

## **Empowering Future Libraries: The Role of Talent Management in Library Development**

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**Abstract:** To maintain the high standard of public as well as academic libraries' services and to be able to develop them further and lead them into the future, new challenges must be overcome. These are for example the War for Talents, diversity, skills of older and younger employees, the advancing digitization, integration issues, sustainability, fake news etc. One approach to address these challenges involves implementing talent management, utilizing its methods to both retain current employees and identify well-trained new staff, effectively deploying them as needed.

This paper presents results from a quantitative study titled "The Library needs Talents! An Empirical Study on the Use of Talent Management Methods for Staff Recruitment and Staff Development in Libraries" with findings about the status of this topic in German libraries and the possibility of implementing talent management. The study consists of a survey conducted in May 2019 with 143 participants, of whom 113 completed the questionnaire and a workshop held in June 2019 with ten librarians of academic and public libraries in which the questions "How can talents be found for and in a library?" and "How do you keep these talents in the library?" were discussed.

The results show that interest in talent management exists in German libraries, but a lack of expertise on the subject has hindered its implementation in libraries thus far. Further key findings indicate that career opportunities and development prospects still have room for improvement. Particularly in smaller institutions with only a few employees, career advancement can be challenging. All in all, the size of the institution plays a minor role. While complete talent management may not be feasible in smaller institutions, individual aspects can still be addressed and implemented. For example, relevant competencies that talents should possess could be identified in advance and reflected in job advertisements.

This paper introduces a novel perspective on addressing challenges faced by public and academic libraries. It is shedding light on the status of talent management and its potential implementation. The value of this paper extends to library professionals seeking ways to attract and retain talent, irrespective of the institution's size, presenting actionable insights for competency-based recruitment practices.



**Keywords:** Future Libraries, Talent Management, Human Resources Management, Public Libraries, Academic Libraries

### **Introduction**

“There is little doubt that the attraction, development, and retention of talent are nowadays one of the most critical challenges faced by companies [as well as libraries] worldwide” (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020:457). Despite all the digitization and efficient processes: It is and will always be the employees who make the difference. In the years to come, due to demographic developments, they will become an increasingly valuable asset that needs to be cherished and cared for (Hays, 2023:3). Already again and again, job advertisements from libraries must be extended – at least in Germany – and sometimes after a long search the job vacancy must be filled by people from other disciplines. So, the “War for Talents” has meanwhile also reached libraries. For this to maintain the high standard of public as well as academic libraries’ services and to be able to develop them further and lead them into the future, new challenges must be overcome. These are for example not only the War for Talents / skilled labour shortage, but also diversity, skills of older and younger employees, the advancing digitization with an increase in digital and hybrid event formats, integration issues, sustainability, and fake news etc. One possibility to face these challenges is to establish talent management to use its methods on the one hand to retain employees and on the other hand to find well-trained new employees and to be able to deploy them in the right place at the right time.

### **What is Talent Management?**

Talent management refers to those organizational concepts and measures that deal specifically with the recruitment, assessment, retention, and development of current or future employees who are referred to as talents due to their comparatively scarce, highly sought-after key competencies that are central to the organization (Ritz and Sinelli, 2018:14).

This definition can be extended by considering all employees as people with talents, so that it is important to identify their respective talents and to use them in the organization in the best possible way according to this talent.

Talent management is manifold and can include the following aspects or tasks that can be combined with one another (Ritz and Thom, 2018:290-291):

- Focusing of all HR tasks / functions to the challenges and consequences of demographic change
- Attracting, assessing, developing, and retaining selected key positions and/or a wide range of female employees
- Avoidance or reduction of employees' intention to leave by improving the library's working conditions

- Improving the external communication of employer attractiveness
- Targeted addressing and thus winning over younger workers
- Further development of competencies, especially of older employees
- Measures to maintain the work capacity and knowledge of older employees beyond retirement age
- Measures to promote diversity in the library

Especially in connection with the last three points – diversity and the skills of older employees – talent management can support the promotion of female and older talents, and with this the optimized coordination of professional and private life will even gain higher importance in the future (Ritz and Thom, 2018:298). The topic of age and age diversity should therefore be given a positive assessment by measures that convey a positive image of old age (Engelhardt, Burmeister and Hirschi, 2018:40).

The individual competence and career development of talents is seen as particularly relevant in connection with the incentive and retention strategy of talent management (Ritz and Thom, 2018:19). “A decent organization ought to have a very much planned programme for the systematic administration, training and development of employees to enhance the transformation of policies and programmes relevant to such organization” (Osiesi et al., 2022:230). The task of personnel management is therefore to constantly expand their employees’ qualifications and experience through interesting activities and specific further trainings and to give them individual career prospects (Holtbrügge, 2017:161-162). “Staff professional development could be regarded as a lifelong endeavour involving continuous learning on the part of the staff, with regards to updating of their contemporary knowledge, skills and experiences for self and all-round development” (Osiese et al., 2022:230). It should be avoided to evaluate the employees as well as the executives of the middle and lower management levels using a standard competence grid in order to be able to identify talents. It is better to consider each person as an individual with a unique set of abilities (Kolb, Burkart and Zundel, 2010:516). And never to forget, that „Human resources in any institution are crucial for the development of that institution” (Soroya, Sarwar and Shahid, 2022:240).

“Every employee is replaceable.” This saying is a bad advisor in talent management. Talent-driven companies believe that differences exist, and it specially makes a difference who takes on a key function (Ritz and Thom, 2018:19). The crucial difference between a good employee and a 'talent', in

addition to the potential, is the “fire in the stomach”, the enthusiasm and the commitment – the intrinsic motivation (Kolb, Burkart and Zundel, 2010:516). When recruiting, care should therefore be taken to find the most suitable candidate for the library and not just for the vacant position. The difference is often that while a potential candidate may have the skills and abilities to fill a job description fairly well, they may not have the potential to do other / advanced roles in the future or fit in the library / the team (Knijff, Berger and Seiler, 2018:251).

Also “organizations often source exclusive talent development instead of nurturing talent inclusively. Exclusive refers to organizations’ tendency to hire top talents outside their organization when needs arise, or if they have to look for candidates within the organization, only those identified as performers within their elite pool are selected. Literature suggests that inclusive talent development (i.e., career development via training for all employees regardless of individual performance) can complement management for employee retention” (Kaliannan et al., 2023:1).

### **Why should talent management be used in libraries?**

In knowledge-based organizations such as libraries in particular, available talents who carry this knowledge must be promoted because they make a decisive contribution to the capital and success of an organization (Ritz and Sinelli, 2018:4).

To prevent these talents from competing and moving on to other organizations, among other things, the loyalty of these employees should be promoted. Especially young and talented employees only show loyalty as long as the work entrusted to them and areas of responsibility within the organization appear attractive to them and make a contribution to lifelong learning, to increasing their employability and career development (Ritz and Sinelli, 2018:1).

In addition, the knowledge of older people who are about to retire needs to be secured for the library, so knowledge transfer needs to be seen as part of talent management, which means that the transfer of knowledge between the generations employed in the library maybe needs to be improved. Knowledge transfer is an opportunity to use and develop talents of both older and younger employees (Engelhardt, Burmeister and Hirschi, 2018:2).

A study showed that “ITD [Inclusive Talent Management] is becoming increasingly crucial for individual talent growth and organizational performance towards a sustainable competitive advantage” (Kaliannan et al., 2023:1).

In May 2019, as part of a bachelor thesis, a quantitative study was carried out using a questionnaire on the topic of talent management. 113 participants completed the online questionnaire in full. A total of 59% of those surveyed

consider the introduction of talent management in libraries to be sensible, 28% as somewhat sensible and only 13% as not really sensible or not at all sensible.

### **What about talent management in libraries?**

First, it should be borne in mind that in all organizations there are already components of a functioning talent management (Stulle, 2018:17).

2019, as part of the bachelor's thesis titled "Talent Matters in Libraries!" an empirical study was conducted, examining the use of talent management methods for recruitment and development of personnel in libraries (Hoecken, 2019). The study comprised two parts: a questionnaire and a group discussion. The questionnaire was distributed in May 2019 through a well-known industry mailing list called "Inetbib" (Inetbib e.V., 2023). The survey period was two weeks and ran from May 6, 2019 to May 20, 2019. The survey aimed to assess the state of talent management in German libraries at that time and gain insights into the feasibility of implementing talent management in libraries. A total of 143 individuals participated in the survey, with 113 completing the questionnaire.

The evaluation of the survey was conducted using the software "UmfrageOnline", which was also used to create the questionnaire (enuvo GmbH, 2024). This software collected the data and graphically analyzed the results of the closed and semi-open questions. The responses to the open questions were manually evaluated and summarized.

The second part of the study took place on June 13, 2019, during the practical day at HAW Hamburg. The group discussion involved the participation of ten librarians from both public and academic libraries. They were divided into two groups of five people each and tasked with discussing the questions "How can talents be identified and recruited for a library?" and "How can these talents be retained within the library?". They were asked to record the results of their discussions on flipchart paper. After the working phase, the group presented their collected ideas and suggestions in plenary.

The key findings of the quantitative study revealed that over half of the respondents (59%) considered the introduction of talent management in their institutions to be meaningful (see figure 1). Furthermore, for over 70% of the surveyed institutions, the greatest challenge in attracting and retaining employees was the appreciation of their performance. This result aligned with the conclusions drawn by the group discussion participants, who also identified a lack of support from leadership as a common issue in their respective institutions.

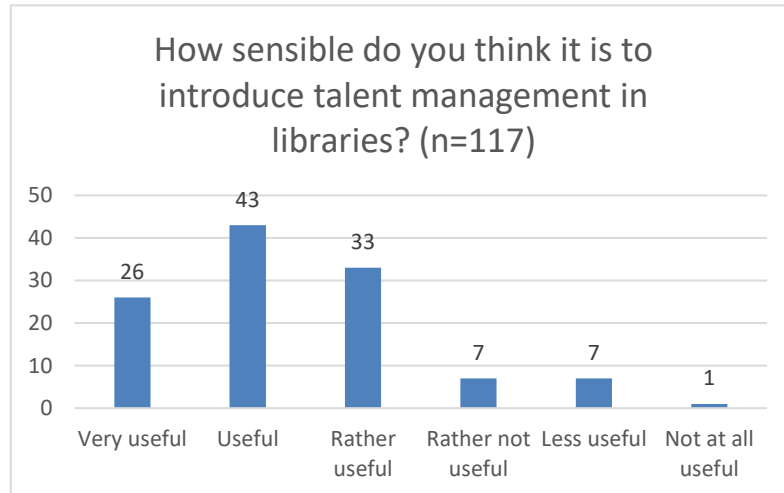


Fig. 1 How sensible do you think it is to introduce talent management in libraries?

In addition to career opportunities and development prospects, the implementation of flexible working hours was identified as another significant challenge. However, it was observed that over half of the surveyed institutions had already implemented flexible working hour models at the time of the survey and the COVID-19 pandemic likely further accelerated this aspect (see figures 2 and 3).

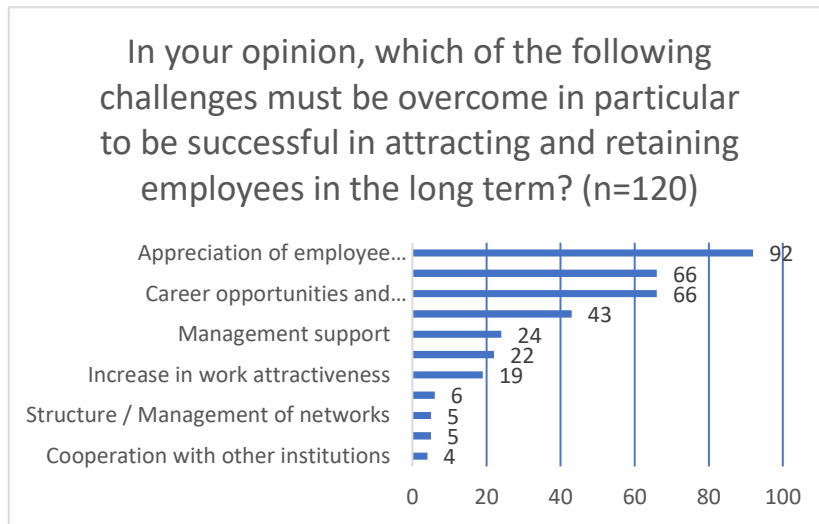


Fig. 2 In your opinion, which of the following challenges must be overcome to be successful in attracting and retaining employees in the long term?

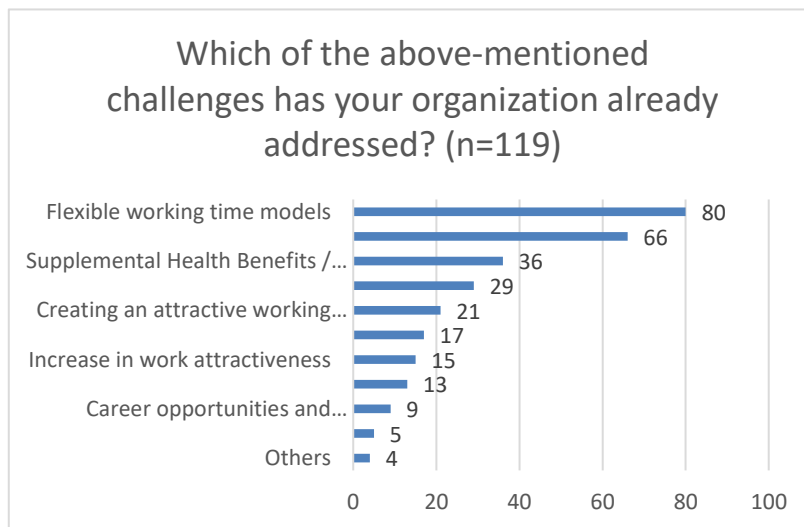


Fig. 3 Which of the above-mentioned challenges has your organization already addressed?

Furthermore, measures to support the development of leadership were already predominantly offered, covering a small portion of talent management (focusing on the development of specific employee groups).

Regarding the demographic change, the majority agreed that the shortage of skilled workers affected their institutions. Institutions competed intensely to attract the available talent in the job market and therefore needed to present themselves as attractive options. During the group discussion it was suggested that job advertisements could be enhanced, with required competencies being explicitly included from the outset. Additionally, involving teams or departments in the search for new talents was proposed. This would make the entire process more transparent and contribute to the appreciation of employees' performance.

In summary, the interest in talent management exists, but a lack of expertise on the subject has hindered its implementation in libraries thus far. In the future, institutions should place greater emphasis on talent aspects and key positions within their organizations, while establishing their own definitions of competency areas. The offered measures can then be targeted towards the individual competencies of employee groups. The specific measures for leadership development are a good starting point in this regard.

On the other hand, career opportunities and development prospects still have room for improvement. Particularly in smaller institutions with only a few employees, career advancement can be challenging. However, regardless of size, every institution can foster the skills and competencies of their talents. This can be achieved through traditional training opportunities or, for example, job rotations within the institution. Additionally, mentoring programs would prove beneficial as a personnel development measure for institutions that will be heavily affected by retirement in the coming years. This approach not only enables seamless succession planning for specific positions but also provides employees with opportunities to further develop their own competencies.

As could be seen, the size of the institution plays a minor role. While complete talent management may not be feasible in smaller institutions, individual aspects can still be addressed and implemented. This is already happening to some extent. For example, relevant competencies that talents should possess could be identified in advance and reflected in job advertisements.

### **Recommendations and conclusions**

A study published in 2022 found out that job career has been proven the sole construct that significantly impacts all aspects of job performance (Soroya, Sarwar and Shahid, 2022:252). So, talent management is needed.



Some aspects of talent management are already implemented in libraries, but for talent management in libraries to work, it must fit the individual culture of the institution, the needs of the individual staff, the specific human resources management practices, as well as the management capacities and it must correspond to the library's strategic goals (Ritz and Sinelli, 2018:1). This shows that there is the need to understand the setting in which an organization is operating to know what approach to talent management will be most effective (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020:466).

In addition, it must be lived and modelled by the management of a library, because without credible consent and active participation on the part of the management, a functioning talent management is difficult to implement (Stulle, 2018:34). Also, a research study showed that the line managers are crucial actors in talent management in practice and for this more support for the line manager is absolutely necessary (Bos, Thunnissen and Pardoen, 2020:103).

Talent management should not simply be equated with personnel management or development (Ritz and Thom, 2018) It goes beyond it. Even if the boundaries between contemporary talent management and conventional personnel development are extremely fluid, both contents merge directly into one another (Stulle, 2018:31).

The following methods are recommended for personnel management in connection with talent management (Stulle, 2018:31-32):

- Offer project work, later management of a team or an even higher position
- Enable job rotation
- Development directly at the workplace through appropriate tasks, learning opportunities, exchange with colleagues and thereby strengthening and expanding one's own skills
- Design and implement development programs
- Revise or develop feedback instruments
- Targeted, which means individual advanced training through training courses, workshops, etc.

As could be seen in the results of the study, the interest in talent management exists in German libraries, but a lack of expertise on the subject has hindered its implementation in libraries thus far. Career opportunities and development prospects still have room for improvement. Particularly in smaller institutions with only a few employees, career advancement can be challenging. All in all, the size of the institution plays a minor role. While complete talent management may not be feasible in smaller institutions, individual aspects can still be addressed and implemented. For example, relevant competencies that talents

should possess could be identified in advance and reflected in job advertisements.

Library professionals seeking ways to attract and retain talent, irrespective of the institution's size, have now presenting actionable insights for competency-based recruitment practices. It is recommended, that in future, institutions should place greater emphasis on talent aspects and key positions within their organizations, while establishing their own definitions of competency areas. While complete talent management may not be feasible in smaller institutions, individual aspects can still be addressed and implemented.

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