



Evolution or Revolution? New roles for Library staff in organisational knowledge management

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Abstract

A recent paper by the QUT Vice-Chancellor, "Framing our Future", called on QUT staff to experiment, engage and regenerate. This paper discusses ways in which the QUT Library has already begun to experiment with new services, engage in new business interdependencies, and regenerate the roles of staff in Lending and Library Resource Services. This is being done by using existing Library strengths in knowledge management, and building new ones in partnership with other areas of the University. QUT Library implemented the Course Materials Database in 2001. The Course materials Database is designed to enable digitisation of copyright materials previously held in hard copy reserve collections, and make resources available to students 24/7. Sophisticated copyright management strategies designed by the Library will also be used to centrally manage copyright compliance for other areas of the University. Library Resource Services and Lending Services staff have developed expertise in scanning and digitisation techniques, and the Library Systems staff have collaborated with Information Technology Services in the design of the database. As the second stage of the project, loading of External Studies and coursepack material has progressed, new business relationships with the Teaching and Learning Services Staff, the University Printing Services including Student Copying and Printing Services, and the University Bookshop have been created, and some exciting opportunities are developing for the Library to extend its influence within the University. A new "print-on-demand" option is jointly being developed. These emerging interdependencies will allow the development of new roles and skills within the Library, and enable new career paths for professional and non-professional Library staff.

Queensland University of Technology Library has pursued strategies which have allowed it to take a leading role within the University in providing electronic resources for students. This has been achieved by taking an innovative and entrepreneurial role in the provision of digital resources to support teaching and learning. Key roles that Library staff now play include the giving of expert advice on copyright and consideration in the provision of course resources, interpreting licensing agreements and their impact on resource provision, scanning and database creation. These new roles have led to a gradual widening of the skills base of many Library staff, and the evolution of new and interesting jobs for Lending Services and Library Resource Services (Technical Services) staff. At QUT, the process has been evolutionary, and has occurred incrementally as a natural result of the strategies adopted by the Library to meet demand, and improve services. It has also occurred as a result of having to do more with less, and finding clever solutions to increased workloads.

QUT Library has also embraced flexible staffing solutions, which have allowed us to meet key performance indicators and improve productivity, after a period of considerable reengineering during the 1990s. It was recognised that Library Resource Services (LRS) and Lending Services in particular, experienced peak demand at different times during the year, and systems were introduced to allow Lending staff to be seconded into LRS for fixed periods each year. These periods were based on a mapping of peak times in Lending and LRS.

This flexibility has also led to a gradual evolution of tasks in Lending Services and Library Resource Services. Lending Services tasks have evolved from the operating of paper-based silos such as processing of Course Reserve requests, and manual handling tasks such as shelving, to a workstation-based model, dealing with electronic services, client-focused procedures such as inter-campus loans, and desktop delivery of documents. Library Resource Services tasks have expanded to include indexing and maintenance of the database underpinning the Course Materials Database, direct client contact with academic staff clients of the Course Materials Database, locating and manipulating of electronic resources across the University to populate the Course Materials Database, linking to databases able to supply permanent URLs at the article level, and copyright compliance management.

In addition the Library has sought business opportunities outside its traditional boundaries, and collaborative ventures with Divisional partners, such as Open Learning, QUT Printing Services, and the University Bookshop.

A.D. Abbott states three general characteristics for any profession—

- 1 Professions address human problems amenable to expert service.
- 2 Professions compete vigorously for new and emerging problem jurisdictions.
- 3 Professions seek to expand their jurisdiction by pre-empting the territories of other professions. (Abbott, 1988: 14)

The QUT Library Project Stage 2, demonstrates the way that QUT Library staff have embraced all three of these characteristics, in order to win new business opportunities.

Background– Experiment

QUT Library implemented the Course Materials Database in 2001 and since that time over 20,000 high–use coursework documents have been scanned, converted to PDF, and indexed into the database. The Library Resource Services Deputy Manager also scanned current licence provisions of databases that the Library subscribed to, and in some cases made contact with vendors about their ability and approval to provide a permanent URL at the article level. Not all vendors were willing or able to provide permanent URLs for the Course Materials Database .

The Course Materials Database replaced the physical collection of photocopied copyright articles held in Course Reserve collections at each branch of the Library. This has been a cooperative project of the Library, and Teaching and Learning Support Services (TALSS) Online Learning and Teaching (OLT). Online Learning and Teaching staff provided a secure webpage for each unit currently taught at QUT, within which copyright course materials such as photocopied articles, book portions and lecture notes could be located and used by students. Library staff made the items available to students by scanning and loading of the photocopies that were required readings in the Course Reserve collection in 2001.

Since that time, any copyright high–use readings can be selected by lecturers to be digitised and made available for students via the Course Materials Database. A request form within the Library web site allows academic staff to request resources to be made available for defined teaching periods. Library staff locate, scan, convert to PDF and index the material The Course Materials Database was designed primarily as an integrated information resource service for students, and is also “fundamentally a copyright management system” (Young and Stokker, 2001: 2)

New Business– Engage

Costings undertaken during the initial project proposal stage of development of the Course Materials Database, indicated that it was cheaper for a student to buy a printed coursepack, than print out individual documents, so the intent of stage two of the project was to make the documents available for electronic access, as well as in printed resources. It was also intended to provide a central database from which other areas of the University could source documents to produce printed coursepacks and External Students Notes, and to manage the copyright obligations associated with their provision.

Stage 2 of the Course Materials Database project was undertaken in 2003–2004. The work was divided into two phases. Phase 1 entailed the digitising and loading of External Students’ Notes packs into the Course Materials Database, and phase 2 completed the digitising and loading of all copyright material in all other printed sets of readings (coursepacks), which were available for purchase from the University Bookshop during 2003. Project funds were made available to employ a HEWA8 Project Manager for six months, and a team of three HEWA3 project workers, who were employed for the lifetime of the project. The Deputy Library Resource Services Manager (Technical Services) designed and managed the day–to–day workflows, and

established procedures for the ongoing work for Library Resource Services Serials staff after the end of the Project. The project took approximately eighteen months to complete.

Opportunities arose during the project for Library staff to expand their roles and skills base, and engage with the functions of other areas of the Division of Technology, Information and Learning Support (DTILS), and the University, and raised the possibility of further business synergies. The definitions of synergy,

- The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.
- Cooperative interaction among groups, especially among the acquired subsidiaries or merged parts of a corporation, that creates an enhanced combined effect (www.dictionary.com)

well describe the outcomes of this project.

The work that was done by the Project Team has established processes by which the Library will play a continuing and central role in assisting with provision of resources, which have traditionally been provided by other University Divisions and Sections, to both external and internal students.

New Roles– Regenerate

1. External Students Notes

During the first part of the second stage of the Course Materials Database Project, the Project Team were required to copy files originally created by the Open Learning Unit for the External Students’ Notes, convert them into PDF and index them into the Course Materials Database. Discussions were held with the Manager of Open Learning, and her staff, who were invited to join the Project Working Party. The project staff made contact with the Open Learning Computing Support Officer, who enabled them to access the Open Learning Server. They were then required to open index files created by Open Learning staff for each external unit, and from there to open the individual files for each reading. These files were high–quality PDF, which had been prepared by Open Learning staff. The Project Team assessed the quality of each file, and checked them for copyright compliance within the digital environment. They also put aside any files which may have had some issues of non–compliance with copyright requirements within the digital environment, for further checking. Any citations that could not be confirmed as compliant with current copyright requirements in the digital environment, or could not be bibliographically verified, were reported back to the Open Learning staff. The files were then subject to the Adobe Capture process, which uses optical character recognition to convert TIFF files created in scanning processes, to PDF, and also reduces file size.

Benefits to the Library

The workflows that the Project Team established with the Open Learning staff are now being used by Library Resource Services staff, as part of their ongoing work. At the beginning of each semester the Open Learning staff members notify Library Resources Services (LRS) staff of any new or changed units on the Open Learning server, and LRS staff copy and index any new readings within these units into the Course Materials Database. This work forms part of a continuum. Open Learning staff and LRS staff are at either end of a process of locating and retrieving files from each other’s servers to populate the Course Materials Database and the printed External Students Notes packs.

This is a similar model to the one developed for work done by Lending Services during stage 1 of the Course Materials Database project. At one end of the process, LRS staff receive requests from academic staff and forward them to Lending Services, provide the copyright compliance checking, feedback to requesters, and finally indexing of the material. Lending Staff now receive the request citations from LRS staff, retrieve the material, either from QUT collections or from document delivery, and create high-quality scans using overhead book scanners, on to a local directory. They also copy the files to the Library Resource Services Directories.

The new links with Open Learning have provided opportunities for Library staff to expand their influence, and take a lead role in the provision of digital resources, in collaboration with other areas of our Division. Staff are also gaining new skills and networking opportunities, which mean they are becoming better qualified to take employment opportunities both inside and outside the Library.

Benefits to the Collaborative Partners

Open Learning staff no longer have to produce from scratch all the PDF files used to create External Students' Notes. They have reciprocal access to the Library directories and servers, and will source much of the material they need to produce printed notes sets from the Library Course Materials Database. A certain amount of the copyright compliance checking that used to be done by Open Learning staff will no longer be required, as the documents they source from the Course Materials Database will already have been checked for compliance by Library staff. There is a growing recognition within the University of the Library's central role in copyright management, and an ex-Library staff member is the current University Copyright Officer.

During the project, documents were put aside, which project staff could either not immediately verify, or could not guarantee their copyright compliance. Project staff undertook to check all this material for the Open Learning staff, and a small working party was established to recommend strategies for the provision of an expert copyright clearance service, initially for Open Learning, and eventually for the whole of the University. This Working Party was comprised of the Project manager, The University Copyright Officer, the Open Learning Manager, and the Deputy Manager of Library Resource Services. Recommendations for a copyright clearance service based in the Library were taken to the Divisional Executive for consideration.

The Deputy Manager of Library Resources Services also assisted the Open Learning staff with improving their procedures for ensuring copyright compliance for printed External Students' Notes sets.

2. Course pack copyright documents

A recent survey of academic staff, and their use of the Course Materials Database, revealed that 48% do not intend to produce printed course materials after 2005. This fact is highly relevant to the possibility of further expansion of the roles of Library staff. The second part of Stage 2 of the Course Materials Database Project entailed the digitisation of all copyright documents currently available in printed coursepacks. The responsibility for provision of the materials has previously rested with the University Printing Services (QPS), and the University Bookshop. The cost was borne by Schools and Faculties, with the material being sold on consignment by the University Bookshops. All unsold material was returned to the School or Faculty.

The addition of the copyright materials in coursepacks and external notes, 7,723 in total, brought the number of documents digitized in the Course Materials Database to over 20,000. The Course Materials Database can now be considered to be a central repository for course materials, and the responsibility for their provision to students has shifted from the University Bookshop and the QUT Printing Services, to the Library.

Benefits to the Library

It is not intended to continue the process of digitising existing coursepacks. Between the time the project was proposed in 2001–2002, and its completion in 2004, the number of coursepacks containing copyright material, which were commissioned by academic staff for supply to the Bookshops, fell from an estimated 900 packs produced in 2001, to 450 in 2003–4. As stated previously, 50% of academics do not intend to produce printed coursepacks after 2005. They are in all probability intending to make their required copyright readings available via the Course Materials Database. Library Staff have new roles in the provision of this material, by receiving the requests for new course material from academics, digitizing it and providing access by indexing the material. It is then available to students twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week during the relevant teaching periods.

This new business has allowed Library Resource Services to re-energise some of its services, and develop staff skills.

Meeting the Smart Service Challenge

Benefits to the Collaborative Partners

In 2004, the QUT Printing Services has initiated a new service called FlexiPrint. This print-on-demand product depends on high-quality PDF documents to be available for students to use in "tailor-making" their own coursepacks. These coursepacks are available at a reduced printing cost, and a suite of print options, including cost, time and pickup or mail out options are available for students to select. The use of high-quality PDF files from the Course Materials Database allows the service to provide good quality prints, and also maintain accurate statistics for the Copyright Agency Limited. Their business is migrating from producing printed coursepacks, to providing students with flexible self-selected coursepacks, available at the point of need

The University Bookshop will still provide printed coursepacks of non-copyright materials, and the printed reproduction of articles will remain preferable for some schools for some time to come. Those disciplines whose resources rely on high quality or coloured images, such as science, design, or creative industries will continue to provide printed resources, until the software is available to create satisfactory images, and file sizes which can be delivered easily to students.

Both the QUT Printing Services and the University Bookshop will in all probability experience some downturn in the business of producing printed resources. However the availability of the electronic resources which can be activated from day one of semester, will be a useful support for ensuring course resources are available when needed by the students, even during times of peak demand for those services.

Benefits for Clients

At the end of the 2nd stage of the Course Materials Database project, we have a suite of new services to a range of clients.

These services will

- improve access for external and remote students by adding 24/7 access to course resources, in addition to their printed coursepacks
- assist with a more timely delivery of resources to internal and external students, and resources can be made available immediately they are loaded into the Course Materials Database, without any delays that might be caused by postal service, or peak congestion for competing Printery production of hard copy
- Copyright cleared files in the Course Materials Database will allow Open Learning faster acquisition of some documents required for production of printed External Students Notes sets, and so assist with speedier delivery to students
- Assist academics by providing a very large database from which to choose documents required for coursework, and remove the need for them to supply photocopies to either the Library or Open Learning
- Provides resources to enable students to self-select documents to tailor-make their own coursepacks
- Provides high-quality PDF documents for students to direct to the FlexiPrint service in collaboration with QUT Printing Services

Benefits for Library Staff

During the 1990s, many libraries downsized their Technical Services staff, in response to new technologies and services provided by vendors and budgetary pressures. This was the case at QUT, but it seems possible now, that after several years of development of new services, staff may need to be recruited, with new skills that will enable them to take advantage of the collaborative business opportunities which are arising. These skills include technical Information Technology skills, high-level communication skills, and the ability to quickly adapt to new workflows, which may be dynamic in nature. Participation in projects, both as Managers and project team members is increasing for Library staff. The expertise they bring to these roles in budgeting, time management, risk-assessment, design of new processes and systems, has meant that Library projects are almost invariably successful, and this success is being recognised.

By not being afraid to experiment with new technologies, QUT Library has been able to engage with other sections of the University, and regenerate the roles of Library staff. We see this as evolutionary, a gradual reshaping of the tasks done by particular positions within sections of the Library, as a natural outcome of the information technology age. The vision of Library Directors, including the late Jan Novak, has encouraged staff to find opportunities for growth of our services and to embark on the road to collaboration with other university industries. As Jan noted in 2002, we must "Give new roles to staff to support a cross-functional focus and total integration with overall Library strategy, other library systems, and University and external systems" (Novak, 2002: 8), and "For example, university libraries might form alliances with university bookshops and piggyback on each other's systems". (Novak, 2002: 3) The second stage of the Project has allowed us to do just that.

Evolution or Revolution?

Evolution is survival of the fittest

Evolution is finding the best design to fit the environment

Evolution is taking risks and being prepared to discard failures

Evolution is the gradual transformation of Library services to cater for the needs of the wired generation

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