

## **Leadership and management in Estonian academic libraries: leaders' role and competencies.**

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**Abstract:** There is a lot of research about academic library leadership. This research includes different sides of leaders' activities, functions and characteristics. In most studies top leaders are examined. Only few studies have been done about middle managers. This study was designed to include both top and middle level leaders. The goal is to investigate the views and understanding of different level leaders on their own and the other level leaders' activities and competencies, needed for accomplishing the role of the leader. The presumption of the study is that leaders of all levels constitute a team, and therefore need distinct understanding of the role of other team members in the library leadership process. The goal is to investigate different levels leaders' views and understanding of their own and the other level leaders' activities and competencies, needed for accomplishing the leader's role. The presumption of the study is that leaders of all levels constitute a team, and therefore need distinct understanding of other team member's role in the library leadership and management process. The additional research issue is the education of leaders. Is it important, that the academic library leader has a degree in library and information sciences or there is no need for professional educational? The research strategy used in this study is the grounded theory. The grounded theory is seldom used in academic library leadership studies. The grounded theory is a qualitative method of social research. It gives an opportunity to analyse and understand deeper the meaning that participants give to the role and competence of academic library leaders. Leaders at different levels have the role what includes specific competencies and all these roles and competencies have their purpose and place in the leadership and management process.

The use of Grounded Theory in the pilot study of the research is described.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Management, Academic libraries, Estonia, Grounded theory

## **1. Introduction**

Science moves more and more into the digital form – the increasing amount of scientific information sources is in the internet, researchers create and develop digital networks. The internet offers opportunity for online learning and teaching. New generation of scientists and students become more digitally literate. They have different expectations to the academic libraries. Academic libraries face a lot of challenges, when they want to be at least one step forward of their users. It means that academic libraries must become the organizations that are able to offer all digital services which their users expect. They must support researchers and students not only to access to the scientific sources, but also to participate in academic networks and learning environments.

Changing scientific and learning information environment and users' expectations force libraries to make rapid changes. An organization that is undergoing transformation needs its leaders to understand their challenges, opportunities and responsibilities. Academic library leaders need knowledge and skills to manage change and to maintain the position of the library in the changing information world. It is increasingly important that academic library leaders understand their role in the organization – activities and competencies, needed for accomplishing the role of the leader. Moreover, leaders must understand not only their own role but also the role of other level leaders. Leaders at all levels constitute a team, and therefore need distinct understanding of other team member's role in the library leadership and management process.

## **2. Background**

The changing information world forces academic libraries to make rapid changes. Not long time ago, the libraries were recognized for their collections and reading rooms. The raising amount of digital information in current academic libraries forces them to develop new environments and services for their users. Changing libraries need leaders who are able to get libraries through transition process, leaders who have visions and guide others to achieve these visions. Current and future academic library leaders need leadership skills and knowledge. On the other hand, management activities prepare the infrastructure for the transition of libraries (Hernon, 2010). Hernon (ibid.) uses the term „managerial leadership“ to describe the process where people influence others in the group, and using both – leadership and management competencies.

There is a lot of research about academic library leadership. This research includes different sides of leaders' activities, functions and characteristics. In most studies top leaders are examined. Only few studies have been done about middle managers (Cawthorne, 2010; Rooney, 2010; Chang & Bright, 2011). However, involvement of the middle managers in the leading process is inevitable and therefore we need more knowledge about the role of middle managers in the organization and their leadership and management abilities. The presumption of current study is that both top and middle level managers are needed to work as a team. Therefore leaders need to have an overall picture of the roles of team members. Leaders of different levels' have the role that includes specific competencies and all these roles and competencies have their

purpose and place in the leadership and management process. Misunderstandings and conflicts could be avoided if every leader as a group member has an imagination of the role of other leaders in the organization.

To give an overview of the research areas in academic library leadership, the author lists here some of them, which were conducted in the beginning of 21st century and connected with the research area of this study. Researches were conducted on organisational studies, including information and communication processes (Paul, 2000; Winston, 2001; Holloway, 2004; Chalmers, Liedtka & Bednar, 2006; Russo Martin, 2006; Stenson, 2006; Gazan, 2007; Pan & Howard, 2011). There are also studies on emotional intelligence (Kreitz, 2009). The large area with different approaches constitutes investigations of competencies of academic library leaders, including competencies needed by future academic library leaders (Winston & Dunkley, 2002; Williams II & Winston, 2003; Young, Herson, Powell, 2004; Young, Herson, & Powell, 2006; al Ansari & al Khadher, 2011; Goulding, Walton & Stephens, 2012; Wilkins Jordan, 2012; Woolls & Zimmermann, 2012). There are also studies on professional development and education of library leaders (Roberts & Black, 2008; Mort Feldmann, Level & Liu, 2013; Jantti & Greenhalgh, 2012).

Different methodologies and methods have been used in the above mentioned research. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are represented in the leadership research. Winston (2001), Winston & Dunkley (2002) and Williams & Winston (2003) used statistical method. Winston (2001) analysed statistically data of *US News and World Report* to determine an appropriate measure of organizational success. Winston & Dunkley (2002) analyzed job announcements for the identification of leadership competencies in the context of the knowledge and skills associated with development and fundraising. Williams & Winston (2003) analysed the original research published in frequently cited library and information science journals to consider the extent to which academic librarians and administrators conduct and publish original research.

Young, Herson and Powell (2004 and 2006) and Wilkins Jordan (2012) used Delphi methodology in their research. Young, Herson and Powell (2004) explores competencies of future leaders in academic and public libraries and the study of Young, Herson and Powell (2006) the perceptions of Gen-X librarians about the attributes essential for academic library leaders. Wilkins Jordan (2012) developed a set of competencies of library leaders.

Al Ansari & al Khadher (2011) used an expert evaluation and a survey method to create a competency model that delineates an explicit set of competencies viewed as necessary for success in the leading position. Questionnaires were analyzed statistically. The survey method was used in several leadership studies. Goulding, Walton & Stephens (2012) studied the political and strategic skills needed by library leaders in the current library environment. Woolls & Zimmermann (2012) conducted a survey to determine the perceptions of students in US schools of library and information science towards leadership.

Some studies of middle managers used also the survey method. Cawthorne's (2010) study explored how middle managers perceive their agreement, participation and recognition of shared leadership. Rooney's (2010) study

examined the experience of management, preparation, and training possessed by middle managers in academic libraries.

Chang & Bright (2011) used a case study to identify the causes of the changes that impact middle managers in academic libraries. A case study was used also by Russo Martin (2006) who studied team effectiveness in the academic medical library settings; Roberts & Black (2008) developed a tailored approach to personal and professional development; Mort Feldmann, Level & Liu (2013) studied leadership training and development opportunities within the libraries; Jantti & Greenhalgh (2012) established an integrated approach to leadership competency development; Pan & Howard, (2011) demonstrated the efficacy of collaborative evidence based information practice (EBIP) as an organizational effectiveness model; Gazan (2007) focused on the concept of connection work; Chalmers, Liedtka & Bednar (2006) conducted an internal communication audit during a period of organizational change; Stenson (2006) studied value of information and organisational effectiveness.

The studies, mentioned above analyse many different aspects of leadership and management. In the leadership research a wide scale of research methods have been used.

In the current research the author would like to connect the role and competencies of leaders with their educational background. The aim of the research is to find out how the role image, competence and educational background of leaders influence on each other. The aim is also to study how clear is the understanding of different level leaders about the roles and competencies of each other that are needed to perform these roles.

### **3. Aim of the research**

The aim of the research is to study the role of leadership and management in the activities of Estonian academic library leaders and managers and find the connections of the role image of the leaders with their competencies and educational background.

The study includes the leaders' understanding of leadership and management sides in their roles. Connections between leaders' role and competencies with their educational background are also studied. The following questions are posed: Are there any connections between leaders' role image and their educational background? Does the educational background influences the formation of leader's role image or is the choice of educational field influenced by the role image of the leader? Therefore, it is important to understand the need for library and information science education as an essential education for leaders in libraries.

The position of academic library leaders is different from the position of leaders in other organizations. This position needs more expertise in library and information science field. On the one hand academic library leaders need knowledge that every leader of any organization needs about information processes that are necessary for leading and managing organizations. On the other hand leaders of academic libraries lead information organizations – the organizations, that gather, manage, process and share information, it means

organizations whose main working area is information. From this point of view the academic library leaders need specific competence in library and information science.

Research questions of the study were developed according to the aim of the research:

1. What is the role of leadership and management in the activities of Estonian academic library leaders/managers?
2. What is the leader's role image and how it is connected with competencies?
3. How do leaders understand the roles of different management levels?
4. How do leaders perceive library and information science as a professional field in their roles? How do they argue its necessity or unnecessary?

Answers to these questions might give us a better understanding about the roles of Estonian academic library leaders and provide support that leaders need to develop their competence for successful role performance.

## **5. Methodology**

A qualitative approach was used in this research. The qualitative approach focuses on social meanings, perceptions and beliefs of participants. „Society is seen in part as composed of people's perceptions of the social world, which means that knowledge of the social world is incomplete unless we also understand people's social meanings.“ (Brewer, 2003, p. 3). Contrary to the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach takes into account not only the quantitative data but pays attention on small differences that in statistical analyses might be discarded and gives an opportunity to generate deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative approach allows an interpretation in a way that is meaningful for a small number of research units.

The research is based on the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist theory suggests that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Knowledge and meaning rest on social constructions. This research focuses on describing and understanding the role of leaders and leaders' understanding of leadership and management activities and competencies in their roles. Different management levels are under observation – top and middle managers. The main objective is to understand how the role image, competence forming and educational choices of leaders influence each other.

The grounded theory research strategy is chosen for conducting this research. The grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss, varies and has evolved over the years (Morse, 2009). The theoretical concept of the grounded theory assumes, that society, reality and consciousness are constructed through interaction and are based on communication and language. This position defines, that interaction is dynamic and interpretative and is directed to the phenomenon how people create, define and change meaning and action (Charmaz, 2006). The constructivist grounded theory approach is followed in this research. It assumes connection between the subject and the context and acknowledges subjectivities throughout the data analysis. The constructivist

grounded theory assumes mutual construction of data through interaction and researcher's reflexivity (Morse, 2009). The grounded theory gives possibility to get deeper knowledge about the research phenomenon. The qualities of the grounded theory are flexibility and reflexivity. The researcher has a possibility to gather more data to expand content and outcome of the research. It gives an opportunity to analyse and understand deeper the meaning that participants give to the role and competence of academic library leaders and find connections between the different sides of the leadership and management process.

## **6. Data collection method**

For data collection the semi-structured interviews with open questions were developed. The interview questions were divided into two parts, both parts have three sections.

In the part one the interviewed leaders have to answer questions about themselves. Sections of the part one are: leader's role, competencies needed and educational background of the leader. Questions about the leader's role gather data about the role image and common activities of the leaders in their working days. Questions about competencies are developed to gather data about leaders' views on the skills and knowledge needed for completing the role of the leader. In the section two there are questions about the leader's view on library and information competence – how academic library leaders perceive the library and information science as a profession field from the leadership perspective. In the third section leaders introduce their educational background and assess different educational areas for leader's role. In the third section leaders are asked to assess the library and information science education, given in Estonian universities from the point of view of the academic library leader.

The second part of the interview includes questions where leaders have to answer about other level leaders. The sections one and two are identical to the sections of the part one: the section one is about leader's role and section two about competencies. The section three includes questions about the expected educational background for the leader.

The dataset of the research includes top and middle managers of seven Estonian academic libraries: Tartu University Library, Tallinn University of Technology Library, Academic Library of Tallinn University, Estonian Academy of Arts Library, Library of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Library of Estonian University of Life Sciences and National Library of Estonia. The number of participants is 60-65 depending on willingness of leaders to participate in this research.

## **7. Pilot study and preliminary findings**

A pilot study was conducted: 1) to investigate the relevance of questions for gathering data and 2) to test the clarity of the questions.

The results of the pilot study confirmed, that interview questions were relevant and can give answers to all research questions. However, one question from the part one, the section two was reformulated.

The interview results of the pilot study were analysed with the constant comparative analysis. The interviews were transcribed and initial coding was done.

The preliminary findings of the pilot study indicated that leaders of Estonian libraries are more managers than leaders. In the answers on the questions of their role, leaders talked about the need for leadership activities, but in describing their every-day work, it emerged that most of their activities included actions related to management. The answers of the interview participants indicated to the fixed frameworks of organizational processes. The fixed frameworks do not leave much opportunity for the middle managers for innovative and leading activities.

The answers of participants indicated that leaders do not perceive clearly what expectations the leader's role holds. There were quite clearly stated administrative functions. Human resource management was declared but less represented in the every-day actions of leaders. There were also contradictions in the answers of interview participants while they talked about the role of the leader.

When the interviewees talked about the competencies of the leader, they first focussed on personal characteristics. The author of this research agrees that personal characteristics could influence leaders' actions, but this research, however, concentrates on skills and knowledge that leaders need in the process of leading. The competencies listed by the interviewed leaders, supported the role image that was described by them. The leader, who seemed to be more administratively oriented, named firstly financial and economical competencies. Another leader, who had a more innovative role image, listed communication, pedagogical and performance skills and knowledge for acting successfully in the role of the leader. The future research should examine the directions of influence in connections with competencies and the role image.

The view of the interviewed leaders on the library and information science education was quite interesting. The leaders perceived knowledge about librarianship as understanding of the working field managed by them, but they did not see necessity of library and information science education for the success of their role as a leader. The participants presumed that librarianship could be studied within the work process and professional training. The participant 2 stated her opinion with the following words: „..... *for me librarianship is not so mystic that it could not be acquired. Also in working process.*“ From the answers of participants it became evident that they lacked knowledge of nowadays library and information science education and its content. They looked at library and information science education as a field of professional training.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this article the author presented the design of her research project. The research is developed to study the role and competencies of Estonian academic library leaders. The research is also going to draw connections between role images and competencies of academic library leaders with their educational

background. The understanding of other level leaders role and competencies is also studied. The methodological approach for this study is qualitative. The research is based on the constructivist paradigm and uses grounded theory methodology. A semi-structured interview was developed for data gathering. The pilot study was carried out for examining the relevance of the interview questions. Analyses of the interview results of the pilot study indicated some possible directions and thoughts that will be examined further in the main study.

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