

‘The Google amendment’: achieving new ways of working within traditional constraints

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Griffith University’s Scholarly Information and Research (SIR) portfolio has been undergoing a business initiative labelled ‘Turning a New Page’ (TNP) which has identified the need for staff to be creative and innovative and leverage the available technology to its fullest potential. This paper discusses how the necessity of embedding innovation identified by TNP was brought to life by offering one staff member the opportunity to work differently. It explores the experience from the staff member’s point of view, impact on co-workers, and achievement of organisational objectives. It offers a model which could be applied more broadly within organisations irrespective of type.

Introduction

In 2011, the Scholarly Information and Research (SIR) portfolio began a business improvement initiative, under the leadership of the Director, Scholarly Information and Research. SIR is part of Information Services (INS) at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. Griffith is a multi-campus research and teaching university, with 5 campuses across Brisbane and the Gold Coast, providing services to over 40,000 students.

Within SIR there is an Academic Services group, including the Library and IT Help unit, which provides the first point of contact for most IT and Library queries, both face to face and electronically, and an Academic Services Unit, including Academic Services Librarians who provide support to researchers across multiple disciplines on all five campuses. The Scholarly Content and Discovery group within SIR includes the Research Data Services Unit, including the eResearch Team and the Scholarly Information Unit which includes Vendor Services and Acquisitions.

This initiative, branded Turning a New Page (TNP), has been working for 18 months to identify services and gaps, as well as consider any necessary structural changes. TNP has been more fully documented in Sparks et al, 2013. The aim of the initiative was to “embed innovation and integrate e-research and library services” (Sparks et al., 2013). To embed innovation, management needed to investigate new ways of working.

Another element deriving from this model includes the concept of adding a Google-like amendment to existing position descriptions. This addition allows flexibility for staff to participate and contribute to project teams as a small percentage of their current role. Just as Google encourages engineers to work on any company related projects they choose for up to 20 per cent of their time, we want to encourage staff to seek activities that interest and excite them and also support building their skills (Mediratta, 2007). The goal is to make it easy for staff to volunteer and for managers to endorse participation in projects and experiments. (Sparks, et al., 2013)

This paper discusses the next stage of the TNP journey, discussing innovation and what it means within a traditional organisation structure and culture, and explains the outcomes of attempting to implement the concept of the Google-like amendment. We then describe one Librarian’s journey in building an innovation community “on the edge”.

Innovation is everywhere

Innovation takes many forms, and organisations take many different approaches to positioning themselves to be innovative. There is an extensive literature on the topic covering many decades, and a work that is still widely referenced, Everett Rogers’ *Diffusion of Innovations* was first published in 1962.

Universities offer degrees on innovation, and there are research centres studying innovation. There is a group of universities who have positioned themselves as the Innovative Research Universities, and in an increasingly competitive higher educational environment, innovation appears to be an important marketing strategy. But as the word has become so overused, organisations are turning to a more evocative phrase to describe their commitment to innovation – “on the edge”.

In June 2012, Deloitte announced the establishment of the Centre for the Edge. Their press release on their website has a sub-heading – *strengthening its commitment to innovation*. With a Chief Edge Officer in charge, the Centre is described as Deloitte’s global applied research and thought leadership development group (“Deloitte launches Centre for the Edge in Australia – strengthening its commitment to innovation,” 2012). While their commitment to innovation comes through very strongly, the most interesting thing about this initiative is that Deloitte feels they need a separate centre to strengthen commitment to innovation. This is an example of one model of structure used to encourage innovation.

Google is often held up as an example of an innovative organisation. On his blog post explaining why he left Google, previous Google employee James Whittaker stated that “Google was run like an innovation factory, empowering employees to be entrepreneurial through founder’s awards, peer bonuses and 20% time”.(Whittaker, 2012). This is an example of embedded innovation.

What is Innovation?

Rowley (Rowley, 2011) discusses the definition of innovation, especially as it applies to libraries, and adopts the following:

Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace (Baregheh et al., 2009, p. 14).

The concept of ‘new’ seems to be required for something to be innovative, but ‘new’ needs a context. A product, service or process that has been in use for some time at one organisation might be new for another – is that then innovation? Or is that simply catching up? Does innovation have to be ‘the first’, or can it be as simple as ‘new’ in the relevant context? In a competitive environment such as currently exists in the higher education sector, the ability to highlight an outstanding service or product that is unique is important, so in that context, the creation of ‘new’, ie ‘unique’ or ‘first’ has value.

Client service is more important than ever, and service organisations such as libraries strive to meet the needs of researchers, academics and students. The ability to be creative and innovative with constrained resources is critical. So in this context, it may not matter if a new or improved product service or process is innovative, or if it makes a difference to the marketplace, providing it adds value for the client either directly or indirectly.

How is innovation created?

Jantz (Jantz, 2012) conducted a literature review on factors influencing innovation in research libraries, and discusses four major factors: leadership, new knowledge, organizational structure, and perceived innovation attributes. He reported (Jantz 2012 p.530) on findings by (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012) that one of the most consistent indicators of innovation is the leader’s positive attitude toward change. Jantz puts forward eight propositions that relate to the institutional and service framework, organisational structure and leadership, after having identified that innovations largely fall into either administrative or technical innovations, and can be incremental or radical.

- P1: Technical innovation activity in research libraries will be predominantly incremental as opposed to radical.
- P2: In research libraries, formalization will be positively associated with technical, incremental innovations and negatively associated with technical, radical innovations.
- P3: In research libraries, formalization will be positively associated with administrative innovations, both radical and incremental.

P4: In research libraries, centralization will be positively associated with administrative innovation, both radical and incremental.

P5: In research libraries, centralization will be positively associated with technical, radical innovations and not significantly related to technical, incremental innovations.

P6: In research libraries, organizational complexity will be positively associated with technical innovations—both radical and incremental—and will have a stronger association with radical innovations.

P7: In research libraries, leaders' formal education beyond the MLS will be positively related to radical innovation.

P8: In research libraries, the age, tenure in the library, and tenure in the profession of the leadership team will be positively related to incremental innovations and negatively related to radical innovations.

He goes on to say:

For a sustained innovative activity, all organizational members should feel empowered to suggest innovations not only within their sphere of responsibility, but also innovations that might be relevant in other units or have a multiunit impact. For organizational members to initiate or pursue more radical concepts, they will require the organizational and psychological support that leaders can provide. (Jantz, 2012)

While not surprising, Jantz's arguments support the strategy proposed by the TNP initiative for embedding innovation.

Rowley's arguments, although support empowering staff, raise some concerns:

... innovation cannot just be left to chance – it needs managing. In addition, without a clear commitment to an innovation project, innovations are likely to become swamped by everyday activities (Rowley, 2011 p.256)

One of the tasks of TNP was to consider organisational structures, and what was identified was also described by Rowley.

...existing organizational structures are designed to support the day-to-day activities of the organization and may not be well structured to facilitate, for example, communication, team-working, and resource allocation for innovation. (Rowley, 2011 p.256)

Rowley mentions a CMI study (Patterson and Kerrin, 2009)

...which asked respondents to identify the top three catalysts of innovation in their organization; almost half identified managers' support and openness to innovation as critical. Four in ten pointed to the role of leaders in modeling behaviours that encourage innovation, whilst almost a third highlighted the importance of setting up the right team of people. (Rowley, 2011 p.257)

The TNP proposal identified that setting up the right teams was important, but stopped short of what the 'right' teams are. Rowley indicated that:

...high-performance project teams rarely happen by accident. They are the result of careful selection, enhanced by investment in teambuilding, clear guidance on roles and tasks, and attention to the social aspect of group processes as well as the task aspects. (Rowley, 2011 p. 258)

This implies a layer of management and control that runs counter to the spirit of TNP, as explained below.

Another element deriving from this model includes the concept of adding a Google-like amendment to existing position descriptions. This addition allows flexibility for staff to participate and contribute to project teams as a small percentage of their current role. Just as

Google encourages engineers to work on any company related projects they choose for up to 20 per cent of their time, we want to encourage staff to seek activities that interest and excite them and also support building their skills (Mediratta, 2007). The goal is to make it easy for staff to volunteer and for managers to endorse participation in projects and experiments. (Sparks, et al., 2013).

Innovation Communities

Another structure for innovation is the innovation community – a group working within and across organisational structures. These communities are formal or informal, and work together to identify and create innovation, and may already be part of organisational structures, and just as communities of practice share information and ideas, these communities come together to create innovation.

Users who are central elements of the community, especially user groups with demand for cultivating "innovation ability", are no longer passive service recipients, but will be participants and organizers of the design and construction of the information environment and activities of the innovation community. (Lu & Guo, 2009 p.262)

The following diagram shows the components of a toolkit designed to better understand the influencing factors on the performance or 'success' of innovation communities. (*Innovation Communities : Teamworking of Key Persons : A Success Factor in Radical Innovation*, 2012)

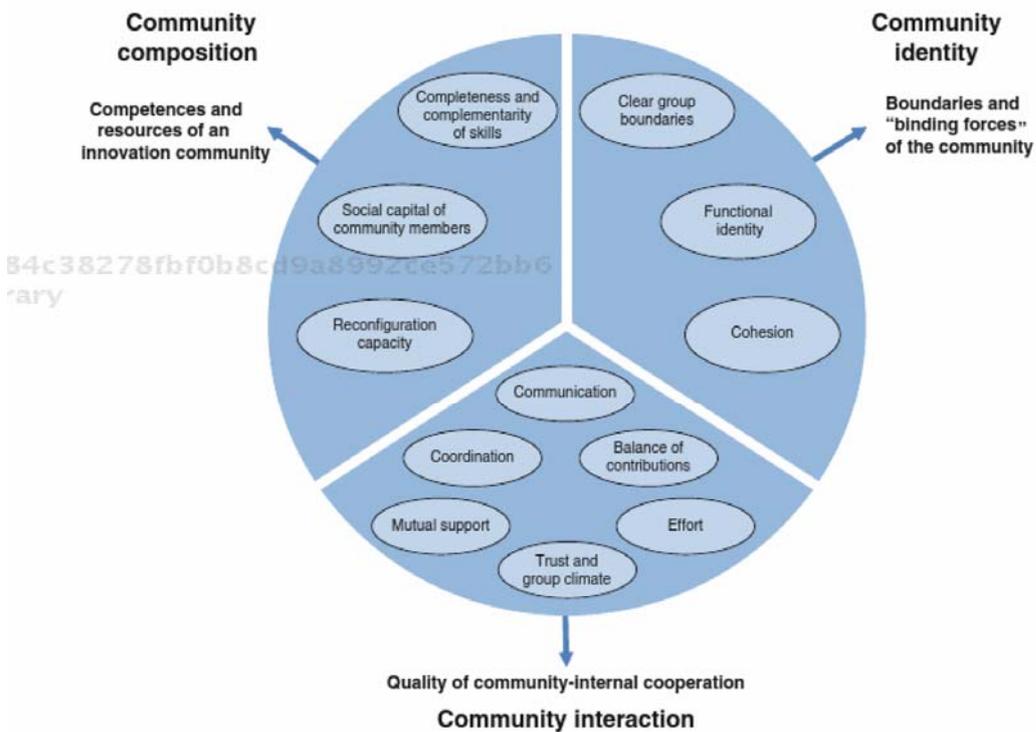


Fig. 5.1 Influencing factors on the performance of innovation communities (Source: Author)

These factors could be applied to the success of any community group, so it isn't difficult to see their relevance to an innovation community.

The Google amendment – the spirit of TNP meets the practicalities of HR

The Griffith Human Resources (HR) environment is very traditional, underpinned by an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, position descriptions and based on a hierarchical structure. Many staff work to rosters to staff service points, with negotiated or set times available for professional development. Many staff are assigned to projects in quiet times, but always under supervision and in a structured manner.

Expectations around self-directed work towards innovation, and the creation of the necessary teams and pooling of resources to achieve the desirable outcomes didn't fit within either the current workplace culture or the demands of service delivery. Demanding workloads leave little time or energy for the creativity necessary to be innovative.

The only way to build in this significant cultural change seemed to be to use the existing systems, and to add a statement to the position descriptions. The statement below (the Google amendment) was created, borrowing heavily from some Google job advertisements.

All staff are expected to spend up to 20% of their time working on creative projects which may require them to work cross functionally with other internal teams to leverage resources most effectively to have substantial impact.

This was felt to be too strong, so it was watered down to :

All staff are encouraged to spend between 5-20% of their time or as negotiated working on creative projects which may require them to work cross functionally with other internal teams to leverage resources most effectively to have substantial impact.

While very supportive of the concept, after discussions at various levels, HR staff were unwilling or unable to approve the addition of the statement to the position descriptions, and felt it was unnecessary as there is already the ability to allocate staff time to projects. That ruled out the option of formalising this expectation (at least for now) as expressed in Sparks' paper (Sparks et al, 2013).

A new way of working – at the edge

While thinking through this issue, a Librarian who could be considered a 'spark plug' (Lubans, 2010) was attending the [mLibraries 2012](#) conference in the UK at the end of a lengthy holiday. This was the Librarians' first overseas trip, and her experiences were likely to provoke much thought, discussion and potential for innovation. When staff members attend seminars or conferences away from normal working routine, their minds are most receptive and stimulated from hearing and thinking and learning about new ideas (Harrison, 2010).

This particular Librarian is employed as an Academic Services Librarian within the Health group at Griffith's Gold Coast campus and has been employed in various roles throughout the organisation such as Library Administration roles, Lending Services, Reference Services, and short term contract opportunities as Monographs Team Leader and the Coordinator of the Higher Education Research Data Collection Survey. She has been at Griffith University 18 years and has extensive networks among the staff, both within and outside SIR. These diverse experiences, networks and personality suggested she would have strong potential to create an innovation community.

It is current practice within SIR for conference or seminar attendees to distribute a report upon return to colleagues outlining major themes, new innovations or technologies they have discovered or learnt. The unfortunate reality regarding this practice is that reports along with potential innovative ideas are filed away on networks drives with most reports never seeing the light of day again. If some staff could 'claim' time immediately following conference attendance to focus on creative ideas and turn them into projects and outcomes, the example set could encourage a culture of innovation to grow within their workgroup and flow onto other areas of the organisation.

Innovative ideas

The theme of the three day m-Libraries conference was "From margin to mainstream: mobile technologies transforming lives and libraries". The conference considered the challenges and opportunities that mobile technologies offer and how they can be used to improve and enhance library services throughout the world. Learning style has become personalised and there is now an expectation of being able to find and connect to any learning materials anytime, anywhere, by any device (Su, 2012). The challenge for any library service provider is to ensure obstacles accessing data from mobile technologies are kept to a minimum and that all services created are sustainable.

When given approval to attend the conference, the Librarian was given specific instructions to capture new ideas about delivery of library services via mobile technologies. The Librarian embraced the opportunity to gain professional development and was motivated to learn what mobile technology services were being delivered in United Kingdom and United States of America.

Claim time

On her return the Librarian was invited to participate in an experiment. On her first day back at work, she was invited to *claim* a few days out of the workplace before she got back into clearing her email inbox and started picking up workload, to take time in a quiet reflective environment to reflect on everything she had heard, and to come up with some innovations for Griffith.

Her supervisor agreed to the arrangement and it was deliberately left quite open, but with the clearly stated expectation that the time was not only to be spent learning about the new mobile technologies, but to have an action plan by the end of the time.

The time claimed enabled the Librarian to continue being receptive and simulated about new and different ideas for the delivery of library services. She was specifically asked to not subject innovative ideas to any limitations or pre-determined mind sets around project size, staffing, IT capacity or capabilities or funding and to apply an open minded approach to ideas.

The Librarian was more than happy to accept the offer and worked *off line* at home for two days without the pressure and interruption of normal duties producing a list of innovative ideas around delivery of library services via mobile devices. The Librarian's normal workload was self-monitored and urgent tasks directed to the Manager for delegation.

Upon return to work the Librarian was asked to share her ideas with the Associate Director SIR and Academic Services Unit Manager. The ideas were clearly aimed at improving services, so the Librarian was offered the opportunity to develop them further and develop them into projects, and this responsibility was eagerly accepted. The Librarian was encouraged to use her networks and experience to engage with other staff members across the organisation to discuss ideas, to confirm viability and to identify which ideas to implement as trials, effectively creating a fledgling and informal innovation community.

Mobile Library Services Group

A small Mobile Library Services Group was formed by the Librarian with no formal structure or governance, containing three staff from different areas and positions across the organisation. Group members handpicked by the Librarian included a Learning and Teaching Manager, Marketing and Communications Advisor and Library and IT Help Team member. Each member was deliberately chosen as all three were known to be easily engaged, early adopters of innovation, technologically savvy, unafraid to offer constructive criticism and in positions that enabled them to support group decisions or ideas through to fruition.

Over the course of several meetings, the first goal of the Mobile Library Services Group which was to identify further ideas about deliverable library services using mobile technology was achieved. Technologies decided to be used in the project trials include Quick Response (QR) codes, Augmented Reality (AR) and SMS Services.

An objective of the Mobile Library Services Group was to implement ideas that wouldn't generate too much organizational resistance or require large resourcing upfront so once the Mobile Library Services Group had finalised services the Librarian developed a "work around the edges" approach avoiding loud promotion and quietly went about designing the services.

Skills audit

After the Mobile Library Service Group decided which ideas could be implemented, the Librarian entrusted with this trial developed a severe case of stage fright. Concerns around the number of ideas earmarked for implementation combined with fear of striking possible resistance from within the organisation saw the Librarian stall. Another concern was that the Librarian was located at a campus remote to where the projects would be implemented.

To work through this, the Librarian took a step back to rethink strategies and to breathe.

Griffith University uses the Prince II project management framework, and INS has a project group which oversee project governance. All projects normally start with a project proposal seeking necessary approval or funding and without any previous project management experience, the Librarian had started focusing on the insurmountable task that lay ahead rather focusing on achievable objectives and outcomes. While some initiatives go ahead without project governance, especially where there is no budget implication, most, even small projects, would benefit from some understanding of project structures and guidelines to ensure objectives are understood and achieved, appropriate communication and engagement takes place, and necessary consultation and approvals takes place.

It was established rather quickly that the Librarian would need to develop basic project management skills in order to move forward to implement projects. After reading a few project management books and after talking to Project Managers with INS, the Librarian realized that the major object stalling the project was the written approval of not only the projects, but also the objectives and desirable outcomes. The Librarian delivered a project proposal paper which was consequently approved by management.

Supportive Management

The Librarian was offered full support around project development, leading to implementation. This allowed the Librarian to demonstrate project approval when speaking to stakeholders and team members regarding the projects. Linking the ideas and projects to the name of any senior manager was considered a crucial move for successful implementation (Jantz, 2012).

The Librarian was given free rein with a very loose reporting requirement and encouraged to take any problems or roadblocks to the Associate Director SIR, who effectively operates as the project sponsor. In this instance, Associate Director SIR was comfortable with loose reporting requirements, but this may vary depending on the staff involved. A critical skill which this librarian has is the ability to develop communication strategies and understand the importance of engagement of key stakeholders. Also important was the Librarians' understanding of the organisation, its structure and culture and to some extent, the internal and external politics. It is this type of appreciation of the organisation size and culture that allowed the Librarian to work around the edges in order to see innovation work (Deloitte, 2012).

Planned projects

All projects will be trialled over a twelve month period using Google Analytics which will keep statistics enabling the Librarian and the Mobile Library Services Group to make decisions around whether or not to modify or retire the projects.

Short and mid-term projects using QR codes and SMS technologies are:

- QR codes in heavily used areas of the physical collection linking clients to library guides offering access to electronic books, journals or databases. The use of QR codes in this instance is to link the client from the hard copy collection to the virtual collection.
- QR codes on course code reserve items linking clients to the catalogue to see if short terms items are available for borrowing allowing clients to place a hold or to retrieve a hardcopy item from the collection if available.
- QR codes near daily hardcopy newspapers advising clients to scan codes in order to access previous editions which are now only available in electronic copy.
- QR codes in prominent student areas of the library so clients can request roving service. Same notice will also provide a SMS number to for clients who don't own smart phones

and need to text requesting the service. Roving service member can meet clients at an agreed location for assistance.

- QR codes near student printing machines linking to a video tutorial stored on the library blog advising clients how to add credit to copy and printing accounts.
- SMS notification roving service allowing students in the library to text from their mobile devices requesting a roving staff member to meet them at an agreed location for assistance.
- SMS Reference service allows students to text the service desk with ready reference type questions.
- SMS notifications and alerts via our Library Management System.

Long term projects requiring further development and funding:

- Library orientation tours using AR applications to enable clients to learn more about the library and services it offers using their smart mobile device. For example when the application is placed over the Lending services desk, a computer generated overlay would appear providing options on how to find out more information about what type of assistance that service point offers. Links to the library home page advising of borrowing process will be included along with links to video clips which offer a personal welcoming message from the Library management. The overlay will also include a link to a floor plan of the library and extra information about the collection locations.
- SMS reminder service confirming details of workshop such as date, time and location in which clients are enrolled. The specific built booking system used for workshops enrollment at this stage does not have suitable capabilities so options are being investigated.

Recommendation

As a result of project implementation, the Librarian and the Mobile Library Services Group have recommended that a Mobile Library Strategy be developed and implemented during 2013. The group were keen to build upon the strategy implemented at Glasgow University Library (Stenson, 2012).

- Mobile use education strategy
- Learning 2:0 programs also known as the 23 Things program. Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library developed the concept and is now used widely in public and academic libraries across Australia (Cheetham, 2012).
- Mobile e-book strategy
- Development of mobile promotion and evaluation strategy

Personal reflection

Position descriptions within any organisation, size or structure can prevent staff from thinking creatively or innovatively and encourage staff to be ritualistic (Clayton, 1997). "From margin to mainstream: mobile technologies transforming lives and libraries" was the theme of the mLibraries conference and as a result of the trial, it seems the role of this particular Librarian has also been transformed. The Librarian responsible for the implementation of these projects now feels empowered and liberated and importantly, she no longer feels held back by her position description.

Conclusion

The TNP process began an evaluation of services and organisational structures to integrate e-research and library services. The objective of embedding innovation into teams by adding an amendment to position descriptions has struck a road block, so other methods are required to achieve the desired outcomes. This experiment drew on the principles of TNP, and leveraged an opportunity to experiment with an innovation community. As a result, the group's innovation has seen the planning of new library services deliverable via mobile devices using mobile technologies such as QR coding and augmented reality.

The next step for SIR is to look at the outcomes achieved, and consider if the strategies adopted in this experiment could be applied more widely.

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