Capacity Building for Librarians during the Stage of Establishing a Modern Open Access Library at Library and Information Network Center (LINC), Hanoi University of Technology (HUT), Vietnam

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Abstract

Library and Information Network Center (LINC), Hanoi University of Technology (HUT) are in the transition from a traditional library model to a modern open access library. Capacity building for librarians becomes a key issue for this library to adapt new changes. However, librarians encounter difficulties in identifying core competencies needed to work effectively in a new environment. This study focuses on investigating LINC to define problems relating to human resource development. The application of literature review on previous studies aims at ascertaining core competencies. A particular model study for staff development at University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library, America is employed in an effort to help LINC gain a useful lesson-learned. Besides, analysis of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and STEP (Social, Technological, Economic and Political impact) models as well as change management theory are also introduced to assist library staff in coping with changes. Two major research findings have been presented in this research. A list of seven core competencies can be considered as necessary knowledge and skills during this transition stage for staff at LINC. Additionally, in an attempt to help LINC staff actively get involved in advancing needed capabilities, the study model, SWOT, STEP, and change management are integrated in this paper as useful tools. This research is expected to be a theoretical model for other academic libraries to find out core competencies for librarians in Vietnam.

Keywords: Capacity building; Competence development; Open access library; Staff development; Change management; Vietnam

1. Overview of LINC

The library at Hanoi University of Technology (HUT) was established in 1956. Initially, this library had only two staff and a number of five thousand books. In 2003, the Library and HUT Network Center were united to become a Library and Information Network Center (LINC). Now, LINC possesses a qualified staff team including one at doctorate level, twelve masters and 57 bachelors (42 librarians and 28 information technology staff). In June 2006, the center was relocated to a new, modern and well-equipped building. Up to now, library resources have increased to approximately 60.000 items however electronic resources are limited in number. About 2000 users access the library everyday.

2. Difficulties relating to staff competencies in this initial stage at LINC:

(a) Abilities Required to Implement an Intensive IL Training Programme

Like many other academic libraries in Vietnam, LINC is at a very initial stage of implementing information literacy (IL) programme. This library faces a shortage of competent staff who need equipping with comprehensive knowledge and practical

experiences to launch effective information literacy training activities for library users. At present, only three librarians take responsibility to implement library programmes for approximately 30.000 students. What students and academic staff can benefit from library training programme is brief introductions to library resources, policies and regulations. Meanwhile, students expect to master adequate skills to identify, locate and evaluate information. As Joseph states "The ultimate goal of any library service is to teach information literacy to clients with the goal of assisting clients to identify and select relevant information using appropriate strategies" (Joseph, 2003 p. 221). Furthermore, those librarians do not have a continuous and frequent training throughout student's life, especially for 3rd and 4th year students who need more advanced information searching skills for their research.

As implementing information literacy programme, a consistent collaboration between library and faculties are not attached into great importance. The concepts of resource-based learning and lifelong learning seem to be unfamiliar to those librarians in the higher education environment. LINC is likely to be one of the cases that Hickok (2006) has mentioned in his investigation in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese librarians admitted that they were unable to provide customers with advanced information searching skills. Librarians working at the reference desk usually deal with very simple inquiries. For instance, 90% of library user's requests are expressed by the question "Do you have this book?" and only 10% of them are advanced search questions.

(b) Knowledge of Foreign Languages
Insufficient ability of foreign languages, especially English, is another barrier for staff. This downside limits their opportunities to update information for professional development because English is not their first language. Besides, librarians encounter difficulties in exploring and disseminating information in English on the Internet to the clients. Meanwhile, information resources in Vietnamese at LINC hardly meet user's demanding. Thus an improvement of foreign languages is a key factor for those librarians to exploit a huge number of academic sources on the Internet.

(c) Library Resource Understanding
Not only this aspect is an essential requirement for the library resource management, but it does effect on the quality of library and information services. As information providers, a few librarians acquire a comprehensive understanding of what information resources that LINC has. Inadequate library training and this drawback consequently result in ineffective reference services providing to students. As being asked about the number of materials in reading rooms, almost all librarians provide unsure responses.

(d) Work Attitude
In this transition process, a proactive work attitude should be inspired to all staff members at LINC. Prior to this stage, LINC was a traditional library where librarians worked rather like custodians. The majority of library staff demonstrated a passive working style since their roles mainly involved in circulating materials manually. However, this perception should be revised because the role of librarians has been changed. Librarians are encouraged to take more active roles of advising information literacy skills required for an effective use of an open access library. Additionally, an open-tacked library should be perceived as an expanded classroom where library staff are aware of a user-oriented working style. Again, Hickok's findings point out similarities when he expresses, "From student interviews, the common perception of librarians is that of just workers who check out books or look up a title...not information experts/research consultants" (Hickok, 2006).

(e) Knowledge Of Research Methodology

HUT students will benefit more from library services if librarians have knowledge of research methodology. Apart from the role of information workers, there is a need to equip those people with knowledge and practical experiences in doing research. This cognition both assists them in disseminating relevant information and probably giving useful consultants to the research process of students, teachers and other scholars. In fact, many librarians reveal that they do not have much knowledge of methodology and some others suppose not to be in charge of this duty.

(f) Teamwork Skills

A shortage of teambuilding knowledge among library staff affects their daily work performance. Few of them realize that teamwork skills play an important role in improving effectiveness and flexibility in workplaces. This method often helps librarians to generate more benefits and advantages than individuals acting alone. And, working in team allows a group of people to handle large and complex projects. Stueart and Moran explains, "A managerial innovation that is becoming more common in many types of organizations, including libraries, is the use of teams" (Stueart & Moran, 2002 p. 339). More specifically, to successfully motivate all team members proactively involve in library development, a clear team goal must be set. As a result, each person will be aware of his or her role in team. However, LINC's mission statement, in fact, has not been stated.

(g) Perception of Change Management

For staff at LINC, change management is a really new concept. Thus, it is necessary for them to be knowledgeable about change management, which is vital and inevitable (Gallacher, 1999). In other words, it is to raise awareness among those people to actively determine internal and external forces lead to changes and how to respond those changes accordingly (Feret and Marcinek, 1999 and Daft, 1997). It is time librarians need to improve their expertise and change old working habits to adapt to new circumstances because status-quo attitudes can no longer be maintained. Like Stueart and Moran (2002) predict managing change will be an important characteristic of knowledge-based organizations and information centre. If we passively perceive change, we will be negatively overwhelmed by its impacts (Gates, 1999). The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA, 2006) also concludes that librarians' core competencies comprise knowledge of the broad context where information is derived, organized, spread and used. Information professionals should demonstrate the ability to anticipate the future direction as well as incorporate social and cultural goals and values to the library and information services. In the meantime, librarians certainly tend to resist to changes and this resistance may simply be made by the way they receive and react to changes. Particularly in this situation, groups of status-quo individuals seem to be comfortable as working together and satisfied with the way things are. Another, staff are not well informed about change occurred in their organization so they receive it passively.

3. Study Model

This part reviews the case of University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library where McNeil and Giesecke conducted a case study research to investigate staff's capabilities in 2001. The main purpose is to focus LINC staff's attention on how the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library perceived and solved the problems relating to staff development.

(a) Overview of University of Nebraska-Lincoln Library

At this open access library, librarians were aware of a need to adapt to new change. They were encouraged to actively take part in the progress of developing strategic plans for library. Library administrators frequently reviewed the library's mission statement, goals

and objectives to ensure librarians understand the role and responsibilities of the Nebraska-Lincoln University library to clients. And, "Quality of library and information services has been considerably improved as customer services have been emphasized" (McNeil and Gieseke, 2001 p. 49). However, staff met similar problems like their colleagues at LINC as well.

(b) Problems facing the Nebraska-Lincoln University Library in terms of Competence Development for Library Staff

Librarians at Nebraska-Lincoln University Library confronted with challenges to identify core competencies to provide more effective library and information services to customers. Library managers and staff had not approached to a mutual understanding towards strategies coping with changes. In fact, this shortage of "common language" stemmed from library staff's unclear understanding about mission statement, goals and objectives. Additionally, the Nebraska-Lincoln University Library had not received frequent and continuous professional training programmes for both new and experienced staff. Those reasons made negative impacts on services at the Nebraska-Lincoln University Library.

(c) Steps to improve staff's competencies at Nebraska-Lincoln University Library

Step 1: Identification of core competencies

An investigation was conducted at Nebraska-Lincoln University library and McNeil and Gieseke have finalized following core competencies needed for library staff:

- "Analytical skills/problem solving/decision making,
- communication skills,
- creativity/innovation,
- expertise and technical knowledge,
- flexibility/adaptability,
- interpersonal/group skills,
- leadership,
- organizational understanding and global thinking,
- ownership/ accountability/ dependability,
- planning and organizational skills,
- resource management,
- service attitude/ user satisfaction" (McNeil and Gieseke, 2001)

These findings result from interviews and discussions with staff at Nebraska-Lincoln University library. McNeil and Gieseke also use studies of Robbins and Licona (1994), Woodswoth and Lester (1991), Woodswoth and Westermann (1995) to finalize those core competencies. Specifically, of all core competencies listed by McNeil and Gieseke, eight of them are similar to Woodswoth and Lester (1991) and twelve matches to Woodswoth and Westermann (1995). Noticeably, a large number of library staff at the Nebraska-Lincoln University found these above competencies necessary to them.

Step 2: Implementation

The above core competencies were utilized as a base for the process of recruitment, training and evaluation. During the recruiting process, Nebraska-Lincoln University Library used the list of core competencies as criteria to select capable candidates for the right positions. To get a job at Lincoln University Library, applicants must demonstrate suitable skills, knowledge and attitudes. In training, core competencies were integrated into the training programmes for staff. The purpose of training programmes was to

improve library staff's capabilities up to new requirements so as to adapt to current and future working environment. Nebraska-Lincoln University Library organized different and flexible types of training models such as formal training programmes, workshops on professional development, self-learning activities, and group discussions to develop practical skills or experiences to deal with change. This library especially emphasized on the need for continuous training activities continuously for library staff. Evaluation was the final stage, in which each staff was required to complete an appraisal of work performance to know how improvement had been made.

(d) Implications to LINC

In this model, especially the process of core competence identification and implementation, figures out a practical solution that LINC can utilize to advance necessary knowledge and skills for librarians. More importantly, as adopting this model to LINC, staff will be more actively getting involved in this renovated process and to formulate vision for library development in the future. When reviewing above competencies presented by McNeil and Gieseke, LINC leaderships may integrate them into the human resource development policy. It is important to note that in this McNeil and Gieseke's research, Library administrators at Nebraska-Lincoln University Library admitted that they felt easier to work in the transition of that renewal phrase. Librarians actually realized a need to adapt to change and move forward to meet their customer's needs and expectations. In short, this study model is beneficial to LINC in this phrase.

4. STEP, SWOT, Change Management Theory

Following up recommendations expressed by Daft (1997), Gallacher (1999) and Stueart and Moran (2002), an analysis of SWOT, STEP and change management theory are included in this research to construct useful tools for LINC staff to examine types of change might occur in their workplace. As a consequence, librarians are able to review core competencies needed to improve their work performance. The researcher attempts to explain what SWOT, STEP analysis and change management theory are and then reflect them to LINC context.

(a) SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis (Figure 1) basically helps us to understand the interaction between internal and external impacts on an organization. In other words, librarians analyze the inner and outside effects on their library so as to update changes. They need to realize potentials as well as barriers occurred in their library then be able to reinforce strengths, seize opportunities, cope with threats, and lessen weaknesses.

Internal factors / External factors	Internal strengths (S)	Internal weaknesses (W)
External Opportunities (O)	S – O Strategy: Maxi-Maxi Utilize one's strengths to capitalize on external opportunities	W – O Strategy: Mini – Maxi Develop one's weaknesses to be able to capitalize on external opportunities
External threats (T)	S – T strategy: Maxi – Mini Use one's strengths to cope with external threats	W – T Strategy: Mini – Maxi Develop one's weaknesses to either defend from or avoid external threats

Figure 1: SWOT matrix (Emblemsvag and Kjolstad 2002, p. 845)

To achieve a more clear understanding of the SWOT analysis, a different illustration is showed in the Figure 2. The initiation of SWOT analysis will be a premise for assessing organizational capacity and staffs' competencies. Managers use this method to raise awareness among staff of a need for change.
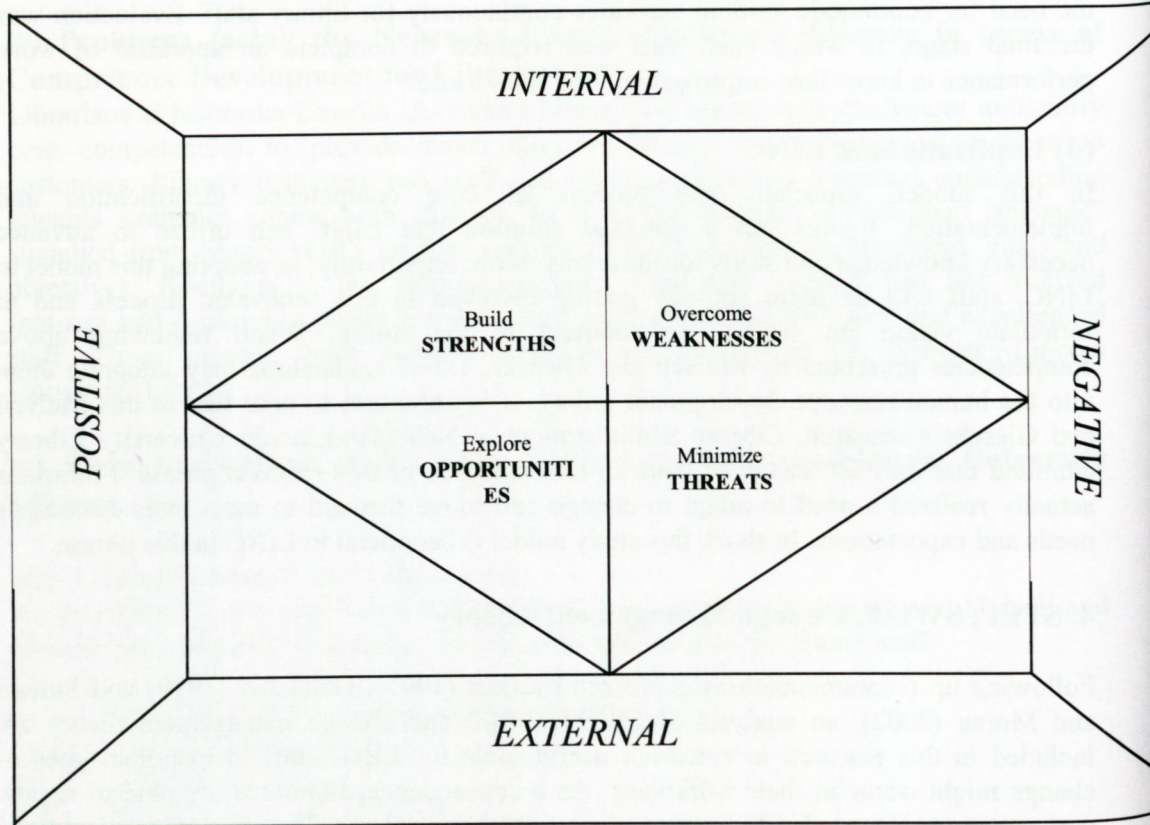

Figure 2: SWOT analysis (Stueart & Moran, 2002 p.101)

(b) STEP Analysis

STEP analysis can be used to comprehensively examine the external environment of an organization (Stueart and Moran, 2002). Accordingly, it is time for information professionals to pay attention to social trends, the development of technology, economy and politic (Gallacher, 1999). Obviously, these factors usually make impacts on shaping mission for library operation.

As analyzing *social trend*, librarians have to think about a broader context where they are working in such as parent organizations and other competitors (Gallacher, 1999). In this competitive period, the concept of customer-driven services becomes more and more important. A university and its library, therefore, have to strongly advance strengths and advantages to attract students. For example, HUT is one of the most reputable universities in Vietnam. More students will join HUT if LINC offers more favorable library and information services to ensure a high quality of education.

Regarding to the technological aspect, Stueart and Moran (2002, p. 114) ascertain that, "*Technology* is the major force in changing library and information services today". Technological development has created a great deal of new information products and shortens information life's span. Librarians understand that the LINC library will probably not only provide users with printed materials. Instead of old information services, library users will have opportunities to access various sources of electronic and academic resources sharing with library networks locally and globally. As Hung the Director of National Centre for Scientific and Technological Information and

Documentation (Hung, 2003) affirms, "Digital library development has been actually considered as a major trend of library and information services development in Vietnam".

Economic development is one of the issues effecting libraries remarkably (Daft, 1997). Specifically, budgets allocating to education sector often makes direct and indirect effects on library and information services (Stueart and Moran, 2002 and Gallacher, 1999). In Vietnam, it is widely understood that the government has pay full attention to the development of the library and information filed. The number of modern electronic libraries has significantly increased in the last few years. And, LINC is a typical library where a large amount of money has been spent on building up a good library infrastructure.

Concerning to *political trend* makes librarians become more engaged in library development. Likewise, Gallacher reveals "when librarians are environmentally and politically aware, the library and individuals working in it can offer the right ideas, at the right time, to the right people, in the right way" Gallacher (1999, p. 24).

In short, a clear clarification of social, technological, economical and political impacts on an organization assists those librarians in getting insight into organizational facts and foresees library development direction in the future. It is also helpful for the staff to be actively involved in formulating library policies and planning. There should have a flexible integration of STEP and SWOT analysis due to their consistent relations.

(c) Change Management Theory

Based on SWOT and STEP analysis, theory of change implementation is utilized to help LINC rapidly revamp to a modern library. In other words, if SWOT and STEP analysis point out the need to change, this theoretical model is to implement it successfully. The process of change implementation is illustrated in the Figure 3.

According to Stueart & Moran (2002) implementing change can be divided into three main stages. As can be seen from Figure 3, the identification of the need to change initially originates from inside reality and outside environment of the organization. Then people realize the necessities to restructure the organization to fit with new contexts. The final stage is to work out solutions to deal with change. This pattern can be used for both individual and organizational purposes. Stueart and Moran suggest, "There must be a plan for change, a roadmap of getting from where the organization is now to where it wants to be" (Stueart and Moran, 2002 p. 17) So librarians are, somehow, aware of the importance of the change implementation process to the library development.

5. Conclusion

LINC is facing both challenges and opportunities during the transforming stage to a modern library. Capacity building becomes a vital issue to help LINC to keep up with rapid development of information exploitation and a huge demand of information usage. However, this library is still in shortage of competent staff who possess intensive knowledge and practical experiences on building up, operating, as well as leading and managing changes in a modern library. This research has indicated seven areas of knowledge and skills that staff at LINC should consider as essential abilities. The study model and other theoretical tools significantly assist library staff in investigating their library and its surroundings impacts to keep up with changes and to formulate professional vision for LINC. As Gallacher suggests, "It is very important for all librarians to be continuously sensitive to their surrounding, use relevant tools and techniques to inform themselves of changes in the environment, to understand the significance of these changes for their organizations" (Gallacher, 1999 p. 5)
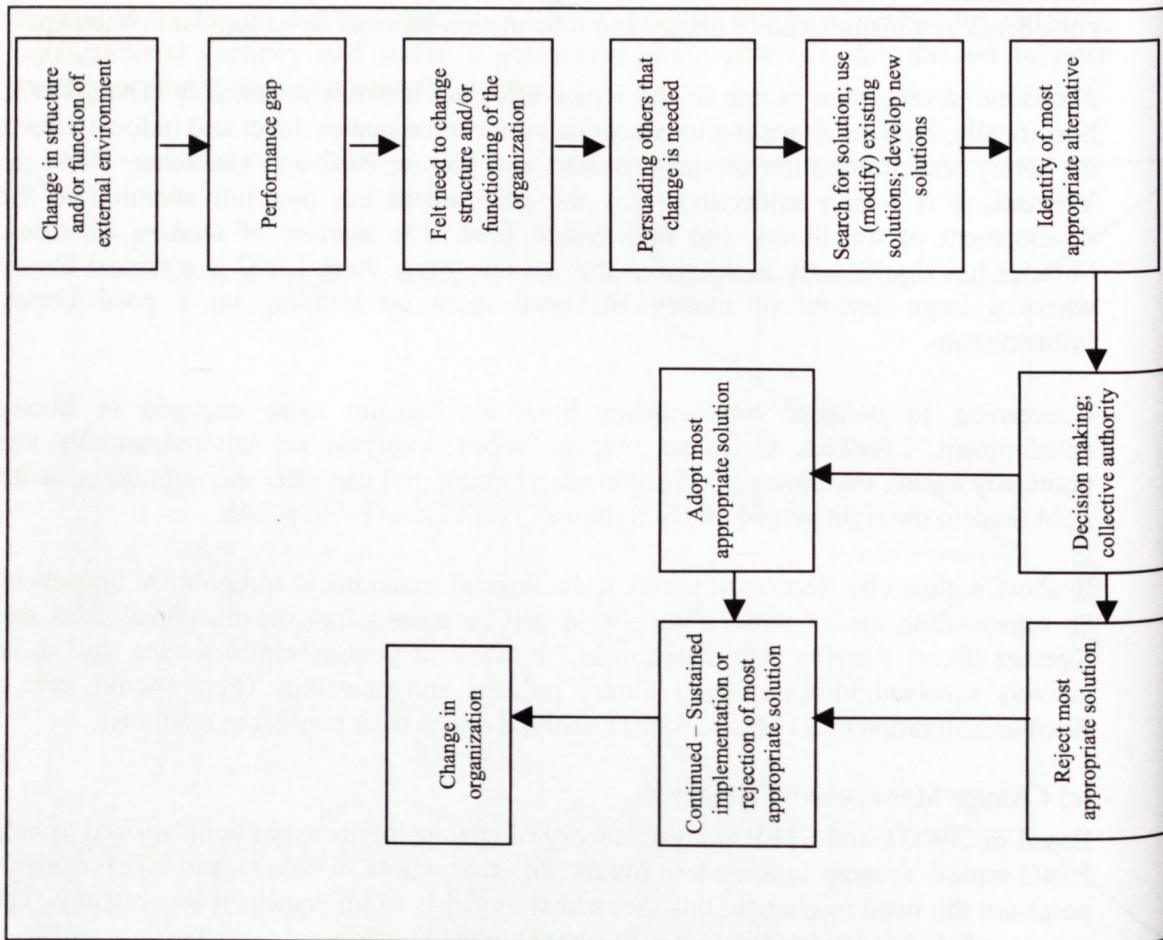
Figure 3: The Process of Change in Organization (Stueart & Moran 2002, p.17)

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