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Workplace Practice

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Biography

Darren has worked in the library sector for fifteen years, seven as the Information Services Manager at the Yarra-Melbourne Regional Library. He has been involved in the SWIFT project for the past three years and currently is the Chairperson of the Users' Group and a member of the Steering Committees.

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Biography

Kevin has held various senior positions in his working career at organisations such as Canon and DMR. As a project manager, he has led numerous successful projects. He was engaged in October 2006 as project manager, to procure and implement the preferred integrated library management system for the SWIFT Consortium.

From standalone to SWIFT

Abstract

Numerous issues face libraries today. Libraries of all types are challenged to provide greater information access and improved levels of service, while coping with the pace of technological change and ever-increasing budget pressure (Sun Microsystems, 2003). Richardson and Hopkins' (2004) research found that institutions are looking closely at their IT investments, and holding them up to the same scrutiny as other deliverables, i.e. looking for return on investment. The world of public libraries has sped up over the past ten years. Libraries and other information society stakeholders have realised that the only way to remain relevant in a networked information environment is to develop collaborative relationships and networked solutions to meet the pressures of change brought about by the information society.

In 2001 a group of six Regional Library services asked the question "why don't we acquire an Integrated Library Management System (ILMS) together?" At the time five of the six libraries, needed to review and acquire a new ILMS for one of two reasons. They were either not happy with their current system due to supplier relationships or their current system was not going to be supported in the near future. As other library services in Victoria were also looking to acquire an ILMS in the next two to five years, the SWIFT Consortia was established. The SWIFT initiative is a partnership between the Municipal Association of Victoria and VICLINK to create a collaborative library management system for Victoria's public libraries. SWIFT aims to deliver seamless state-wide access to Victoria's library resources and improved, equitable, and sustainable information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. This paper outlines the history of the project, what has been achieved to date and the challenges ahead.

Introduction

'Every project has risk. There is always at least some level of uncertainty in a project's outcome, no matter what the Microsoft Project Gantt chart on the wall seems to imply' (Kendrick, 2003).

'Numerous issues face libraries today. Libraries of all types are challenged to provide greater information access and improved levels of service, while coping with the pace of technological change and ever-increasing budget pressure' (Sun Microsystems, 2003). Richardson and Hopkins' (2004) research found that 'institutions are looking closely at their IT investments, and holding them up to the same scrutiny as other deliverables, i.e. looking for return on investment'.

The world of public libraries has sped up over the past ten years. Libraries and other information society stakeholders have realised that the only way to remain relevant in a networked information environment is to develop collaborative relationships and networked solutions to meet the pressures of change brought about by the information society. The acquisition of a shared Integrated Library Management System, although not unheard of nationally and internationally, is a new concept in Victorian Public Libraries.

Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS) are the central system used in libraries for the majority of tasks undertaken by staff and to allow members of the library to gain access to the physical and virtual collections. In this automated world where everyone wants access to information whenever and wherever they want, the ILMS is the major business critical system in

libraries, closely followed by their web site.

'Libraries are no longer selecting an ILMS for a future in 10 to 20 years time that they cannot imagine today. They are choosing a system to support their current business practices; with architecture capable of evolving to meet new functional requirements, and most importantly, a vendor with demonstrated ability to achieve that evolution' (Richardson & Hopkins, 2004).

In 2002, 'libraries spent more than five hundred and thirty million dollars on library systems and related services. Among academic, public and research libraries, more than eight hundred either migrated to a new integrated library system (ILS) or significantly upgraded their existing one' (Marshall & Roddy in Lugg & Fischer, 2003).

Background or life before SWIFT

The public library network is one of Victoria's key community services. In 2003-2004 there were forty four public library services serving seventy nine Victorian local government councils through two hundred and sixty service points and four hundred mobile stops. Together the services handled approximately 26 million visits, 47 million loans and 2.5 million reference enquiries. Nearly 50% of the Victorian community are active members of the public library network.

Growth in the use of Information Technology (IT) is impacting public libraries in many different ways.

- The internet has replaced the public library as the first point of call for most private citizens wanting to

search for information. For these people, the public library is increasingly used as the second point of call, to obtain information that is not readily obtained using the internet – for example, local history material and resources not available online.

- The internet has set the expectation that the library can provide sophisticated search facilities to locate materials in different media whether held in the library's own collection or elsewhere.
- Many libraries provide internet access, often free, for primary searching to those who do not have internet access at home.
- Some or all of these capabilities are required at mobile libraries, joint use libraries (such as those shared with schools) and other sites remote from the library's primary IT infrastructure.
- Members also expect to have twenty four hour internet access to search, reservation and other facilities from home.
- Improvements in service and efficiency will continue to be dependent on advances in support of library internal processes – an example is the processing of Inter-Library Loans, which for many libraries is a labour-intensive process.
- Not only is the IT infrastructure of many libraries unable to cope with emerging demands, it is also ageing and in need of replacement in many cases.
- The Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) on Public Libraries has defined a Strategic Direction that requires any new ILMS to be

capable of inter-working with other organisations such as the State Library and academic institutions.

In 2001 a group of six Regional Library services asked the question "why don't we acquire an LMS together?" At the time five of the six libraries needed to review and acquire a new LMS for one of two reasons. They were either not happy with their current system or their current system was not going to be supported in the near future. As other library services in Victoria were also looking to acquire a LMS in the next two to five years, the idea of procuring and implementing a state-wide Library Management System was established.

In 2002-2003, funding was allocated from the State-wide Public Library Development Projects grant to:

- investigate and identify the potential benefits including service outcomes for library users, financial and infrastructure resourcing of a joint venture for investment in collaborative library management system(s) for Victoria's public libraries
- prepare a draft business plan to promote the case for a collaborative library management system and to advocate to gain support for the project from potential participants, funding sources and other stakeholders

In 2003, a Business Case Analysis prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) (2003, p.2), found that 'the SWIFT initiative is a virtual mandatory requirement of public libraries to meet the needs of the community in the future. The initiative presents an important catalyst for achieving

equitable user outcomes, shared financial savings and flow-on support benefits which are not achievable singly by any library.' It identified major benefits such as:

- improved equity in access
- increased bargaining power through joint acquisitions
- improved access to technology know-how at the cutting edge
- coordinated collection management, loans and acquisitions
- more efficient web-based research
- allowing increased collection coverage and reducing duplication
- streamlined but flexible content development
- platform for future expansion and value-added services
- capacity to redirect staff and financial resources to meet local service priorities

The Business Case recommended the initiative be tested through a proof-of-concept pilot in a representative group of libraries. The pilot objective was to develop and refine the agreed delivery model and conclusively demonstrate the benefits of a state-wide system. More information regarding the initial business case study can be found in Binnion and Cochrane's (2004) paper titled SWIFT – the future library system for Victoria's communities.

In December 2003, the SWIFT Consortium unsuccessfully applied for a State Government Grant for the proof-of-concept pilot. This prompted four interested libraries to fund the project in principle, to ensure that the impetus for the initiative continue while working towards gaining financial support from

the State Government for future expansion of the project.

In September of 2004, Expressions of Interest (EOI) were obtained. Analysis of the EOIs indicated that a consortium of four libraries could expect to meet the core requirements and obtain operational savings that would pay back the initial investment in just over two years.

Vision for Victorian public libraries according to the MAC

In March 2005, in response to requests for grants for library system related projects, the Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) on Public Libraries and VICLINK developed a long term strategy for public libraries in Victoria based on a vision.

The MAC's 'Vision for Victorian Public Libraries' is:

'Our vision is that The Library will be your consistent partner throughout your journey of life long learning acting as a broker and trusted guide to a wealth of valuable content.'

Our vision is that The Library is seen by decision makers as one of the most important and effective investments in building an innovative state with caring communities.

As we progress through life our motives for interacting with libraries changes, so also does the access that we have to a library's services, for example, when we graduate from college we may no longer have access to the resources of the college library.

The vision is to bring together all of these disparate interactions and to

give the user a consistent and coherent interaction that will stay with them throughout their life long journey. It will provide access to all of the libraries' resources throughout the user's life.

At each stage of the journey the user's experience of The Library will be personalised to best support their current needs. The user will access My Library, which will grow and change with them but will always be a point of access to The Library.

Whilst schools, colleges, institutes, universities, professional bodies, societies and clubs etc., all play a critical role in the journey of life long learning, our vision is that The Library is the one consistent organisation that is with them from beginning to end.

The Library will open the door to an unbelievable wealth of authoritative content resources and information services; acting as a trusted partner in guiding the user through the maze of information and knowledge discovery.' (Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries, 2005)

From request for proposal to implementation

In 2005 a partnership was formed between the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and VICLINK to create a collaborative library management system for Victoria's public libraries. This has become known as the SWIFT Project.

The aim of SWIFT is to deliver seamless state-wide access to Victoria's library resources and improved,

equitable and sustainable information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure.

The primary objectives of the SWIFT Project are to implement an ILMS for the SWIFT Participating Libraries that integrates diverse library operations including:

- acquisitions and serials
- cataloguing and authority control
- circulation and reserves
- online public access catalogue

The ILMS should be flexible and scalable to:

- accommodate the varying requirements of Participating Library Services
- meet current public and administrative needs
- be capable of meeting future growth, additional libraries, and the future expansion of services

Specifically, the solution should be able to provide:

- a link into the State-wide Web portal being developed with the State Library of Victoria
- an open architecture compliant with Z39.50 and other international standards used to interface with other software
- a single customisable front end providing an integrated view of all available print and electronic resources
- the ability to search at the local, regional and Consortium level
- uniform navigation to reduce accessibility barriers and optimise ease of use

- increased mobility of library collections through interlibrary loans
 - an option to have a single patron membership card at all Consortium libraries
 - improved IT knowledge and skills for library staff
 - coordination of collection's management practices across Victorian libraries
 - enhanced availability, development and maintenance of the library system infrastructure for all libraries, particularly those in rural areas
 - reduced costs compared with the existing systems
 - support for the MAC's 'Vision for Victorian Public Libraries'
- development of a project manual that included
 - a Risk Management Plan
 - a Probity Plan
 - a Communications Plan
 - a Project Management Timetable
 - development of a website to use for communication purposes (<http://www.swiftproject.org.au>)
 - development of evaluation criteria principles and processes for evaluation the RFP responses
 - preparation of appropriate contract documents

In May 2005, the MAV was appointed to seek firm proposals and negotiate terms and conditions for the supply of an ILMS and associated managed services. Funding was obtained from the Department for Victorian Communities to fund the employment of a SWIFT Project Manager and to cover any associated legal expenses. The SWIFT Project was broken into two phases:

- Phase one - Supplier selection and contract negotiation
- Phase two – Implementation of solution

Phase one

Activities associated with this phase have included:

- establishment of an appropriate project management structure including the formation of a Steering Committee and a Working Group
- preparation of a Request for Proposal Document

To manage the Project, a Steering Committee was established with appropriate representation from across a wide range of Project Stakeholders. The Steering Committee's main role was to ensure that appropriate probity standards and procedures were adopted throughout the Project and to approve recommendations made to it from time to time by the Working Party. The Working Party, with representation from each of the Participating Libraries, is where the majority of the work has been undertaken. Once the RFP document had been produced, it was issued to the marketplace for a period of six weeks. By the closing date, eight responses had been received from the marketplace. The evaluation process was divided into two stages.

Stage one:

- Evaluation of proposal compliance and system functionality (based on the Supplier responses).
- Costs of Supplier solutions (based on the Supplier responses). To ensure that evaluator's opinions were not influenced by price alone,

the costing details were not examined until the functional evaluations had been completed.

At the end of this stage, which took one week using twelve members of the Working Group, the number of Suppliers was reduced from eight to four.

Stage two:

The remaining Suppliers were subjected to:

- reference checking
- presentations
- discussions with Supplier CEOs
- demonstrations

For the Supplier demonstrations, which took three days each to conduct, one hundred and ninety two scenarios across fourteen functional areas were developed. Each Supplier was asked to demonstrate each scenario "blind".

To assist with this process, up to fifty two subject matter specialists were used from the Participating Libraries i.e. cataloguers evaluated the cataloguing functions, circulation staff evaluated circulation functions etc. In addition, each subject matter specialist was required to answer three questions:

- overall impression of the System being evaluated
- impression of each Supplier's logical processes
- impression of each Supplier's interaction between modules

Once the evaluation process had been completed and the scores calculated, contract negotiations commenced with the successful Supplier, SirsiDynix, and

de-briefing sessions were held with the unsuccessful Suppliers.

The contracts used included:

- a contract between MAV and the successful Supplier called the System and Services Contract, with the MAV acting as an Agent for and on behalf of the Participating Libraries
- a Back-to-Back Agreement between the MAV and each of the Participating Libraries

Phase two

The main activities associated with phase two of the Project relate to the implementation of the solution, a phase that is continuing as you read this paper. To understand the activities associated with the implementation phase, it is best to gain an understanding of the components of the solution. These include:

- Base system
 - System implementation
 - Data conversion
 - Staff training
 - Managed services
- Optional extras
 - Director's station
 - Datastream
 - Collection exchange
 - PC reservation system
 - SIP/NCIP licences

Wherever possible, the size of the consortium of participating libraries has been used to obtain favourable pricing considerations as well as the approaches used in implementing various elements of the solution i.e. combining similar based existing

systems to convert in unison rather than individually. Each participating library has the flexibility to implement the all or part of the optional extras, although to date, most extras are being implemented.

The stakeholders

The SWIFT Project consists of many stakeholders, ranging from politicians, bureaucrats and Participating Libraries, to librarians and patrons. As each have different requirements, the need to communicate effectively and efficiently has been of the utmost importance.

One of the reasons subject matter specialists were included in the evaluation process was not only due to their skills and knowledge, but also to start the process of introducing such staff to the new environment to follow.

If you build it they will come

During the evaluation and initial implementation phases of the Project up to eight library organisations were involved. Once the decision had been made on the selection of a preferred Supplier, it became apparent to a number of people that this Project, which had been talked about for a long time, was starting to produce results. Not only were there savings to be made, but improved and increased functionality was to be provided.

Accordingly a number of additional library organisations expressed their interest in becoming involved. At this stage, seventeen library organisations are associated with the Project. It is anticipated that this number will grow quite considerably in the foreseeable future.

Future directions

The overall direction of the Project is governed by a Management Committee which has replaced the earlier mentioned Steering Committee.

The future direction of the Project will be largely governed by this Committee, the composition of which contains the CEO/Library Managers of the Participating Libraries.

Apart from the inclusion of additional Participating Libraries, additional features offered by the preferred Supplier, as well as any new Government initiatives that effect the operation of libraries in Victoria will be deliberated on and approved by the Management Committee.

Lessons learned – Top 5

Winters (2002) developed a working top ten list of 'why projects failed', and we believe that at some stage of the project, the SWIFT group has been guilty of some if not all of them. Five of the major lessons learned from this Project are:

1. Project Manager

Schwalbe (2004) believes that someone must take responsibility for coordinating all of the people, plans and work required to complete the project. Someone must focus on the big picture of the project and steer the project team. This someone is the project manager. Without the necessary project management skills, the project was progressing in an unstructured way. The project before the employment of a central project manager was a good example of Parkinson's Law, that is, 'the work expanded to fill the time allowed' (Schwalbe, 2004) instead of allocating time constraints to each task.

2. Project Plan

'All effectively managed projects involve the preparation of the project plan. This is the fundamental document that spells out what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, and what resources will be necessary' (Davidson, 2000). The lack of a project plan in the early stages of the SWIFT Project has probably meant that the scope has shifted and grown considerably over the past two to three years. Today, the Project Plan is one of the key tools that is religiously used to manage the timely completion of set activities.

3. Other Plans

The other major plans which were not developed in the early stages of the Project included a communications plan, probity plan, risk management plan and a quality plan. However, once a full time Project Manager joined the Project, these plans were developed and implemented. Due to the large number of stakeholders who need to be kept informed of various elements of the Project from time to time, these plans have become an important part of the Project.

Standards Australia (2004) believe that 'organisations that manage risk effectively and efficiently are more likely to achieve their objectives and do at lower overall cost.' In a recent study, it indicated that 'effective risk management could provide up to a 20:1 return on investment' (NSW Department of Commerce, 2004).

4. Communication

The Project Management Institute (2000) states that 'good communications planning involves determining the information and

communications needs of the stakeholders, who needs what information, when they need it, how it will be given to them and by whom.' This needs to be done to ensure that there is good communication with all stakeholders especially the internal ones. If this is not done, you may find that some libraries may become dissatisfied and pull out of the project.

5. Resource it

Winters' (2002) number six reason "why projects fail" is 'poor effort estimation'. In the early stages of the project, there was a heavy reliance on individuals within the participating libraries to ensure necessary work was completed. We were all trying to do our full-time jobs while trying to develop key documents such as a request for tender. If you can, assign the appropriate resources to your project and be realistic on what "in-kind" support you can give to the project without impacting on your organisation. Buy in skills and knowledge if needed to achieve the work. This means the project will more likely be delivered on time; your staff will be less stressed and your organisation and its members will enjoy the intended benefits sooner.

Conclusion

During the first four years of this Project, when there was much 'coming and going', some of the basic principles that are important today, were formed. However in the last six to seven months, much has been achieved. Some of the early aims, objectives and visions are now being realised. Reasons this progress has been made include:

- clear project planning and direction;
- effective communications;

- the input from a group of dedicated and enthusiastic staff from the Participating Libraries;
- support from Government based on the benefits the Project will produce; and
- the cost efficient solution offered by the preferred supplier.

It is hoped that when the ALIA Conference is held in two years time, a large number of Victorian Library organisations will be able to speak positively about their new integrated library management system and the benefits of the SWIFT Consortium.

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