literature about the provision of staff development and training as investment for organisations. Staff development and staff training are parts of the bigger concept of human resource development (HRD). Training is just one possible way to organise and implement learning processes in organisations and not always the most effective one. HRD encompasses the broad set of activities that improve the performance of the individual and teams, hence the organisation. Training and development have come to be viewed as *lifelong activity*, rather than the front end acquisition of qualifications. As a result, the focus of concern has shifted from what the trainer does, to what the learner requires. The ultimate aim of the training and development process has been characterised as the creation of the learning organisation, constantly reviewing its mistakes and successes and adapting its activities appropriately.

The issues of workforce demographics, desirable characteristics of the workforce and the obstacles to achieving the workforce which is well prepared, motivated and strategically ready in today's libraries, are key elements to consider when discussing human resource development.

The continuum - from formal training to the learning organisation

The nature of work has changed considerably and will change even more rapidly for two reasons:

1. The shelf-life of equipment and software systems and consequently skills needed to operate them becomes obsolete at an ever increasing rate;
2. The structures of organisations have become fluid and will be even more fluid, giving more flexibility both vertically and horizontally, eliminating the tight demarcation around job boundaries.

It is not all that long ago that only qualified librarians were expected to staff the so called reference desks. We now have combined desks in many libraries staffed not only by support staff, but also by staff working in other service areas, e.g. IT, student services and so on.

Some of the other issues/challenges confronting libraries in this context are: Do we hire for today's needs or tomorrow's? How can we hire for the future needs of the library? How do we go about providing human resource development for the needs of the organisation as a whole, not just for the specific jobs people perform? These issues are not confined to libraries. Many other organisations are also trying to deal with these challenges.

Until recently, the focus when hiring has been more on skills, e.g. for reference, cataloguing, IT and so on, rather than on attributes like strategic thinking, flexibility, adaptability and commitment to lifelong learning. There is a growing trend now to

'hire for attributes and then train for the skills' (Whitmell Associates 2004). The need to hire staff with abilities such as flexibility, adaptability, leadership potential and learning agility is increasingly recognised by library managers.

One of the predictions regarding the future of the workforce by Rita Johnston is that: 'Workers will move from one task or project to another rather than being committed to one job for many years.' (Johnston 1999, p 483). Johnson argues that 'Positive attitudes towards change, creativity and enterprise will no longer be the exclusive province of the manager but will be essential requirements of the average worker' (p.485). Individual workers will be expected to become lifelong learners and take more responsibility for their own development.

This shifting of responsibility for learning, from the organisation to the individual impacts on the role of managers and staff development officers who are increasingly expected to take on the role of mentor, resource provider and facilitator rather than that of direct trainers. If we look at the changes in teaching and learning at our universities and schools particularly the changing role of academics and teachers from being the sage to that of guide, mentor, coach or facilitator, there are many parallels to be drawn between university teaching and workplace learning.

The process of bringing in such changes to our workplaces is not straightforward as it affects the hiring process as well as staff development and training activities. To keep alive the principles of training and development, all related initiatives need to be integrated. Hiring, orientation, communication, performance reviews, and rewards and recognition are interrelated and therefore should be linked to each other and to the training and development programs.

Recruitment of staff who are flexible, strategic thinkers, multi-skilled, open to change and responsive is not a simple, straightforward process as identification of individuals with these skills is not as easy as identification of those with cataloguing, reference or IT skills. Retaining these skilled people and ensuring that once hired, they are motivated and continue to enhance the skills and attributes they had when they joined the organisation may present challenges for library managers. It requires creation of an environment within the organisation to ensure these happen, in other words a "knowledge-based organisation" equipped to deal with the constantly changing environment.

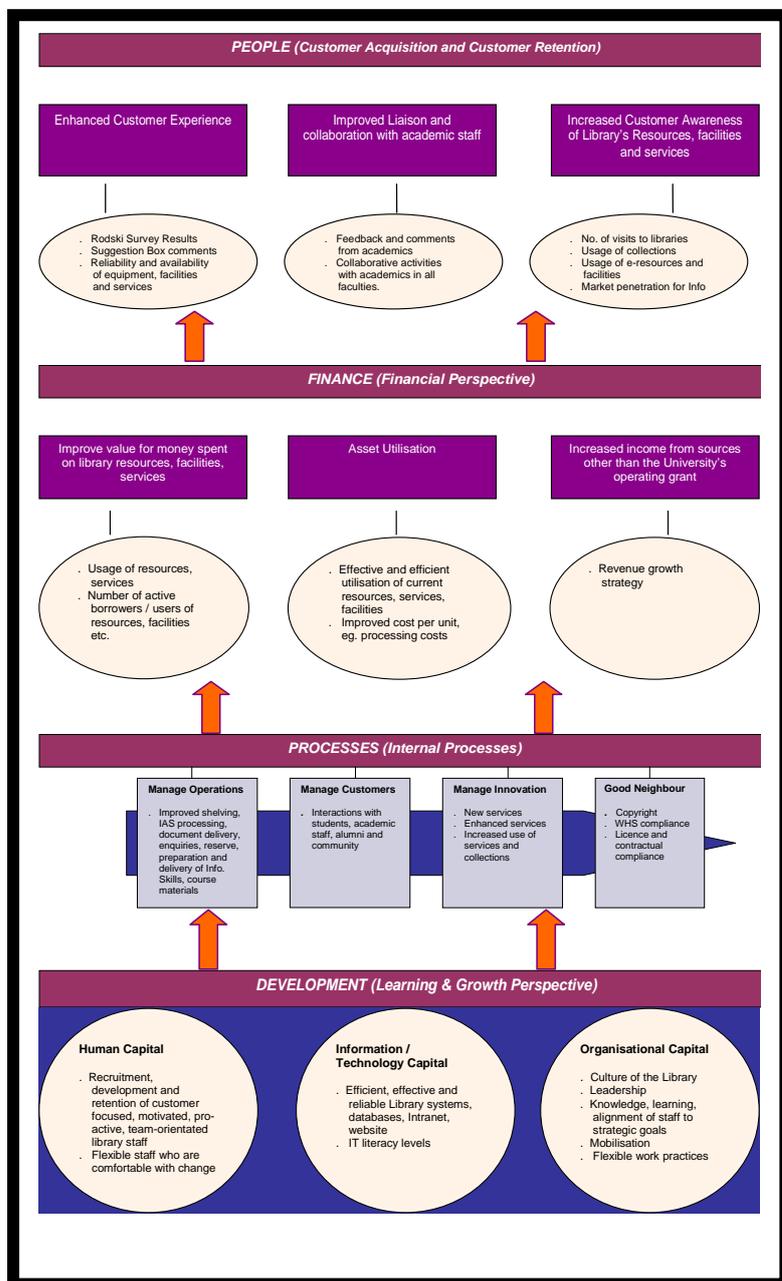
Some of our staff belong to the NetGen or Millennium (Millennials) generation who are often referred to as those born after 1982. We will be recruiting more of these people as the baby boomers move on. The recruitment, retention and growth of the 'Millennials' will bring some challenges which need to be successfully dealt with in order to create the new workforce for our organisations and to prepare succession planning. We are already witnessing in our schools and universities the challenges brought about by the skill gap amongst staff (teachers, teacher librarians, academics). The skill gap has the potential to create obstacles to the introduction of new, more effective and efficient work practices and new services dependent on using higher levels of ICT.

Bond Human Resource Development – from training to development

Bond University is Australia's first private university established in 1989. It is private, but not-for-profit and independent. Bond is a member of the AVCC (Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee) and the Library is part of various national and regional networks of libraries, such as CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians),

QULOC (Queensland University Librarians Office of Cooperation) and Libraries Australia.

Bond University uses the BSC as a strategic planning and measurement tool. The Library's BSC is one of the many sub-scorecards making up the University's scorecard. The following is a pictorial representation of the Library's BSC:



The Library's scorecard was developed in 2002 with the participation of all staff. There are regular reviewing, reporting and monitoring mechanisms in place involving all sections of the Library.

The Library has been going through a number of change processes in the last 3-4 years both in its organisational structure and its restructuring of various positions. The aim is to align the positions with the higher level objectives and goals of the organisation in order to increase its responsiveness to the external environment. The change process has not been one-off nor has it been revolutionary. The underlying

focus has always been that change is an essential ingredient of the regular activities and operations of the Library. The areas we have been focusing on to embed the change processes included:

- Identification of critical activities of strategic importance to the Library and the University
- Identification of positions to match the activities
- Creation of new descriptions for strategic positions including identification of critical skills for these positions
- Creation of generic position descriptions as much as possible
- Implementation of flexibility in the deployment of staff across functions and locations
- Recruitment, induction and training of appropriate staff
- Introduction of a new university-wide Professional Development Review system
- Library-specific training in using the Professional Development Review system for all staff as well as a separate one for supervisors
- Planning and implementation of a staff development and training program for all staff. The program covers a broad range of activities, such as public speaking, writing, project management skills as well as regular presentations by academics about their research and teaching activities.
- Creation of library-wide policies in consultation with both staff and customer groups
- Use of a university-wide “Organisational Change” process with a standard change management template
- Regular round table meetings with student groups to elicit feedback about our services and to allow all library staff to interact with them in an informal setting. These meetings have created opportunities for staff to see students’ perspectives on a variety of issues.
- Workshops on change management and customer service for all library staff
- Annual Planning Day where all staff participated. This was a follow-up to the Change management workshop

The processes and activities listed above were linked to the implementation of a number of key projects. The projects included selection and implementation of a new library management system, a new copying and printing system, a major de-selection program, a digital copyright repository coupled with an e-reserve system, refurbishment of the Law Library, reorganisation of space for facilities, services and staff offices in the Main Library and introduction of Medicine at the University. The new library system was used as a catalyst to review all processing activities and to increase the level of multi-skilling amongst staff, especially those working in the Information Access Services. Staff undertook a program of re-training to perform duties which had traditionally been person specific. Others who previously had not worked at the front service desks were trained to perform lending or information desk duties.

The physical relocation of staff to share open space office areas with others is another strategy we have used to create synergies amongst various functional areas. Co-location with those who perform duties in different but complimentary areas is helpful both for multi-skilling and for providing seamless service to the customers.

Introduction of a project management approach to most of our activities has created an understanding of achieving set objectives, timelines and naturally the outcomes as well as significance of reporting, measuring and reviewing. Project management training has been incorporated into the regular staff development programs.

The staff perception survey conducted every two years helps library management understand the cultural readiness of the staff. The issues raised in the surveys coupled with those coming out of the annual planning day assist library management with improved understanding of the gaps in the culture. They also feed into the overall human resource planning as part of the learning and growth perspective. The outcomes of both the survey and the annual planning day have been used to assess developmental needs of staff and effectiveness of existing communication strategies. We have been working with the information gathered to align and realign human resources with the existing strategy with the realisation that a certain amount of cultural variation is necessary in different units due to the nature of work undertaken.

Conclusion

Development of human resources lies at the core of the knowledge-productive organisations, like libraries and universities. The process will inevitably involve participation of all employees in developing the knowledge of the organisation.

The survival and success of organisations will increasingly depend on their ability to ensure that they are “smart” at all levels rather than only at the top. The challenge of creating and sustaining ‘smart’ organisations with ‘smart’ people at all levels is probably greater now than it has ever been. Libraries in particular are facing tough challenges as creation and communication of the value they create for their stakeholders in today’s highly competitive information market requires quite different set of attributes and skills than the current workforce and their organisational culture may possess.

Peter Drucker talks about the ‘*means of production*’ being owned by the workers themselves now. Because these means are in their heads or their fingertips. What Marx dreamt of over a century ago has become a reality, in a way no Marxist ever imagined.

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