The Need to Grow, Learn and Develop – How does Management Affect Motivation for Professional Development?

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Abstract

This article argues that knowledge management and social recognition is important for organisational learning and professional self-esteem in academic libraries. An anonymous survey was issued in 2016 to investigate how library staff's self-esteem is affected by how they experience their management's view and overview of their knowledge. The need for what Axel Honneth refers to as social recognition will also be discussed as an important part of how professional self-esteem and work satisfaction is experienced and further how this affects motivation to participate in professional development.

Key Words: Academic libraries; knowledge management; social recognition

1. Introduction

Richard Branson's famous words "Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to" is a good summary of how knowledge management should be carried out. Motivated employees who dare to think in new and innovative ways can be challenging to manage but are highly valuable to their company. In the changing world of information science and librarianship the question of "adapt or die" is

more relevant than ever. The need for ´learning on demand´ and constant professional development is becoming increasingly important for knowledge workers, making it even more important for their leaders to focus on knowledge management.

Knowledge management is a relatively new field of research, but an important one to knowledge organisations such as academic libraries. Worldwide, academic libraries are aiming to provide students and academic staff with information literacy skills to help them produce new and enhance their existing knowledge. Yet little attention has been given to librarians' own skills and providing a plan for their professional development. IFLA has formulated the standard for "Continuing Professional Development: Principles and Best Practices" (IFLA, 2016), but few libraries seem to have an explicit focus on this yet. According to Townley (2001), Islam, Agarwal and Ikeda (2014) and Daland (2015), much more attention could be dedicated to the area of knowledge management in libraries. Librarians are knowledge workers and a natural assumption would be that their professional self-esteem and job satisfaction would be affected by whether they had the possibility for professional development or not. Axel Honneth argues that the need for social recognition is also important. This would indicate that being recognised by management for one's skills and competencies would help motivation and professional self-esteem.

This article aims to investigate how managements' attitude towards professional development affects librarians' motivation to participate in such things and further how their self-esteem and perception of professional capability is affected. Lines will be drawn to the philosopher Axel Honneth and his theories of social recognition (Anderson & Honneth, 2005; Honneth, 2008, 2012).

2. Methodology

A quantitative study of how knowledge is viewed, experienced and prioritised in Norwegian academic libraries is the basis for this article. An anonymous survey was conducted using the survey programme SurveyXact in the spring of 2016. The main goal of the survey was to map and understand how Norwegian librarians had experienced the transition to a new library management system. The questionnaire also included more general questions on how management and staff viewed competencies and knowledge in their

libraries. The questions were mainly closed, but some open commentary fields were included to catch any other comments or opinions the respondents may have wanted to share. Descriptive statistics will be used to shed light on and investigate the research questions.

Staff in Norwegian academic libraries count for 1,637 full-time equivalent (Statistics Norway, 2016). The answer rate was 499 respondents that completed the whole survey, and 127 that gave some answers, but did not complete the entire survey. This will be reflected in the N value in the graphs. The response of 626 library professionals makes for a response rate of 38%.

There are some challenges to a quantitative survey issued to several academic libraries of different sizes and work cultures, and this will have to be addressed in the analysis of the data. To keep the survey anonymous, a link to the questionnaire was issued without linking the respondents to their answers. This may mean that some respondents have answered the questionnaire several times. Also, one must consider that those who chose to respond are the ones with strong opinions, being positive or negative.

3. Knowledge Management as Theoretical Framework

Knowledge management can be defined as "The creation and subsequent management of an environment which encourages knowledge to be created, shared, learnt, enhanced, and organized for the benefit of the organization and its customers" (Sarrafzadeh, Martin, & Hazeri, 2006, p. 624). It is a relatively new area of research, emerging over the past twenty years. Knowledge management is a task that should be engaged in first and foremost by management. Management is responsible for strategic planning of the enterprise and should lead the way forward. Not only among existing staff at the workplace, but also to strategically plan the need for new employments.

Libraries are knowledge organisations and the knowledge of the library's staff ultimately decides what the library can do and what services it can offer its users. Therefore, library management should focus on managing knowledge. This entails to *build, hold, pool and use* knowledge (Wiig, 1993). A library needs to keep and uphold the present knowledge, but also to map out the knowledge gap to develop the further growth of knowledge and raise competencies in required areas. Different employees hold different knowledge and have

different personalities. The most creative and innovative people may be the most challenging to manage, as they are constantly thinking critically of the way things are carried out and how it could be done differently. Management may have their hands full just by managing the everyday activity and may get frustrated by this. However, a firm grasp on knowledge management and a strategic plan for the future may help getting the most out of the internal creativity. Creative employees whose ideas are constantly rejected may feel frustrated and demotivated, making them less interested in contributing to the development of the business. This provides another compelling argument for why libraries should be actively focusing on knowledge management.

Knowledge can easily be linked to professional self-esteem. Having the knowledge needed to fulfil one's job will build professional self-esteem and feeling confident in one's abilities will be helpful in taking on the challenge of learning new things. But how is professional self-esteem built? Is it staff's own responsibility to know what they know and further what they need to know, or does management need to play a stronger role in guiding their staff? The responses from the survey suggests that management must encourage staff to participate in professional development seminars and conferences in order for them to make professional development a priority. This should be a genuine interest for management, as motivated employees will be more likely to develop their skills and adding value to the staff. "Perceived investment in employee development (PIED) is developed through employees' assessment of their organizations' commitment to help employees learn to identify and obtain new skills and competencies that will allow them to move to new positions, either within or outside these organizations" (Lee & Bruvold, 2003, p. 983).

Self-esteem can be linked to the social recognition one is faced with, or not faced with in a professional setting, or what can be described as "the result of an ongoing intersubjective process, in which one's attitude toward oneself emerges in one's encounter with an other's attitude toward oneself" (Anderson & Honneth, 2005, p. 131). In other words, we are not just individuals, but also part of a community that is the workplace. Collaboration and communities are important for learning and development, and additionally self-esteem and job satisfaction. Communities of practice and social learning can function as an important catalyst for knowledge creation (Alavi & Leidner, 2001, p. 126) and knowledge management seeks to support communities of practice in creating and using knowledge (Townley, 2001, p. 45) making this a virtuous circle. However, different types of employees will

have different agendas and motivations for learning and performing their tasks. For example, *mastery goal oriented employees* strive to develop their competence, skills, and ability for the sake of learning and mastering tasks in itself, whereas *performance goal oriented employees* aim to outperform others and to demonstrate superiority, meaning that they can be reluctant to learn new skills as they will see this as a threat to them when faced with tasks they do not master (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004, pp. 370–371).

Knowledge workers are reliant on their own knowledge and competencies and the ability to learn and develop this to stay on top of their work tasks. The knowledge of co-workers is also important as communities of practice will be an important part of everyday work life. When the knowledge is tacit, it can be difficult to identify what one knows and does not know. Professionals are constantly performing tasks they master without reflecting upon why and how they do it, or perhaps not even reflecting upon the fact that they are doing it at all. The need for a community of practice can be rooted in the need of learning new things, but also for getting reassurance that one's work responsibilities are carried out satisfactorily. "[…] self-trust is not a solo accomplishment. Its acquisition and maintenance are dependent on interpersonal relationships in which one acquires and sustains the capacity to relate to this dynamic inner life" (Anderson & Honneth, 2005, p. 135). The need for social recognition is present in most people. This can be described as the importance of mutual recognition:

> *The importance of mutual recognition is often clearest in the breach. Consider, for example, practices and institutions that express attitudes of denigration and humiliation. They threaten individuals' own self-esteem by making it much harder (and, in limit cases, even impossible) to think of oneself as worthwhile. The resulting feelings of shame and worthlessness threaten one's sense that there is a point to one's undertakings. And without that sense of one's aspirations being worth pursuing, one's agency is hampered. This claim is neither exclusively conceptual nor exclusively empirical. It is, of course, psychologically possible to sustain a sense of self-worth in the face of denigrating and humiliating attitudes, but it is harder to do so, and there are significant costs associated with having to shield oneself from these negative attitudes and having to find subcultures for support.* (Anderson & Honneth, 2005, p. 131)

Most people enjoy working towards a goal and receiving social recognition for their skills and efforts. The lack of such recognition may contribute to lack of

motivation and further loss of professional self-esteem. Frustration may rise from working in an environment where no one cares about the knowledge that is present. Honneth also makes a distinction of the ideological function of social recognition where its mere function is to "[…] encourage an individual relation-to-self that suits the existing dominant order. Instead of truly giving expression to a particular value, such ideological forms of recognition would ensure the motivational willingness to fulfil certain tasks and duties without resistance" (Honneth, 2012, p. 86). In this case, recognition can be viewed as a tool of power to motivate employees to do their job and not rock the boat.

4. Knowledge Sharing and Professional Development

Key concepts in knowledge management are mapping out, improving and sharing knowledge, referring to Wiig's model of building, holding, pooling and using knowledge. Every place of business should focus on raising competencies, keeping knowledge, sharing it and the further development of it.

Knowledge is often divided into the distinction of explicit and tacit knowledge. "Knowledge that is uttered, formulated in sentences, and captured in drawings and writing is explicit. Explicit knowledge is accessible through consciousness. Knowledge tied to the senses, tactile experiences, movement skill, intuition, unarticulated mental models, or implicit rules of thumb is "tacit" (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009, p. 636). Explicit knowledge is often thought of as what we are able to verbalise and explain to others, while tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in experiences and the way we carry things out without making an explicit reflection on it. Therefore the difference between the two is often equated with the difference between "know-how" and "know-what" (Scarborough, 2008). Tacit knowledge can be difficult to put into words and transfer onto others; in the same way the lacking of the tacit knowledge can be difficult to formulate as an information need. Because tacit knowledge is best transferred through experience, the socio-cultural aspect and the need for communities of practice must be acknowledged in knowledge organisations. Sharing knowledge in an organisation is often a spiral of tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge was first described by Polanyi (1962). Tacit knowledge is difficult to identify and pass on. It can be learnt and adapted through conversations and observation, again stressing the need for socio-cultural learning. Being able to do something that one has done for a long time and no longer thinks about when it is done is difficult to make explicit and pass on to others using words. For

new workers in an organisation it can, however, be observed and made into an explicit description. The epistemological dimension to organizational knowledge creation embraces a continual dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge that drives the creation of new ideas (Nonaka, 1994, p. 15). Therefore, a knowledge management system cannot completely supply new employees with all the information they need. There will always be a need for a community of practice and socio-cultural learning.

Knowledge hiding is a new concept. "We contend that knowledge hiding is not simply the absence of sharing; rather, knowledge hiding is the intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another individual" (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012, p. 67). Knowledge hiding is probably likely to happen if knowledge is considered to be a means of power or leverage, probably most likely by goal oriented employees. Nevertheless, "Given the differences between corporate and academic environments, it may be the case that certain fields, education or librarianship, for example, are more conducive to a culture of sharing" (Burnette, 2017, p. 385). As information and knowledge is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary, knowledge sharing and collaboration is more important than ever for librarians (Daland & Hidle, 2016, p. 66).

4.1. Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries

Studies show that academic libraries focus more on information management than knowledge management, and several researchers conclude that this should change. "In fact, KM is frequently used – inaccurately – as almost synonymous with information management (IM). This usage is partly justified because IM and KM share a common purpose: to facilitate the shaping, distribution and sharing of knowledge to achieve business goals, objectives and strategies" (Johannsen, 2000, p. 43). Knowledge management is more than information management, as it contains a focus on how information is translated into knowledge.

4.2. The Human Resource Side of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management also means managing *knowledge workers*. Knowledge workers are hired to do a job, but first and foremost they are human beings

and individuals. In order to get employees to do their best at work, they must be motivated. Being motivated can often be rooted in being seen and recognised. "Recognition should be understood as a genus comprising various forms of practical attitudes whose primary intention consists in a particular act of affirming another person or group" (Honneth, 2012, p. 80). This also highlights the difference between knowledge management and information management. "Typical IM issues include how an executive information system may influence decision making quality, how IT and information can be used to achieve competitive advantage, and how alignment between IT strategy and business strategy may be accomplished. KM, on the other hand, is much more people-oriented, focusing on human resource management issues such as learning processes, continuous education, culture, values and attitudes, etc." (Johannsen, 2000, p. 43). Innovative knowledge workers will be of high value to enterprises that need to develop and keep up with changes in the field of expertise. They will offer new perspectives and solutions to current work methods.

As a new employee, training is essential to understand work tasks and work flows. It is expected that new employees are met with a training program that will ensure that they are taught the necessary skills for being able to do their job. The employee will have some questions for the workplace, but new employees cannot be expected to be cognisant of all knowledge required. Further, an experienced worker cannot be expected to present a new employee with at the information they need. If asked directly, many experienced employees may be able to provide insight into questions involving tacit knowledge, but they may not be able to do so unprompted. Through observation tacit knowledge can be detected and recorded for later use. Therefore, it is of importance that management can identify useful conferences and skills development seminars for new employees to attend and encourage them to do so. It is also important that employees themselves actively engage in providing reports and feedback from conferences and that they themselves keep up to date on upcoming conferences and professional development events.

5. Results

The survey data has been used for other papers and is available at UiA Open Research Data.[1]

The survey shows that librarians seem to have a fairly high satisfaction with their own skills in regard to fulfilling their duties, where over 50% report to having the competencies and skills they need to do their job satisfactory. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see what factors may have an influence on their sense of self-esteem. Men seem to have a slightly higher belief in their own abilities than their female co-workers where nearly 77% of the men reported to having the skills they needed and only 63% of the women (Figure 1).

Education seems, surprisingly, to have very little impact as the librarians who had finished a bachelor's degree reported the same level of confidence as their colleagues who had finished a Ph.D. (Figure 2).

Fig. 1: Gender crossed with own perception of skills and competencies (N=615).
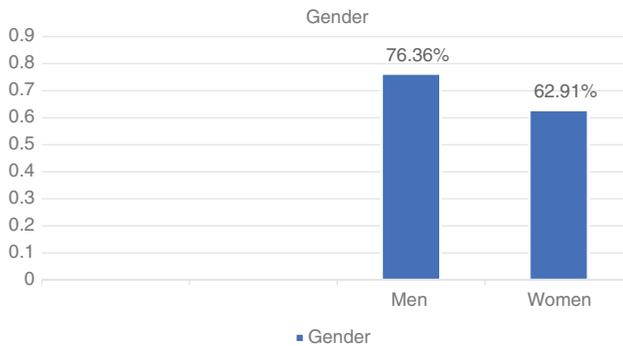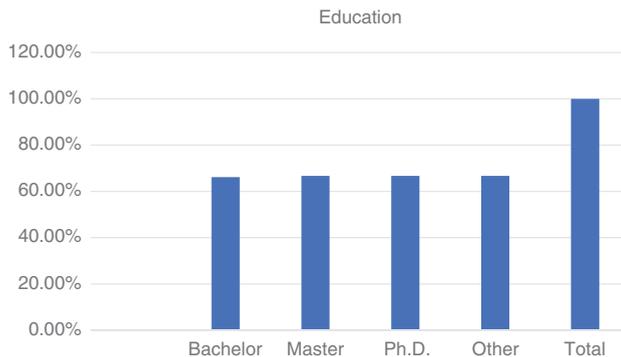

Fig. 2: Education crossed with own perception of skills and competencies (N=604).

The respondents who answered that they believed that their leader has a good overview of their competencies and skills seem to have a slightly higher confidence in their own work performance and professional abilities. More interestingly, staff reporting that their leader encouraged them to take part in professional development did participate in more conferences and seminars.

There is a clear correlation of staff attending conferences when their leader encourages them to do so (Figures 3 and 4).

Overall, most of the respondents said they had not participated in continued education for professional development. But the ones who stated that their leader encouraged them to do so have a much higher level of participation.

Intriguingly, whether leaders encourage staff members to participate in inter-departmental skills development seminars or not does not seem to have an effect on participation (Figure 5). This could be explained by the fact that seminars at the actual work place are easier to attend, and that there is a higher expectation of participation when the seminar is at the workplace.

Finally, it is interesting to see if the respondents who think their leaders have a good overview of their skills and competencies feel more confident in their

Fig. 3: "My leader encourages me to attend conferences" crossed with "In 2015 I attended x conferences" (N=386).
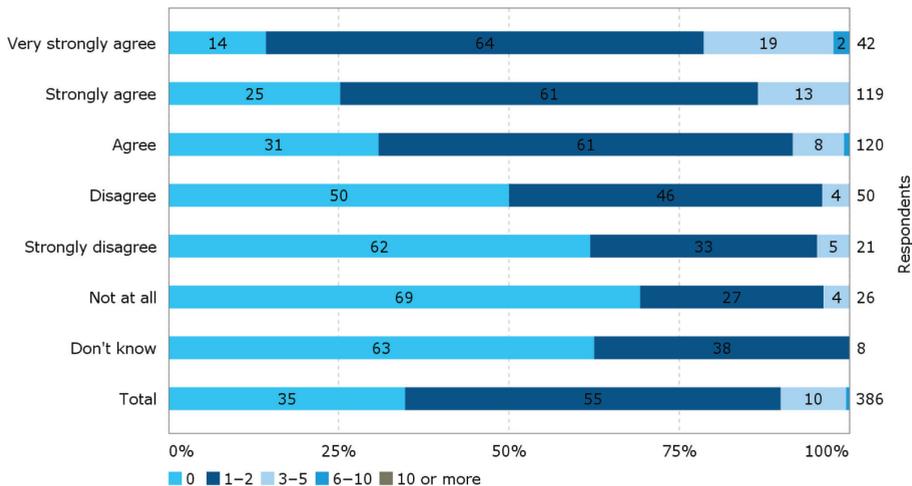
Fig. 4: "My leader encourages me to attend continued education and professional development" crossed with "In 2015 I attended x seminars for continued education" (N=370).
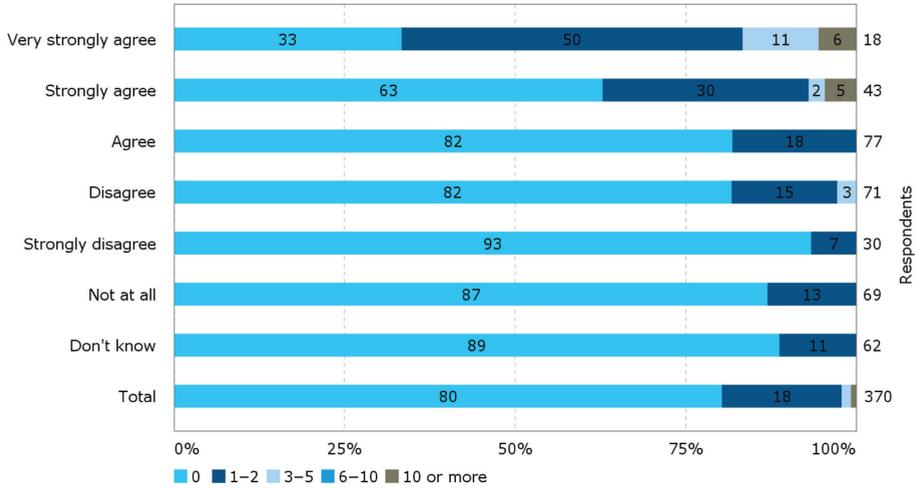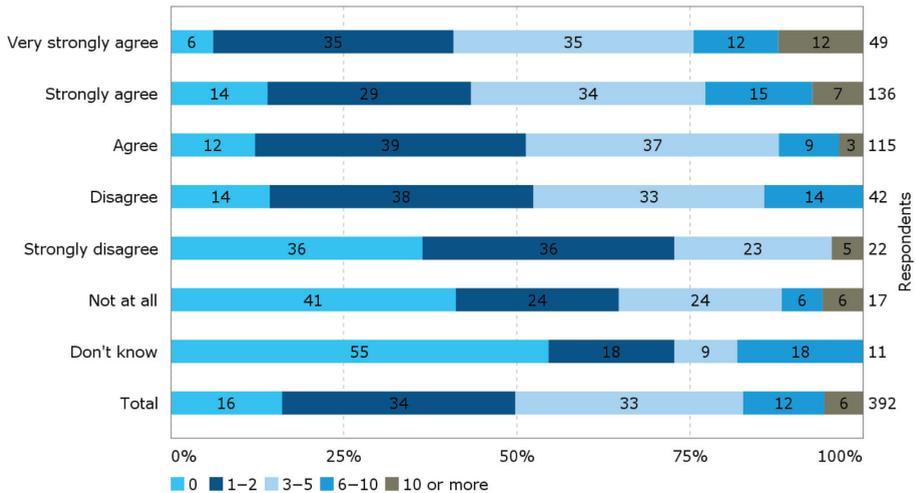

Fig. 5: "My leader encourages me to attend courses" crossed with "In 2015 I attended x interdepartmental skills development seminars" (N=392).

abilities to do their job satisfactorily (Figure 6). The y-axis of the graph represents the answers to the question "I believe I have the necessary skills and competencies needed to perform my tasks at work" and the x-axis shows the

Fig. 6: "My leader has a good overview of my skills and competencies" crossed with "I believe I have the skills and competencies needed to perform my tasks" (N=409).
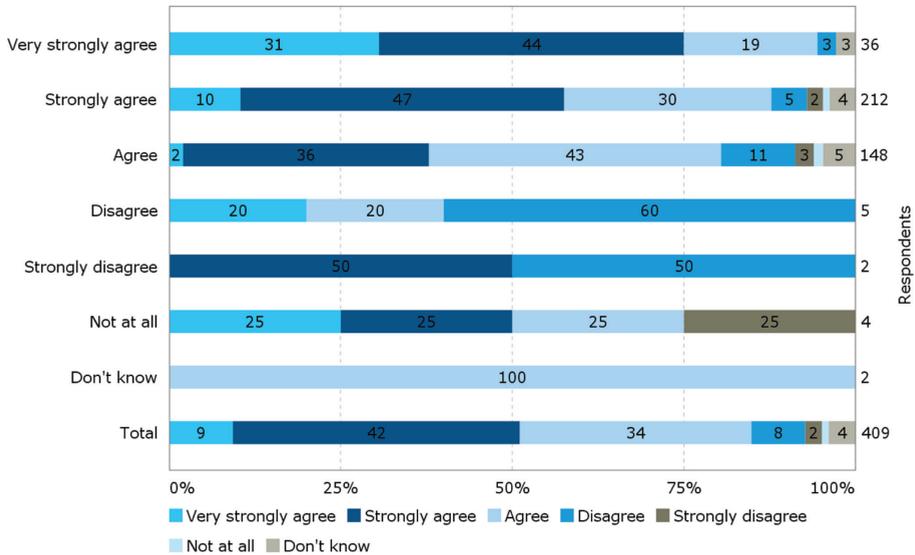
answers to the question "My leader has a good overview of my competencies and skills." Those who strongly agree to their leader having this overview also report a higher level of self-esteem.

6. Discussion

Knowledge management is without a doubt an important task for library management. In order to develop libraries and their services to be relevant in the future, a firm grasp on present knowledge and what challenges may arise in the future is required.

This study suggests that employees who are encouraged to participate in professional development do so. It also implies that members of staff who believe their leader to have a good overview of their competencies and skills experience a higher sense of professional self-esteem.

Knowledge management is not used as such in academic libraries, though several studies indicate that this could be a fruitful approach (Daland, 2016;

Islam et al., 2014; Townley, 2001). KM is useful to map out existing knowledge and where there are gaps in order to inform strategic planning. Mapping out existing knowledge can not only help strategic planning, but furthermore point out staff members who have certain skills and competencies. This will make for inquiries from their co-workers, but also give them the needed recognition that may help motivate them to learn even more (Anderson & Honneth, 2005). Knowledge management is thus something that should be given greater attention. Also, the pooling of knowledge will not only benefit management to strategically plan out the future and employment strategies. It will also help ensure employees are happier, more productive and more motivated to continue to learn and develop.

The need for socio-cultural learning and communities of practice is also an important issue in knowledge enterprises. Lloyd (2012, p. 773) stresses that the people-in-practice perspective and that "This perspective has as its starting point the idea that information literacy is a complex collective practice that is negotiated between people who are co-located and participating in the performances of a setting." If management truly knows what competencies and skills lies in the work force, it will be easier to construct working groups and projects where communities of practice can develop and bear fruit.

7. Conclusions

Knowledge is the most valuable asset in knowledge enterprises like libraries. Knowledge cannot be transferred in its whole to knowledge management systems because it is deeply rooted in the staff members. For staff to be motivated to learn more and to share their knowledge, it is important that they experience this being valued. Honneth speaks of social recognition where we are part of a group and need validation and affirmation from our co-workers. Communities of practice and socio-cultural learning can provide the framework we need to motivate ourselves to further develop professionally. One can use methods like this to make sure employees keep doing their jobs and don't rock the boat, but in the long run innovative and motivated employees who are able to think new thoughts and dare to challenge the established comprehension will be of greater value as they contribute to evaluation and development of their field. Knowledge management is not only instrumental managing of knowledge, but also focusing on human resource management issues, providing recognition and motivation for all staff members.

Acknowledgements

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Note

1 https://dataverse.no/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.18710/EBH77W.