

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS AN IDEA ...

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ABSTRACT

Shortly after drafting a research proposal in 2005 to investigate the potential of library blogs in Western Australia, I was offered numerous library employment opportunities. This paper describes how the research proposal subsequently evolved into a brand-new working project after I experienced the potential of the blog first-hand at different libraries as a new graduate

Rome wasn't built in a day and rarely does an idea materialise overnight. This paper summarises the long process of how I jumped at the chance to feature *LibraryThing* in the library newsletter, but was promptly reminded it was inappropriate to promote any third party websites in 2007. Only after much planning and negotiation with peers and colleagues, an official pilot library blog was finally set up in 2010. Currently the first set of social media policy is being drafted for the entire organisation.

New ideas mean changes, and changes can be threatening. This paper explores the lessons learnt in project planning with reference to the JISC's I -skills cycle. I will take you through the journey of how the initial idea was first rejected, then reviewed, revised, and finally reconsidered and recognised by the senior management team.

This paper further challenges and inspires new graduates to get out of their comfort zones, push existing boundaries and take advantage of all accessible tools to turn those brand-new idea into reality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you wake up one day and an idea hits you like a lightning bolt.

So what? Surely someone else had already implemented the idea before you were born and look, you are new to the organization and the managers are busy. Worst of all, you will severely undermine your current and future credibility in the entire libraryland for a potentially long time if your idea flopped.

What will you do? Will you go back to bed, hoping to sleep it off but your idea remains with you like the most annoying summer flies? Should you instead take the leap of faith and believe that it will be successful with the right resources, and actually go for it and claim it as yours? Or will you just accept your destiny without lifting a finger?

In this paper I will share with you my own magic formula in project planning, and some actionable takeaways which could transform you from being clueless to at least somewhere closer to success.

2. MY IDEA-JOURNEY, THE BEGINNING

2004

Bless the library student practicum program; I was already working casually at five different public libraries before I completed my Graduate Diploma of Science (Information Services) at Edith Cowan University (ECU). While I was interacting with different library staff and gaining more work experience, a question came to my mind:

Why were the public libraries in Perth not using library blog as a tool for marketing and engaging their customers? It was still early days for blogs, but it was certainly gaining popularity as a marketing medium for overseas libraries. Can we do the same thing and achieve the same results here in Perth? Why not?

That was my summer fly that refused to leave.

2005 – 06

Before I knew it, I enrolled myself to the Masters of Science (Information Science) by Research course at ECU and decided to turn the above mentioned question as the topic of my research proposal. I spent two years on an extensive literature review even though materials were very limited at that time. I continue to work casually as different libraries just to make ends meet as I savoured every moment of researching and finding the answers.

2007

I accepted my first full time job with my current employer and made the hard decision to put my research on hold. Instead, wasting no time, I took this chance to launch my idea into a working project. With my manager's support, two months into my role I conducted blogging and Flickr classes for the library customers. The respond was positively overwhelming.

Not long after I forwarded a review of the *LibraryThing* website for the Library newsletter, I was told not to promote any third party website on behalf of the Library or the organisation. I was disappointed, but I didn't lose hope. I continued to be active in the industry and widened my network by assisting in the planning of the Perth Library Camp 2007. I was inspired and challenged by other examples I've seen. If they can embrace the social media with grace in their libraries, why can't we do it? Why can't we do it now?

2008

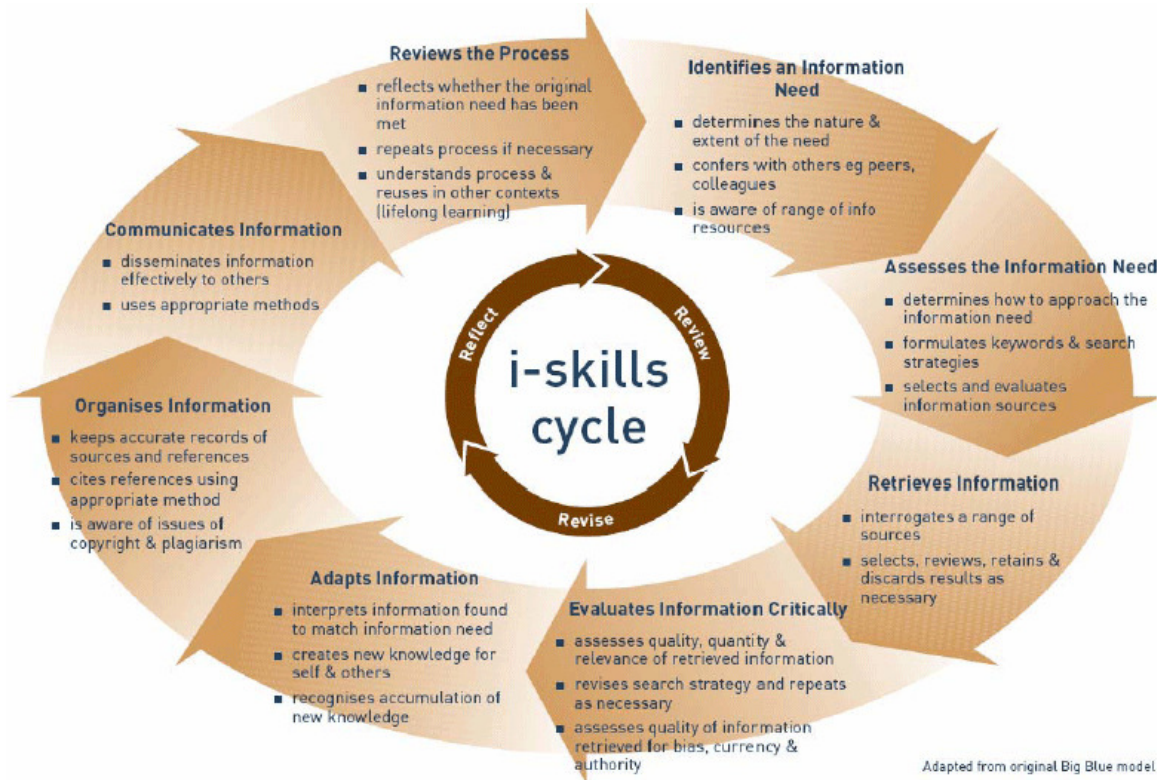
Another year has gone by, I shared my experience at a three minute LibJam sharing session during the Perth Library Camp 2008. Shortly after that I was once again reminded that I should be careful of what I said as I spoke on behalf of my organization. Point taken.

Out of the blue I discovered JISC I-skills cycle from the Australian Library Journal (Hepworth, & Smith, 2008), it is described as a tool to identify, assess, retrieve, evaluate, adapt, organise and communicate information within an iterative context of review and reflection. I photocopied the I-skills cycle and pinned it on my notice board as it fondly reminded me of the Information Literacy cycle I've learnt at the Library school. Just as I was about to give up and cut my losses, on one fateful day, my manager took the photocopy off my notice board, and made a copy for herself and said casually to me:

You would apply this principle to work too

She went back to her office but I was still standing there, gobsmacked. It was exactly what the article was all about but I've overlooked and missed that most important point. That was the turning point of my idea-life as I realized I could use the JISC I-skills cycle as a tool to guide my project planning process.

3. JISC I-SKILLS CYCLE



Journal (Hepworth, & Smith, 2008)

JISC I-skills cycle comprises 8 major concepts. I combined some of the key stages and used the following phases to assist me in my project planning:

3.1. Identifies information need

If you can't describe your brainchild in details right now, trust your instincts and give your idea time to develop in your mind. Or try imagining what you would do if you have more time or knew beforehand that your killer idea will work regardless?

Why do you think it will be worth your time and resources to pursue it? Why would anyone appreciate your idea and what is stopping you from achieving your goal?

Do you know how to integrate your innovation into your organization's culture? How do you make sure your organization is going to reap the benefits from your idea? Are you able to identify the information and resources you needed to answer these questions?

Dig deeper, once you manage to identify the information needed to achieve your goal, talk to someone who can set you straight. At the same time, be visible and start building relationships with a few decision makers. Market yourself and let them know you are keen and passionate about what you believe in. Do not surprise them with your idea at this early stage but continue to spark curiosity and keep them interested.

3.2. Assessing information need, retrieves information, evaluate information

To support your idea, you will need to fine tune it, sharpen it and conduct research more thoroughly than ever before.

After facing numerous setbacks, I realized that there is no point pushing for the idea anymore without first spending more time on research. So I followed the second step of my modified JISC I-skills cycle, and went through all the literature reviews I've done. I spent weeks checking all of Perth's public library websites to look for any Web 2.0 examples and had a feel of what was happening in the industry. Then I emailed and spoke directly to more than 10 different librarians in Perth, asking them for advice. They did not only share with me the problems they faced when implementing social media in their organizations, they also gave me many useful contacts and insights which I had not heard of.

If you have no idea who to ask or who's who, refer to Doessel's (2008) paper from the 4th ALIA New Librarians Symposium for some excellent tips on networking and start getting active in the industry. Contribute to library related meetings, or better still, present a paper or help to organize a conference or an unconference. Things happen when you are visible because other will seek you out once they have heard about you and your capabilities.

When the networking is sorted and now you have a feel of what is happening in the market, compile and evaluate your findings critically and ask yourself if you have enough resources to make it work? Can you identify any gaps in from the research? Base on the information you've gathered, do you have time to achieve your goal on top of your current work load? Whose responsibility is that? Do you provide training to other staff members to carry on the project if you are away? How much time are you willing to sacrifice? How did the other organizations do it? What have they done to overcome their obstacles?

Prepare a risks versus benefits analysis. Are the benefits greater than the risks? Is your plan good to go now? If not, be prepared to cut your losses. Life goes on and a bend in the road seldom means that it is the end of the road. Should you move on to other projects, part ways with the initial idea or to keep going? If you have already crossed the point and decided to make it work, you are finally ready to adapt your information and test your idea.

3.3. Adapts information

To significantly increase the chance for others to buy your idea, turn your project into a value added service for the whole organization instead of just within your department. Think more ambitiously and be willing to work with colleagues from another department. Hand-pick your team members at early stage for their knowledge, skills and expertise. Entice them by aligning your project goals to match their own key performance indicators, interests and ambitions. Create energy, influence the influencers and make it a win-win situation for all parties.

After I had done all the background work, I volunteered and became part of the Town's IT working group and shared my idea in detail with the marketing and public relationship team. I presented to them the potential risks and benefits, working examples from different councils and organizations I'd gathered earlier. Instantly they embraced the potentials of web 2.0 as marketing tools. Then I approached the system analyst for his advice and went through his concerns, I assured him that I will be responsible for updating and maintaining the blog if it were approved. I had also shared my plan with the human resources manager and discussed with her the possible social media policies which would be beneficial for the entire organization.

Once I knew I had enough support and with the help of the Town's website team, I set up a pilot blog for the library. I referred to and modified an existing social media policy by Telstra (2009) to suit our needs, recorded my time spent on updating and maintaining the blog, and captured visitor statistics. I set different milestones to measure the progress of the pilot. I ran the pilot over with the PR, marketing, and IT teams, sought their feedback and obtained suggestions which I might have overlooked.

Do not take risk, pilot test first (De Vaus, 1993). If you are running a pilot or a beta program to test your idea, always draw up a list of benchmarks to test if your idea is realistic and feasible. Consider how your metrics are able to show the benefits of your idea or identify potential practical problems. Stay motivated with small wins but be prepared to consider modifications to the idea or cut losses if the idea does not meet the milestones within the determined timeframe. When you have all these preparation ready, congratulation, you are now one step closer in turning your idea a reality.

3.4. Organize information, Communicate information

Managers are busy people. To ensure that I had the best chance to grab their attention and approval in the shortest time possible; I created a wiki page to keep all the relevant documents and weblinks for their quick reference. Other information, such as findings from the pilot, feedback from other organizations, was distributed well in advance of all our meetings. It was a long process to get that final nod but with the positive feedback and support from various departments, the proposal was finally approved and currently the first set of social media policy is being drafted for the entire organization.

Selling an idea to the senior management can be difficult for all the good reasons. Save them the headaches, drop all the technical terms and leave jargons out of your initial presentation. Are you familiar with the culture of your organization? Which is an appropriate communication method when dealing with the senior management? Do you have all the IT resources or help to present a simple Powerpoint presentation? Or can you upload your presentation to *SlideShare* for others to view online before the meeting?

When you secure the chance for a meet up, sell benefits, not the features; tell a story, not facts. No one may have the same level of passion as you do on the beauty and importance of CSS or RSS, share with them instead how your initiative is going to support the company missions and directions. Convince them why they should devote employee time, and company resources to your idea by demonstrating how it is going to solve an existing problem or add value to the organization.

For my case, it was almost impossible to calculate the solid return on investment in social media from the pilot alone. Moreover, to get the most out from the web 2.0 tools, manpower and skills are required and that could be an expensive exercise. On the flip side, I used my pilot to give them a taste of how the social media can be used as an effective marketing tool for the entire organization as a powerful complement to our existing outreach campaign. I cited specific examples and showed them not only the library would use social media to engage its readers, the PR and Marketing teams could also use it to communicate to the rate payers, while colleagues from Youth Services could use it to stay in touch with the youth in the area. The list went on and they were eager for more.

Give them the chance to play, get involved and be part of the discovery team. Set honest expectations and discuss with them your backup plan to ease their concerns. Be open to feedback and suggestions from the senior management as they have been around in the block much long than you do. Make your first presentation a professional event, not an amateur show.

Now the meeting is over, what's next? To move forward, you need to have a strategy and a step by step action plan. Be as specific as possible and use this system to keep track of all the things you have to do to reach your goal.

Goal	Objective	Resources	Responsibility	Timeline
How is this goal going to contribute to the organization's overall strategic goals? - Milestones 1 - Milestones 2	What makes your goal measurable? What are the milestones for each goal?	Budget Training IT equipments Man-power Marketing	Who is going to achieve this goal? Are staffing levels and skillsets appropriate for the actual workloads?	What is the expected date for completion? Have you allowed time for funding arrangements?

Table 1: Action plan

3.5. Reviews process

Monitor and review your project regularly, tweak what is not working. Use the milestones you set in the action plan to check if the objectives have been achieved. Ask yourself how much have you

progressed towards your goal? Is the timeframe realistic or do you need to acquire more information and resources to continue the project? How does the actual benefits compare to the original project definition? Are there any improvements needed in the procedures or documentation process? It is not the time to point fingers but your findings from the reviews process will be critical for the future project teams to manage their projects more effectively.

To review the process, I conducted a SWOT analysis to have better understanding the project's strengths, weaknesses, as well as the new opportunities and threats facing by the library when implementing social media (Fernandez, 2009). A post-project review meeting was held to go through what went well and what didn't go according to the plan.

Furthermore, can you identify any lessons learned from this project? Look at your project from the research angle, be bold to share your experience and contribute to the profession by submitting a research paper for a conference, or present your findings at a training session (Davis, 2010)

4. DEAR MANAGERS, TO ASSIST US TO TURN THE IDEAS INTO REALITY, PLEASE..

Challenge us

Employees at all levels of the organisation can help to identify ways to do things faster, cheaper or better. Keep the "killer phrases" out of the creativity process, a concept that did not work before does not mean that it may not work now. Challenge us to generate and develop new solutions to solve old problems instead. Encourage us to step out of our comfort zones and be willing to pursue new ideas and exercise our creative muscles.

Empower us

Give us greater autonomy to think out of the box and surprise you with our new ideas to cut costs or improve existing customer service. Be inclusive, share with us your goal and tell us your expectations. Show us your commitment by setting aside funds to test new idea. Enthusiasm is infectious, allow us to be the champions of new initiatives in the organization. If you approve our ideas, let us implement them promptly, if not immediately.

Coach us

All that being said, not all ideas are practical or even sensible, be decisive and firm when helping us kill off bad ideas. Nevertheless, learning is accomplished through trial and error, allow a fair margin of error and provide us with a safe haven for new mistakes. Lead by example, show us you are committed by using the mistakes we made as training opportunities.

5. CONCLUSION

When you are consumed by your new idea, everything will seem to confirm you are right but in fact some of your assumptions and even your research result may be wrong. When my idea first hit me, I dived right into it without any consultation or consideration and therefore spent two years not knowing

why the concept was not able to materialize. I was inexperienced and failed to comprehend the exact process needed to go through for buy in, as well as the massive amount of staying power, energy and interest which is required to get the idea implemented.

To avoid making the same mistake, consider the project planning process as a cycle with different stages, and not a straight-through clear cut process. Study the use of the JSIC I-skills cycle, or other project management life cycle of your choice, modify the steps to match your needs, and no matter what you do, always remember to invest heavily in the planning process before you embark on any projects.

No one else has your unique mix of talents and skills, and you will always have something to offer. If you are passionate in what you believe, hold tight to your idea and don't let it disappear. A true go-getter seldom plays it safe or accepts mediocrity. Take positive risks as nothing will ever achieve by just watching from the sidelines. An idea is seldom the end; it is merely a means to an end. When things go wrong, take advantage of the situation and learn something out from it.

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.”, keep this phrase from Samuel Beckett close to your heart as you turn your idea into reality,

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