The Effect of Library Staff Training and Development on the User Experience: A Case Study at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)

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Abstract

Library staff training and development is a crucial element in ensuring positive user experiences within libraries. A staff component consistently exposed to relevant training and development interventions should not be underestimated.

This paper will explore the processes and methods used at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Libraries (CPUT Libraries) to ensure that its staff has well planned and relevant learning opportunities and interventions.   An overview of skills development in South Africa as well as policies, guidelines and procedures that inform the process will be discussed. The paper further unpack a holistic staff development approach, namely, a three year special skills plan, a performance management process including development needs, annual training plan and implementation.

Collaboration and partnerships between various stakeholders are crucial for the success and effectiveness of the implementation process, viz, university human resources learning and development (HR L & D) department, Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), Cape Library Consortium (CALICO) and accredited training providers. It will also touch on some return on investment (ROI) strategies.

This paper will give specific examples of how these staff training interventions link to positive user experiences.

Keywords

Staff training, development, academic libraries, performance management process

Introduction

Library staff training and development is a crucial element in ensuring positive user experiences within libraries. A staff component consistently exposed to relevant training and development interventions should not be underestimated.

As stated by (Connor 2009):

> "An academic library's single most valuable resource is its workforce. Without educated, well-trained, and motivated librarians and library staff, an academic library program is ill-prepared to meet the needs of its clientele or the challenges that face institutions of higher education."

The processes and methods used at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Libraries (CPUT), to ensure that its staff has well planned and relevant learning opportunities and interventions at the time of need, will be explored. The importance of skills development strategies on a national level will be highlighted as well as unpacking a holistic staff development approach which includes a three year special skills plan, performance management process including development needs, annual training plan and implementation. A successful staff development approach should be based on formal policies, guidelines and procedures and built on good collaboration, partnerships and training providers.

Users can only benefit from well-educated staff who have a positive attitude toward continuing education and which will surely enhance the user experience.

Literature review

According to Anwar (2002) various authors have noted that the responsibility of continuing professional development be placed on "practitioners, professional associations, academic institutions, employers and government agencies". He goes further and states that "wherever the responsibility may lie, several authors have emphasized the need for a coordinated national strategy". This is the case in South Africa where a national skills development strategy was implemented when the South African Qualification Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995) was passed as law in 1995 together with other Acts. As stated by Smith (2003):

> "The HRD (human resource development) is not an option but a strategic imperative: for individuals, organisations and nations. The pace of change and development, particularly in the field of library and information services, is rapid. In these circumstances those that fail to develop risk being left behind."

As stated by Davis (2011) "libraries face a host of new challenges, among them finding ways to stay relevant in the Information Age. Libraries are required to do more with less, and the skills library professionals need continue to evolve." This problem is compounded by the closure of many library schools in South Africa over the last few years which has added extra pressure on staff development in libraries to close the information skills gap.

According to Oldroyd (1995) there are three things that are vital to the successful establishment of staff development within an organization, these are "commitment of senior management; positive perceptions among staff; and assurance that training and staff development support departmental and institutional aims."

Rapid change is therefore something that is and should be expected and librarians need to keep up to date with these changes by continuous updating and development of current and new skills. As stated by Peacock (2001):

> "Librarians must be positioned as key educators in the teaching and learning environments of the future. They require new and refined skills and conceptual understandings which will enable them to perform with an educational competence and professional confidence equal to that of their academic peers."

This has also been indicated by Piggott (1997):

> "If a professional environment is changing, so then will the skills and competencies necessary to perform successfully in that profession. The criteria for successful performance in the information profession are constantly being raised as a result of innovations in technology, communications, and learning."

Large budgets and time are spent on staff training and development and as stated by Oldroyd (1995) "senior managers are acutely aware of the investment of time and money" and goes further by saying that they "expect value for their money in the form of enhanced performance and (where appropriate) profit." In the academic library environment, "profit" could translate as good user experiences.

An overview of skills development in South Africa

As a result of the history of unequal educational development in South Africa, there has been a significant skills shortage in the country. The Government had to set certain growth targets to improve the situation in the country and to ensure that those targets are reached, the South African Qualification Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995) was passed as a law in 1995. The Act includes the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as well as the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Two further Acts were passed to regulate skills development, and they were the Skills Development Act (No.97 of 1998) and the Skills Development Levy Act (No. 9 of 1999).

Anwar's (2002) emphasis the "need for a coordinated national strategy" and this had been the case in South Africa where a national strategy has been put in place in the mid-nineties. What does this mean for organizations in South Africa? Companies and organizations must pay a skills development levy annually to the relevant SETA. This amount is 1% of the total salary bill of the organization. This levy can be claimed back from the SETA by submitting an annual Work Place Skills Plan as well as an Implementation Plan. When the organization can show how skills shortages were addressed and how their staff was developed, then the relevant SETA will pay back a certain percentage of the levy to the organization. This ensures that there are large skills development budgets available in most organizations that may only be used for skills development. These budgets are administered by the Human Resources departments in most organizations via Skills Development Facilitators (Teaching and Learning Managers). Staff development is part of an overall plan to enskill the country and not just the organisation.

Demographics of CPUT and its libraries

CPUT has six faculties:

- Applied Sciences
- Business

- Education & Social Sciences
- Engineering
- Health & Wellness Sciences
- Informatics and Design

CPUT Libraries support ten campuses, with a staff complement of 93 permanent staff members (this excludes contracts and part-time student assistants), and have a physical library at each of these campuses:

	Campus	Number of enrolled students (2011)	Number of library staff per campus	Contract staff (including a/h services)
1	Cape Town	13 489	25	1
2	Bellville	12 801	43	2
3	Wellington	2174	7	1
4	Mowbray	2099	7	1
5	Athlone	1422	1	1
6	Granger Bay	678	3	1
7	Thomas Pattullo	538	2	1
8	Tygerberg	369	2	1
9	Groote Schuur	195	2	1
10	Worcester	88	0	2
	TOTAL nr. of enrolments:	33 853	93	12

Policies, guidelines and procedures

CPUT Libraries has one person, the Training Librarian, dedicated to manage all staff training and development issues. This person has other portfolios as well, which include Information Literacy and Conference Organizing. The process of skills development at CPUT Libraries is guided by a number of policies, guidelines and procedures.

The following policies were developed on an institutional level and are managed by the Human Resources Learning & Development (HR L&D) department:

Staff Education, Training & Development Policy (internal CPUT policy)

As stated in the objectives of this policy (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2007):

"The objective of this policy is to ensure commitment to the delivery of quality services by CPUT through its employees and to maintain a competitive edge. CPUT will endeavor to ensure that all staff receives up to-date, relevant and effective education, training and development in pursuit of the highest level of competence and quality service at all times."

External Studies Policy (internal CPUT policy):

This policy applies to formal study at other Higher Education Intuitions (HEIs) and the objectives of this policy states (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2008):

"The funding of an employee's tuition fees for further study and the granting of leave for study purposes."

Induction Policy (internal CPUT policy):

Induction applies to newly appointed staff to support them in their new working environment and to ensure that they receive the relevant information to excel at the university.

The following internal guidelines and procedures were developed by CPUT Libraries to guide and inform the staff development process:

Training & Development Internal Library Guidelines

The objectives of these guidelines are the following (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2009):

"The intent of this guideline is to provide a framework to staff and their line managers and to ensure that staff receives the necessary training and development at the right time while keeping in mind the demands of day to day operations. The objectives of training and development of staff within the library are to provide staff with the necessary skills to improve work performance and enable staff to adapt to constant changes while developing personally. Staff development needs should mainly derive from the objectives of the strategic plans of the library and institution as a whole."

The responsibility of establishing training needs is threefold. The *Line Manager*, the *Staff Member* and the *Training Librarian* all have roles to play.

Figure 1: CPUT Libraries internal staff training & development relationship model

- Line Managers

Line Managers work closely with their staff and are therefore in the best position to identify any needed training interventions. Performance contracts are developed every year at the beginning of the year between the line manager and their employees. Each performance contract has a development needs section where staff and their Line Managers should indicate any training and development needs/gaps. These sections are used by the Training Librarian to plan the training interventions for the year. It is therefore crucial that these sections are completed thoroughly.

- Staff Member

Training and development is a primary personal work responsibility of every staff member. If a staff member identifies an area for further development, the staff member should discuss this need with his/her Line Manager as well as with the Training Librarian. Agreed needs should then be included in the performance contracts.

- Training Librarian

The Training Librarian will initiate certain training initiatives based on requests directly linked to the strategic plan of the library and CPUT as a whole, requests related to the job and based on the services offered by CPUT Libraries as well as any other new and continuing training requirements of library staff.

Conference Attendance Internal Library Procedure

This procedure should be followed when a staff member would like to attend a conference. The criteria to be used for selecting staff members for attendance include (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2009):

- "Staff members delivering a paper/poster;
- Staff members on the organizing committees or any other relevant committees;
- Library Association of South Africa (LIASA) membership is required for LIASA conferences;
- Relevance of topic of the conference with regards to the staff member's portfolio;
- Budget requirements."

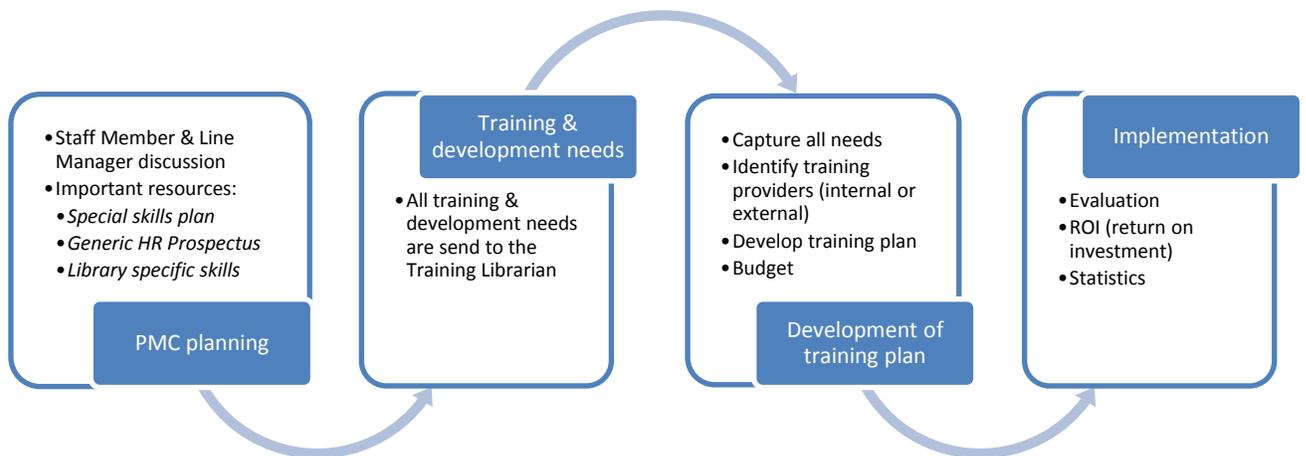**Development process of CPUT Libraries training and development plan**

Figure 2: Development process of the libraries training and development plan

At the beginning of every year all Line Managers at CPUT Libraries have performance management planning meetings with their staff. During this first meeting the Line Manager and staff member identify any training and developmental needs. Further training needs might also be identified

during the year and there are a few resources that are available to the staff to assist them with this planning and are as follows:

Special Skills Plan of CPUT Libraries

During 2010 a special skills plan was developed within CPUT Libraries. The Executive Management of CPUT Libraries and the Training Librarian had the opportunity to identify special skills that were deemed crucial and necessary for the library to operate optimally and to keep up with global trends and movements. This special skills document is one of the resources used by line managers during the performance management planning meetings. These skills were grouped into the following areas:

Management and Leadership
Information Technology (IT) and Digitization
Information Services
Technical services and E-resources
Quality Assurance
Library Research
Training & Development
Support Services

Generic Learning and Development Prospectus

The second resource that is available to library staff is a generic learning and development prospectus from the HR L&D department. This department has partnered with CPUT Libraries and strong working relationships have been developed over the years. The type of training interventions offered here is mostly focussed around;

Induction, MS Office suite, Blackboard, Financial Management, Tax Education, Emotional Intelligence, ITS Interface, Recruitment, Performance Management, Personal Money Management, Project Management, Diversity Management, Retirement Seminar, Health and Safety, etc.

Library Specific Training Needs

Besides the two resources mentioned previously, there are also library specific training needs that are not necessarily covered in those resources. These skills could range from implementing new library specific systems and software, introducing new products to our library staff and many more.

Once the performance management contract planning, including the identification of the development needs, has been finalized, these needs are forwarded to the Training Librarian. The Training Librarian develops the training plan for the year, selects appropriate training providers, arranges and monitors attendance and ensures implementation of the plan. The role of the Training Librarian for staff development is as follows:

- Communicate process and relevant documentation to library staff.
- Compile and implement the annual training plan.
- Identify suitable training providers and facilitators.
- Ensure that all nomination forms for courses on the "Generic Learning and Development prospectus" reach the HR L&D department.
- Organize payment of training providers and facilitators.
- Evaluation and assessment.
- Identify ROI (return on investment) strategies.

- Record-keeping and statistics.

In the experience of the Training Librarian an area of concern that should be highlighted is the lack of suitable training providers in some library specific skills and/or training providers that could facilitate the learning of certain skills within the context of the library environment.

Collaboration and partnerships

At CPUT Libraries we have formed strong partnerships during the years with various stakeholders, and these collaborations are crucial for the success and effectiveness of the training and development process. Some of these partnerships are highlighted:

The *HR Learning & Development Department* (HR L&D) and the Training Librarian of CPUT Libraries work closely together and the relationship is mutually beneficial to both parties. This department ring fences a budget for skills development on an annual basis for the CPUT Libraries. All external training providers are paid from that budget. The Training Librarian is also a member on the Skills Development Committee which is managed by the HR L&D department and deals with applications from staff to study at other higher education institutions to complete formal academic qualifications. CPUT funds these studies and pays between 60% – 100% of the course fees depending on the level of the qualification. CPUT Libraries also supports this department by making available its computer training rooms for their training prospectus courses to CPUT staff in general.

The *Cape Higher Education Consortium* (CHEC) represents the four higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Western Cape. They are:

- Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)
- Stellenbosch University (US)
- University of Cape Town (UCT)
- University of the Western Cape (UWC)

The following is part of CHEC's vision and involvement in the region:

"CHEC incorporates several long-standing projects, communities of practice and a management development programme. It tackles many other issues that affect all of its members, as they arise" (Cape Higher Education Consortium, 2010).

Many of our library staff members have attended the management development programme offered by CHEC. The programme consists of eight modules and is facilitated by various specialist staff members from the four HEIs in the Western Cape.

The *Cape Library Consortium* (CALICO) is the collaborative library project of CHEC. CALICO's vision "is to be a world-class library consortium, using leading edge approaches to meet the information needs of users within individual libraries and across the consortium" (Cape Library Consortium, 2012). CALICO provides expertise in the library system ALEPH and ARC reporting and has facilitated numerous training interventions at CPUT Libraries to its staff.

The *Library Information Association of South Africa* (LIASA), which is the professional library association in the country and many of our staff members have membership with LIASA. LIASA offers various workshops, seminars, etc. during the year as well as an annual LIASA conference. This provides a platform for further skills development. We avail our venues at CPUT Libraries for LIASA activities and training.

Impact on user experience and return on investment strategies

To illustrate how a staff component consistently exposed to relevant training and development interventions would have an impact on the user experience, here are some examples:

Over the last few years much funding has been invested in the Faculty and Branch Librarians involved with Information Literacy training. Most of them have completed an accredited program called the "Train the Trainer" or "Education Training and Development Practitioner (ETDP)". Information Literacy teaching is a core function of an academic library. We teach thousands of students annually on how to find, use and evaluate information. As stated by Lockhart (2011):

> "The faculty and branch librarians' role in terms of quality teaching and assessment brings this process full circle and that is why most of our faculty and branch librarian's have done accredited "train the trainer" programs to ensure a certain level of teaching standards".

This has a direct impact on the user experience as thousands of students receive quality teaching, based on international information literacy standards (ALA and CAUL), from the librarians. Peacock (2001) states that "the new information literacy model represents a more sophisticated conceptualisation of the librarian's role and relationship to the client".

Once a year we organise a staff development day for all the CPUT libraries staff. This day is normally focussed on a specific theme for the year. During 2010 the theme was around client services. As an academic library we offer orientation to large groups of students during the year. This entails showing large groups of students around the library, pointing out the different service points and services we offer, and provide information to the students about our printed and electronic collection.   Due to this function we felt that we wanted our staff to see how other organisations handle large groups and provide information. The staff was taken on a development intervention and visited Eskom's (South Africa's electricity generating company) information centre where they inform the community about generating electricity. The staff found it very useful to see how Eskom dealt with large groups and how they shared information. The staff was then taken to a large shopping mall where they could do their regular shopping at three shops of their choice and had to complete a short client service questionnaire about the shops they visited. They had to reflect on the service they received, how it made them feel, was it good or bad. The questionnaire had the following questions and the staff had to indicate a rating of 1 to 4 where 1 was "Extremely satisfied" and 4 was "Extremely dissatisfied":

- How would you rate the physical layout and appearance of the shop?
- Was the product/service you required available?
- How would you rate the service you received from the shop assistant? Please explain in more detail.
- How did this make you feel?
- Considering your experience today, what elements do you think is crucial for excellent client services at CPUT Libraries?

We wanted staff to get real experiences around client services, reflect on the experience and implement what they have learned back at work within the library environment to enhance the user experience across all CPUT Libraries.

Large budgets are spent globally on training and development initiatives annually and the question has often been asked 'What is our return on investment (ROI)?' We were also asking ourselves that question and started to implement some strategies to see a ROI. One of those was to use the librarians who did the accredited "Train the Trainer" program and who now have the needed

expertise to facilitate training interventions in the library for our library staff.   Another way of ensuring ROI is when staff attends conferences, workshops and seminars. Normally staff has to submit a report two weeks after the event, to give feedback and to highlight important trends and developments. This report is circulated to all library staff as an information sharing initiative. At other times we ask that instead of a report staff members should submit two ideas that they think we could implement at CPUT Libraries. This ensures that new ideas are being shared on a regular basis and this could lead to new developments within the Libraries, and is therefore one of the ways to make sure that we keep up with global trends and foster innovation, which can also lead to improvements in user services.

CPUT Libraries conduct user surveys annually to determine the satisfaction of our users. From these surveys we can determine the level of satisfaction as well as the areas that need further attention. This is another way that training gaps have been identified which could be included in our training plan.

Conclusion

A national skills development strategy is critical to ensure that skills development is taken seriously in organizations within a country and that enough funding is allocated to address the national skills shortages as well as other important skills. This filters through to organizational level and further to departmental level within organizations, and it is an important factor as to why CPUT Libraries have sufficient access to funding for continuous skills development. A structured annual training plan, based on institutional and departmental strategic objectives, is imperative for successful implementation, together with good collaboration and partnerships. It is important to ensure that the needs of users are regularly assessed and that staff has the necessary skills to assist with and enhance the user experience.

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Acknowledgements