

## Information Culture in Finnish Public Libraries.

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Information culture is the perception of information work and information practices by its members within an organization. If information culture is part of the organizational culture which may reflect the organizational effectiveness, the goal of information culture will also impact on the delivery products and services to users. This paper aims to study the information culture in public libraries in Finland. The qualitative research method was applied by interviewing head librarians of major public libraries in Finland. The tool used in data collection was an in-depth interview. Descriptive analysis was used for data analysis.

The analysis of observation and interview data revealed that the support of the city plan in every public library to provide better library services for all is important for high quality library services as well as emphasizing customer-orientation as the core value. The library activities are regulated by the Library Act and decree defining of policy and funding. The success factors of public libraries in Finland are teamwork with leaders who always listen to customers to support the education system. The customer-oriented service development is also one of the key strategies as well as promoting reading as a way of life.

**Keywords:** Information culture, Public libraries, Finland

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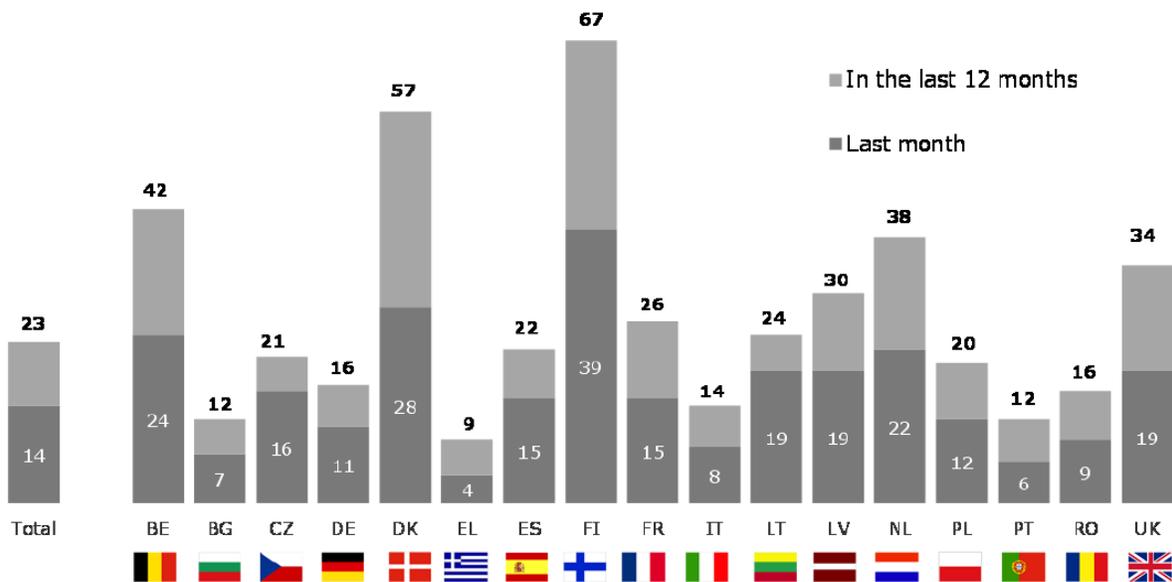
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## Introduction

The concept of information culture can be defined in individual level within organizations in terms of “a pattern of behaviors and attitudes that express an organization’s orientation toward information.” (Davenport and Prusak 1997: 84) It refers to the beliefs (assumptions, values, norms, attitudes) and behaviors (work practices, rituals, social dramas, and communication) of people within organizations which comprise organizational information and information technology. Therefore, information culture is the perception of information work and information practices by its members within the organization. Information culture becomes part of organizational culture that portrays values and attitudes to information. Information culture may reflect the organizational effectiveness (Oliver 2011). The goal of information culture will also impact the delivery of products and services to users.

Culture at the national level is mostly influenced by value systems, while organizational cultures appear to be primarily based on shared practices. Information culture is as varied as the organizational culture. Some studies suggest that organizations that have strong information culture are more likely to achieve success in their business performance (Grimshaw 1995). For example, information cultures in bank firms are maintained by strict norms aiming at securing the confidentiality of client data, and carrying out corresponding work practices. Information service firms or libraries aim at providing high quality information and services to users. The purpose of this article is to explore information culture in Finnish public libraries. Finland was selected as the case study of the study because public libraries have an exceptionally strong role in the society. About two thirds of adults (67%) used a public library in the last 12 months, compared to less than a quarter (23%) of Europe. (Quick, Prior, Toombs, Taylor and Currenti 2013 :4). In the 2010 national library customer survey, over 70% of the 13,000 respondents said libraries had improved their quality of life somewhat or considerably.



**Figure 1** : 67% of adults in Finland visited a public library in the last 12 months. (Quick, Prior, Toombs, Taylor and Currenti 2013)

Finland's first act on public libraries was enacted in 1928 and the Library Act of 1961 created the foundation for the present network of public libraries today. The Library Act obliges cities and municipalities to arrange library and information services independently or in cooperation with other municipalities. Library users must have access to library and information services, and use or borrow the collections of their library free of charge. Public library operations are financed by the municipalities themselves and subsidized by the state. According to estimates, an average of 1% of the annual budgets of municipalities has been allocated to library operations. The national quality management system for public libraries consists of national steering who proposes general policies, sets general quality targets for libraries and ensures they are met, as well as the good management in municipal library operations. Key steering tools include regulations on operations and financing, the library policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the state budget, the principles for financing operations, the qualifications requirements for library staff, and information guidance, which also involves regional administration (Ministry of Education and Culture 2011).

Eighteen of the Finnish public libraries also function as a provincial library under the Library Decree. The provincial libraries support the information and interlibrary lending services of public libraries in their region. They also develop information services, introduce library personnel to new forms of library work, and conduct development projects. The Ministry of Education and Culture finances the joint online services of Finnish public libraries, freely accessible to all ([www.libraries.fi](http://www.libraries.fi)) and develops the classification system and functions as a multilingual library. The National Repository Library also receives and stores material transferred from academic and public libraries. The National Electronic Library, FinELib is a consortium of Finnish universities, universities of applied sciences, research institutes and public libraries. The aim of the consortium is to acquire electronic resources centrally on behalf of its member organizations. Libraries, archives and museums, as well as other organizations preserving national cultural heritage collaborate in the development of the National Digital Library (<http://www.kdk.fi/en>) Finna (<http://www.finna.fi>) is part of the National Digital Library project of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Finna aims to provide unified access to the collections and services of archives, libraries and museums.

### **Research questions:**

The goals of this study are to observe and explore the organizational culture and information culture in Finnish public libraries. The research questions are how the organizational and information culture in Finland to maintain their popularity among users? This research aims to study the information culture in Finnish public libraries.

### **Data and method:**

Data for this study were gathered from five Head Librarians in the major cities of Finland in November 2014. The major public libraries are Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Oulu, and Rovaniemi. The tool used in data collection was an in-depth interview. The interview questions are 2 parts, part 1 is organizational culture (organizational structure, plan & work flow, communication, leadership), part 2 is information environment, information gathering and use, information systems). The interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes and the library observation ranged

from 30-60 minutes. All interviews were taking notes. The data were analysed by content analysis. The data was transcribed at word level. By reading the transcripts were identified the themes of research questions. Based on these themes was formed an index. The observation and interview data were sorted by the index categories.

**Findings:**

This paper describes the organizational culture of the public libraries in Finland as perceived by experienced professionals, the Head librarians of five major cities in the country. This regards the issues of organizational structure, work processes, communication and leadership styles. Further, our approach to information culture regards the issues of information environment, information gathering and information systems as follows :-

1) The Organizational Culture of public libraries in Finland

The study found that the organizational culture of Finnish Public Libraries comprised of the decentralized organizational structures, which highly relied on teamwork at different levels in the libraries. Decentralized organizations utilize individuals with a variety of expertise and knowledge for running the library operations. The public library’s core values are customer-oriented. Customer satisfaction is the goal of library operations. All libraries apply core values such as cooperation, mutual respect, courage and creativity. The interviewees also mentioned confidentiality, diversity, quality, openness to everyone, courage, fairness and responsibility.

Head librarians argue that staff works for core values and understands the library guidelines to fulfill the mission. The strategies of the public libraries are to promote reading culture, to cooperate with schools, and to motivate service culture. The success factors of the public libraries are teamwork with leaders who always listen to the customers to support the education system and the reading culture. The public libraries support staff education and are involved with the education and culture group. The communication among staff and customers are non-formal meetings, asking customers, using the library survey for feedback and using statistics. The leadership style builds on openness and flexible teamwork. The head librarians also emphasized that the director also leads as a coach with interpersonal skills. The details are shown in Table 1:

<u><b>Organizational Structure</b></u>	<u><b>Plan &amp; Work flow</b></u>
<p><b>Structure:</b> Decentralized, Part of Hierarchy(5)</p> <p><b>Core values:</b> Customer oriented(5)</p> <p>Cooperation, Mutual respect, Courage and creativity with joy in the center of every value/ Customer, Confidentiality, Diversity, Quality, Open to everyone, Courage, Fairness, Responsibility</p> <p><b>How staff works for core values:</b> Talking/</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b> Reading as a way of life(2)/Motivation is high among staff/Leisure, work with schools/In-time Library collection and service culture</p> <p><b>Success factors:</b> Teamwork(2), Good leaders/Listen to customers(5) Go for targets/Education system and reading culture</p> <p><b>Workgroup activities:</b> Regular meetings(5)/Discussion, Talk about budgets,</p>

Meeting(5)/Discussion/Culture	Staff education, Education and culture groups <b>Work plans:</b> City plans, Follow strategies(5)
<b><u>Communication</u></b> <b>Non-formal, Ask, Survey feedback, Use statistics</b>	<b><u>Leadership</u></b> <b>Coach ,Open, Flexible, Team, Direct</b>

Table 1: The Organizational Culture of Public Libraries in Finland

## 2) Information culture of public libraries in Finland

The study found that the information culture of Finnish Public Libraries comprised the information environment of the city policies and plans. Head librarians expressed that information gathering and use are statistics information, newspapers, reports, articles in social media, city plan strategies and information in the city intranet. The internet is used as a tool for sharing information as well as face to face meeting. Information sharing describes the exchange of data between people and technologies in public libraries by Community of Practice(CoP), Blog and eLearning. Therefore, Skills that are needed in public libraries include social competences, attitudes (such as cooperation skills, communication skills, helping people), ICT skills, language skills, project skills and service skills. All public libraries use the library databases and staff databases to support their work. Information privacy is as important as freedom of speech and access to information. The relationship of organizational culture and information culture are regular meetings to support high-quality service within the public libraries. The details are shown in Table 2:

<u>Information environment</u> Information policy: City policy(5) Information management plan: City plan(5)	<u>Information Gathering</u> <b>Types:</b> Statistics information(5), newspapers, reports, articles in social media/city plan strategies, city intranet <b>Sources:</b> Internet, City intranet, Memo from library groups, Archives, Articles/Customer Feedback/Library magazines/Email groups/Social media <b>Info.resources:</b> Library system(5), Library collection/Finnish classification system (YKL)
<u>Information Systems</u> Information channels: Internet, Meetings(5)	<u>Information Use</u> <b>Info.skills:</b> Cooperation, Communication skills,

<p>Information systems: Library databases(5), Databases for staff(5)</p> <p>Information sharing: CoP, Blog, eLearning, Meetings/Collaboration with customers</p>	<p>Helping people/ICT skills(3), Language skills(2), Literatures/Project skills/Services skills</p> <p>Ethics: Keep information privacy of customers(5), Education for staff/Freedom of speech, Access to information</p>
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Table 2 : The Information Culture of Public Libraries in Finland

## Conclusion

Even though the municipalities in Finland are responsible for maintaining public libraries. The government subsidized the organization activities by funding the proportion of the cost to run public libraries. On the national level, activities are regulated by the Library Act and decree defining of policy and funding. ***From this study, the success factors of public libraries in Finland are teamwork with leaders who always listen to customers to support the education system. The customer-oriented service development is also one of the key strategies as well as promoting reading as a way of life. The support of the city plan in every public library to provide better library services for all is important for high quality library services as well as emphasizing customer-orientation as the core value.*** Skills that are needed in public libraries include social competences and attitudes (such as cooperation skills, communication skills, helping people). Further, librarians need ICT skills, language skills, project skills and service skills. All public libraries use the library databases and staff databases to support their work. The internet is used as a tool for sharing information as well as face to face meeting. Every public library in Finland follows the city policies and plans. Information gathering and use are statistics information, newspapers, reports, articles in social media, city plan strategies and information in the city intranet.

Information culture in Finnish public libraries is the perception of information work and information practices by its members within the organization that follow the city policy and to ensure the access to knowledge and cultural sources in a networking information, civic and learning society. Besides, the quality of public libraries in Finland comprises the sufficient number of qualified librarians and staff, adequate and update information resources, the Internet and digital services (Finnish Public Library Policy 2015: 2009).

From this study, it is interesting to find out what are the public library's core values and information culture in other ASEAN countries. Strong information culture can reflect the high-quality library performance.

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