

Clients Needs: The foundation for Service Development and Workforce Planning for the Future

Alternative title –Context + Client Needs+ Collaboration - the Key for the Future of University Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - Proposes that university libraries must learn to work across organisational boundaries and that to do so successfully requires the ability to understand organisational relationships and the ability to choose the best fit between the type of relationship required and the initiative. Collaborative relationships can achieve innovative outcomes, but are the most difficult to achieve.

Design/methodology/approach - Introduces briefly the challenges in the Australian higher education sector and discusses the need for university libraries to work across organisational boundaries. This paper discusses the *3Cs model of Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration* as a tool for assisting libraries to understand the different organisational relationships necessary for forming alliances and collaborating. The paper describes QUT Library's positions of *Information Manager* and *eResearch Access Coordinator* which were developed in response to the needs of the QUT's recently established inter-disciplinary research strategies and compares them against the 3Cs model.

Findings – Establishing new innovative roles and services requires libraries to work collaboratively, but collaboration is difficult to achieve and requires stakeholders to accept some risk. The outcomes of collaborative ventures can present libraries with new challenges with respect to staffing structures, communication and decision making and workforce planning.

Originality/value – QUT Library's Information Manager and eResearch Access Coordinator roles demonstrate an innovate approach by a university library to develop new roles and services to meet the changing environment in which libraries are operating.

Keywords Collaboration, Workforce Planning, Research support, University Libraries, Australia

Paper type General review

THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

It is an exciting time for university libraries. Never before have the opportunities to deliver innovative solutions by working across the traditional boundaries of library, information technology services, learning support services, research support services and faculties been so prevalent.

The opportunities, however, are not without challenges. Not the least of which is a constrained funding environment. In Australia federal government funding for higher education has been contracting for many years. Universities are under considerable pressure to raise funds from alternative sources. In 2006 the Australian Government funded a study to

investigate strategies for developing a culture of philanthropy towards universities. Australian universities do not enjoy the generous philanthropic culture that exists in countries such as the United States. Donations and bequests to Australian Universities accounted for only \$171 million or 1.27% of total revenue in 2004. (The Hon Bishop, 2006) Fees from international students have been a welcome stream of external funding, but a recent slowing in enrolments has resulted in more fiscal uncertainty for the sector.

The Australian federal government has recently established a Learning and Teaching Performance Fund to reward universities with additional funding on the basis of outstanding teaching performance. Student feedback is factored into the methodology for assessing teaching performance and only institutions with high rankings receive supplementary funding. Notwithstanding the debate about the validity of the data collecting measures for assessing teaching performance, universities will need to improve the student experience if they hope to secure additional funding.

Competition in the higher education sector is a concern for Australian universities. The introduction of domestic student fees and the increases in those fees over recent years has raised student expectations of their university education experience and opened up the higher education market. There are approximately 40 private training providers in Australia as well as competition from the vocational education and training sector. Strong marketing campaigns by Australian universities demonstrate the competitive environment of the sector. This competition exists in both the physical and virtual learning environments. Furthermore, Australia is currently experiencing high rates of employment and a skills shortage which has the effect of reducing demand for university places.

The funding situation for libraries is further impacted upon by rising costs of scholarly publishing, and inflexible license agreements with vendors for expensive bundles of electronic resources which result in high levels of duplication. The OCLC scan (2003, 7) reported

“As Library funding contracts or remains static (while materials costs increase), staffing and materials budgets receive increased scrutiny from funding agencies and library administrators, creating both challenges and opportunities. The need to reduce costs while the expectations of users increase will significantly impact library services.”

In summary, the context for Australian universities in 2007 is strongly influenced by funding sources: the federal government seeking to influence university direction through funding policies, a competitive marketplace and falling domestic and international demand.

COLLABORATION THE ROAD TO TRANSFORMATION

Brewer et al (2004) argue that academic libraries must reach a transformed stage if they are to survive in the context of diminishing library budgets and other challenges. Building on the work of Guskin and Marcy (2003), Brewer et al apply a *transformative model* to academic libraries which classifies libraries along a continuum from “Muddling through” to “Transitioning” to being a fully “Transforming” library. (Brewer, Hook, Simmons-Welburn, Williams 2004) Some of the characteristics of the transformed Library include:

“Transformed Library

- *Partners with other campus agencies to achieve the collective university goals.....*
- *Serves as a change agent in higher education due to institutional connections, academic values, and cooperative ventures with other libraries.....*

- *Develops new and innovative learning environments and activities through collaboration with other academic and campus units.....*
- *Develops robust collaborative frameworks for the management, access, and preservation of information resources in all formats.....”*

(Brewer, Hook, Simmons-Welburn, Williams 2004, 5)

The transformation process is reliant upon the ability of the academic library to work with other stakeholders on campus. The description includes references to collaboration, cooperation and partnering. Brewer et al (2004, 8) states that:

“The ability to step outside the silos and communicate across disciplines and units will be crucial for institutional transformation”

Barton (2006) in her analysis of the strategic role of the digital librarian states that libraries must work outside the traditional library in *“the context of e-learning and e-scholarship”* Thus emphasising the need for the library to work in the wider context. The digital librarian is defined as a ‘Librarian as researcher’ contributing directly to the work of a research team, ‘Librarian as publisher’ building collections of digital information on behalf of their organisations, and ‘Librarian as a member of the digital library design team’. (Barton 2006, 3) Underlying the success of the librarian in all these roles will be the ability to collaborate effectively across departments. Barton (2006, 3) states that

“Digital librarians must become adept at forging partnerships with colleagues elsewhere in their institutions.”

Librarians will need to develop new skill sets if they are to work successfully outside the current library setting in collaborative work groups and partnerships. For example, not only new professional information skills will be required, but also the skills necessary for working successfully in partnerships and collaborative work groups.

Considerable work has been done to identify the skills required of library and information professionals in the face of a changing information environment. In the United States, “A National Study on the Future of Librarians in the Workforce” aims to identify the extent of the labour shortage and assess the number and types of jobs available and the skills required to do the jobs.

The British Chartered Institute of Library and Information professionals (CLIP) has undertaken research to identify the skills the library and information professional will need for the 21st century. (Fisher, 2005) Included in their findings is a list of generic skills, and although there is no specific mention of collaboration or partnering skills, the list does include *“Multi-profession appreciation”* which is an essential skill for working across boundaries.

The Australian Library and Information Association’s list of generic skills and attributes includes the *“Ability to build partnerships and alliances”*. (Australian Library and information Association, 2005) *“Creating partnerships and alliances”* and *“Recognising the balance of collaborating, leading and following”* are included in a list of *“Competencies for the Information professions of the 21st Century”* prepared for the Special Libraries Association (US). (Abels, Jones, Latham, Magnoni and Marshal, 2005)

Libraries have a tradition of collaborating with each other and there are many examples of well established successful cooperative library networks. The OCLC environmental scan reported

“The really significant advances and the most meaningful and lasting solutions in the library landscape have been cooperative ones” (De Rosa, Dempsey, Wilson, 2003 14)

However, working across boundaries within our organisations presents new challenges for librarians. When libraries work with campus units outside the library they are not speaking library to library as they are with cooperative library networks. Factors such as competition for scarce university resources, different professional perspectives on issues relating to learning and teaching and research, different organisational cultures within departments of a university, all present barriers to collaboration.

Peach (2004) identified tensions between librarians and learning support staff in a university setting due to different understandings of the purpose of learning assistance services. The research demonstrates that a lack of understanding exists between these key professions of their different roles in the provision of learning support.

Terms including partnering, forming alliances, cooperating, and collaborating are found in competency lists for library and information professionals and in the literature to describe the way libraries need to work now and in the future. Within universities "Collaboration" is an increasingly used term. It appears in a range of university documentation from duty statements, through project proposals to memoranda of understanding. The overuse of this term to describe a range of different working relationships and the use of all these terms interchangeably suggests that stakeholders need a common and better understanding of what is required in collaborative organisational relationships if the relationships are to have some chance of success.

THE 3CS MODEL

Brown and Keast's (2003) "3Cs" model of Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration is a useful conceptual framework for developing and managing institutional relationships. The model presents relationships on a continuum starting with cooperation and progressing to coordination and finally collaboration. There is no one best solution. Rather, the type of relationship needs to fit the purpose of the activity.

The table below defines the three types of relationships and demonstrates that the intensity, complexity and duration of the relationships increase with the extent of shared goals, resources, and risks. Cooperation is about taking others into consideration and information sharing. Coordination is a more formal relationship framed around a shared objective and involves pooled resources. Collaboration is a fully integrated relationship. Members of a collaboration see themselves as part of the larger group and not separate groups. (Brown and Keast, 2003)

Take in Table I

Applying the 3Cs model to library relationships with other campus units can improve efforts to work across organisational units within universities. The model can be used to determine and define the appropriate type of relationship and structure needed for a specific initiative before it commences and it can be used as a tool for assessing whether or not an existing relationship and organisational structure is fit-for-purpose. It can provide insights into what may be needed to remedy a failing collaborative venture.

Cooperation and coordination are commonly undertaken in university library initiatives. Collaboration as defined in the 3Cs model is probably a rarer occurrence. Brown and Keast (2003) propose that collaboration can produce great results including changed relationships not just tangible outputs. However, for collaboration to be achieved, stakeholders must be prepared to relinquish control, adopt new management styles, have changed expectations and processes, fund initiatives differently and be willing to take some risks. (Brown and Keast, 2003)

CONTEXT - CLIENTS NEEDS - COLLABORATION AT QUT

Research Support and RQF

Australian universities and the research community are facing new and immediate challenges from the introduction by the Australian Federal Government of the Research Quality

Framework (RQF) which will alter the way in which universities receive a substantial proportion of research funding. RQF funding will be awarded to universities according to the quality and impact of the university's research output which will be judged by independent panels of experts using a number of measuring techniques. Only those universities that can demonstrate high quality, high impact research will receive a share of this funding.

In response to the RQF, Australian universities are focusing on ramping up research quantum and quality. QUT has an ambitious research agenda. Not only are there plans to significantly increase the number of research positions and higher degree students, the university has embarked on an innovative inter-disciplinary approach to research. Four new research institutes with members drawn from across several different faculties have been established.

QUT Library has grasped the opportunity presented by these changes and taken the lead in areas where we have the expertise to assist the university to achieve its' research goals. As part of the university's preparation for the RQF, QUT Library, like other university libraries, has provided advice and training for the University's research community in areas such as bibliometrics, how to increase citation rates, and identification of high quality journals for publication to assist researchers with increasing the quality and quantum of their research publications.

The inter-disciplinary structure of the research institutes required the Library to rethink its current services and faculty-based service model and was an opportunity to develop a new and innovative approach to supporting the University's research program. It was critical that the Library adapt its services and create a model that would meet the needs of our changed research environment.

Established in 2006, The Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI), the largest of the inter-disciplinary research institutes, is comprised of research staff and research level students from three faculties; the Faculty of Health, Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Built Environment and Engineering. The objective is to establish a physical research environment and culture based on collaboration, where researchers from various disciplines are encouraged to get to know each other, talk, share and work together. It is designed to dislodge individual researchers from the confines of their separate offices and discipline labs into physical and virtual collaborative space. The fundamental premise is that solving most real world problems such as climate change or third world health issues requires the successful collaboration of experts from many fields.

IHBI is a new business model for QUT which requires the creation of a knowledge-based enterprise, drawing on the intellectual capital of researchers from a number of different research areas to facilitate collaboration on research projects. The Library in collaboration with IHBI established the position of *Information Manager* to meet the information needs of this new venture. The Information Manager position is funded by a three-way arrangement with the Library, IHBI and the Division of Technology, Information and Learning Support (TILS) of which the Library is a department, all contributing equally. The Information Manager is both a member of Library staff and a member of the Research Support Group in IHBI. The Information Manager is located in-situ in the IHBI building and visits the Library weekly for section meetings.

The IHBI Information Manager provides services ranging from regular library reference services to more specialised value-added information services. An important focus of the Information Manager is to help to build the collaborative culture of the newly formed Institute. One strategy towards achieving collaboration is the recording and dissemination of tacit knowledge within the enterprise such as research specialisations and interests of researchers. The Information Manager is a member of a team responsible for building the web based research knowledge database.

The integration and evolution of electronic resources is critical for meeting the needs of the Institute's researchers. In particular, computer-based communication technologies and virtual

collaborative spaces which enable access to information where and when it is needed and the transfer and sharing of knowledge are a focus for the Information Manager.

The Information Manager leads the newly established IHBI Service Team. The IHBI Service Team is the second tier of the Library's reformed service model to support inter-disciplinary research. Service teams are in place for all the inter-disciplinary research institutes. The IHBI Service Team is comprised of faculty subject specialist librarians from the faculties represented in IHBI, as well as staff outside the Library from other departments within our Division who have research support roles, including the High Performance Computing staff from Information Technology Services (ITS).

The Information Manager does not replace the subject specialist librarians, but rather adds another top level specialist service. The subject specialist librarians located in the university library continue to offer the full range of reference services to the research staff and students of their faculties who are members of IHBI, including one-on-one expert advice sessions, information literacy training and collection building to support research specialisations.

The Information Manager provides a vital link between the Library, the Division and IHBI. The Information Manager has the obvious advantage on being "On-the-ground" and therefore able to identify researchers' needs and facilitate contact between the researcher and the relevant subject specialist librarian. The Information Manager represents not just the library but also the Division and performs a key role in connecting the Library, The Division and IHBI.

eResearch

eResearch is transforming the way research is done. The generation of research data is growing exponentially, leading to massive computing requirements to collect, store, manage and access these huge quantities of data. Research on a global scale is now possible and governments, research institutions and universities are grappling with the physical infrastructure and changes in the culture of research to enable and foster collaboration between researchers within each country and across the world.

eResearch is an important strategy for QUT because it facilitates the collaborative research strategy embraced by QUT and its new inter-disciplinary research institutes. QUT already leads in some areas of e-Research with its established QUT ePrints which digitally publishes research papers, and the use of grid computing portals which facilitate collaborative research between groups and individuals.

eResearch provides an important opportunity for university libraries to provide leadership in their organisations. Harboe-Ree (2006) argues for a significant role for librarians in e-Research as information management specialists, metadata advisors, IP/copyright advisors, and publishers through our work with open access, and as leaders with a long tradition in the provision of repositories.

QUT Library, in response to the emerging e-Research agenda has established the position of *eResearch Access Coordinator* which will be key to the development of eResearch initiatives at QUT. A fundamental requirement of the role is the ability to work collaboratively. All aspects of the eResearch Access Coordinator's responsibilities require working with stakeholders from outside the Library. The eResearch Access Coordinator is responsible for working across QUT faculties, research institutes and other departments within TILS to enable researchers' uptake of eResearch opportunities. The eResearch Access Coordinator will investigate and develop systems for the organisation and curation of research datasets, as well as broker access by QUT researchers to external datasets. The position is also responsible for coordinating the Library's support for QUT research by provision of repositories to store digital copies of QUT's research publications and theses and by promotion of publishing through open access journals.

An assessment of the Information Manager and the eResearch Access Coordinator positions against Brown and Keast's (2003) criteria for collaboration reveals that QUT Library has achieved a truly collaborative model. The new positions have required the Library to:

- Relinquish control and share responsibility for the roles with other stakeholders
- Adopt new management styles
- Change expectations and processes
- Fund the positions differently
- Be willing to take some risks

The Library's experiences with establishing these new positions have borne out Brown and Keast's (2003) assertion that collaboration is indeed the most difficult of the relationships on the 3Cs continuum to achieve. The establishment of the Information Manager and eResearch Access Coordinator positions required the Library to:

- Scan the environment and identify opportunities for the Library
- Develop a vision and articulate it clearly to all stakeholders
- Exercise high level negotiation skills to convince others of the benefits of the roles
- Take some risk and
- Work with stakeholders outside the Library in an ongoing way. Library staff have learnt that it is essential to develop a deep understanding of the priorities and business of the other stakeholders and not to make assumptions based on Library practice.

The Future and Workforce Planning

The Information Manager and e-Research Access Coordinator positions were created by the Library in response to the new context in which the University is operating and in anticipation of our clients' immediate and future needs. Information Manager and eResearch Access Coordinator are regarded as ground-breaking, high risk roles with strategic library-wide responsibility and report directly to senior executive Library staff. They are outside the Library's current campus-based organisational structure and current information sharing and decision-making forums. The risk with this structure is that the positions may become isolated from the remainder of the Library.

The Library will need to re-scope and redefine these research support roles as developments in the research arena are played out across the University and the Australian research community. The Library's aim is to learn from these positions and to eventually embed advanced research support skills into other positions across the Library. To achieve this the Library will need to identify the skill sets required in the new roles and inform our workforce plan accordingly.

QUT has recently written a workforce plan with some 26 recommendations which aims to provide the Library with a long term systematic approach for ensuring our workforce meets the current and future needs of the organisation. Key themes of the plan include:

- Ongoing and continuous review of skill requirements and competencies and the Library's requirements, including an immediate gap analysis between current skills against the newly documented generic skills.
- Ongoing responsive staff development so newly identified skills can be developed by the staff.
- Secondments outside the Library, in addition to the traditional training programs, so staff have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the wider context.

QUT Library workforce plan follows on from work undertaken by the libraries of the Australian Technology Network of Universities (LATN). In 2004 LATN commissioned a consultant, Whitmill and Associates to advise on succession and workforce planning among the ATN member libraries.

The recommendations from the consultancy presented QUT Library and other Libraries of the ATN with a challenging agenda which if achieved would result in fundamental change in the staffing of our libraries. The recommendations for QUT Library were:

- Revision of selection criteria to focus on learning agility, personal; attributes and leadership qualities

- Consideration of all vacancies to determine if requirements have changes or new priorities exist
- Identification of staff with leadership and management potential and allow them to take on greater challenges
- Conduct an inventory of skills and attitudes needed by the library for both short and long term.

(Whitmill, 2004)

CONCLUSION

The wider context in which university libraries are operating presents both challenges and opportunities. Australian university libraries have the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in their institutions and across the higher education and library sectors by identifying the immediate and future needs of our clients, recognising the expertise the Library has to offer and positioning the Library so it can move into new areas and develop new service models, as QUT Library has done with the establishment of the IHBI Information Manager and the e-Research Access Coordinator. Underpinning these new ventures is the ability to work collaboratively across organisational boundaries. Using a framework to enable a deeper understanding of organisational relationship such as the 3Cs model is an effective way to choose the best fit between the type of relationship and the initiative being undertaken and will result in more successful interdepartmental relationships. The Library will need to continuously review the skills required in new roles and services and update workforce plans accordingly.

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Structure	Relationship	Duration	Goals/Perspective	Structural Linkages	Formality	Risks/Rewards
Networking	Cooperation	Short term	Independent outcomes – Autonomous	Loose, flexible links	Informal	Low
Network	Coordination	Medium term	Joint planning and programming –but members remain autonomous	Some level of stability of membership, medium links and often central hub	Formal	Increase in benefits and risks to a point
Network Structure	Collaboration	Longer term	Systems change; Highly interdependent with sharing of power	Members move outside traditional functional areas, tight links	Formal	High risk/high reward

Table. I Networked Forms Unpacked (Brown and Keast, 2003)