

SYSTEMS AND SYNAPSES

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1. Introduction

This paper follows on from a paper presented at Information Online 2005, *“Managing Learning and Intellectual Assets”*, Bates, V et al, and documents the long road to implementation, the perils of the library running such a project, the role of the library as change agents and the continuing evolution of the blended librarian at Southbank Institute of Technology. Specifically, this paper addresses change management and the human elements of such a project.

The Digibank project endeavours to deliver a sustainable competitive advantage for the Institute by digitising all the intellectual property the institute produces as part of its core business (vocational training and education - VTE) as well as tracking and managing the constraints, rights and permissions embedded in those intellectual assets.

Southbank Institute has been in a highly changeable environment for some months now. We have the physical re-development of our main campus, the Skilling Queensland initiative has placed Southbank as a lead institute and we have a change of governance due to being re-badged as an Institute of Technology. Flexibility is necessary to maintain a forward motion in our work. Other stakeholders are also extremely busy with tight timelines and by working cooperatively with them, we are able to keep things moving in the desired direction. The rate of change at Southbank is such that we need to be able to change direction or focus quickly when necessary to achieve the institute’s goals.

2. The Blended Librarian

Steven Bell, Philadelphia University’s library director collaborated with John D Shank (instructional design librarian at Penn State Berks– Leigh Valley College and director of the college’s Centre for Learning Technologies) to explore a concept they call the Blended Librarian: someone “who combines traditional library and information technology skills with instructional design and technology skills as well as

knowledge of collections of instructional resources and current trends in developing and distributing instructional resources."¹

Together they built a national community of librarians, instructional designers, and faculty "to develop strategies, techniques, skills, and tools to permit all academic librarians to advance their integration into the teaching and learning process".²

The Six Principles of Blended Librarianship are³

1. Taking a leadership position as campus innovators and change agents is critical to the success of delivering library services in today's "information society".
2. Committing to developing campus-wide information literacy initiatives on our campuses in order to facilitate our ongoing involvement in the teaching and learning process.
3. Designing instructional and educational programs and classes to assist patrons in using library services and learning information literacy that is absolutely essential to gaining the necessary skills (trade) and knowledge (profession) for lifelong success.
4. Collaborating and engaging in dialogue with instructional technologists and designers which is vital to the development of programs, services and resources needed to facilitate the instructional mission of academic libraries.
5. Implementing adaptive, creative, proactive, and innovative change in library instruction can be enhanced by communicating and collaborating with newly created Instructional Technology/Design librarians and existing instructional designers and technologists.
6. Transforming our relationship with faculty to emphasize our ability to assist them with integrating information technology and library resources into courses, but adding to that traditional role a new capacity to collaborate on enhancing student learning and outcome assessment in the area of information access, retrieval and integration.

Southbank's Liaison Librarian Project

Southbank Library commenced a project called the "Liaison Librarian Project" in 2000 with the goal of:

Librarians working in partnership with teaching and educational staff to achieve the goals and objectives of the national Vocational Education and Training (VET) agenda, including flexible learning strategies by assisting educational staff:

¹ <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA510559.html>

² <http://blendedlibrarian.org>

³ http://liswiki.org/wiki/Blended_librarianship

- *With the development of learning resources, including multimedia, IT, Internet and print*
- *To integrate information and IT resources into their teaching programs*
- *To gain greater access to a diverse range of information services and resources*
- *To incorporate information literacy skills directly into their teaching programs*

Due to budget constraints at the time, the project didn't go ahead in its original form. However, the project concept has acted as a framework for library management as we move into flexible learning and meeting the information needs of our clients, both teachers and students.

The first step was upskilling all librarians with multimedia skills such as Dreamweaver, PhotoShop and Flash. They then worked closely with teachers passing on these skills and knowledge. Two librarians were taken offline to design an online information literacy course (SAIL) for all students at Southbank. Now, the librarians are working in partnership with teachers to embed information literacy in the training packages they deliver.

The Digibank Project is another initiative flowing on from the original framework. Initially, the library expected teachers to upload their own materials to Digibank. However, we have now decided to take a different approach and make the uploading of resources to Digibank as part of the Library's collection development function. Liaison librarians are given (or discover) teaching and learning resources which they then analyse, pull apart (if learning objects are identified within the resource) and upload to Digibank along with all copyright constraints and requirements embedded in the resource.

3. Leadership

All library managers at Southbank have undertaken an intensive five month leadership program funded by the Queensland Department of Education and Training. The leadership program espouses five leadership practices:

- Inspire a shared vision
- Challenge the process
- Model the way
- Enable others to act
- Encourage the heart

I believe this program enabled all library managers (and other leadership development participants in the institute) to gain confidence in their leadership ability and to successfully lead our teams through

the significant changes that are happening around us. We undertook a workplace project as part of the Leadership Development Program.

I chose to focus on the communication part of the Digibank project as my workplace project. The communication plan is intended to provide a methodology to inspire educational and library staff to use Digibank as their primary resource centre. The “vision” is to promote the exchange, re-use and sharing of teaching and learning resources and record the intellectual property rights of contributors.

Some educational staff are reluctant to part with their resources and are definitely not happy to share them due to bad experiences in the past. Some are cautious or fearful and are unsure about job security, or are reluctant to embrace change as they realise they will be working in a new way (the digital world). It is therefore important to describe a positive image of the future of teaching in a realistic way while allaying the fear of change and encouraging them to build on their strengths.

Throughout the overall Digibank project, the project team have endeavoured to “target the willing”: share the vision enthusiastically with those who are ready for change. The intention is that these people will become advocates for the project, they will then share the vision and enthusiasm with their less than willing colleagues.

The project team have gathered as much informal feedback as possible from training, presentations, workshops etc. When the team are training a teacher group, we watch to see what excites the individuals in the group. Different faculties, and indeed, different individuals have widely varying requirements that they hope to achieve using Digibank. We have gathered from these informal observations that teaching staff have four “hot spot topics”:

- Audit process
- External access (Digibank access from home)
- Blackboard integration
- Resource organisation

By identifying which topic most interests the users, the project team have worked to tailor the training and presentations to target audience hot spot topics.

I have always found this project challenging; I am not part of the teaching culture in the institute. In some ways the library management and the project team have ignored standard practices in favour of new approaches, often because we are aware of the sensitivity of the changes we are introducing but also in order to break down the communication barriers between “management” and educational staff. Library has always cultivated a support role with educational staff and aren’t seen as “management”; we endeavour to be non-threatening change agents. I have exploited this by way of “infiltrating” the faculties

using the Liaison Librarian network (see 4.0 Library as Change Agents).

Using the “bottom up” approach with educationalists as described above and the “top down” approach with the executive management, so that they espouse the convenience and usability of the Digibank repository, we are gradually raising awareness and trust.

One example is that of the Online Learning Team. This team produces most of the online content on Blackboard (our learning management system). This team has been under enormous pressure to perform since its inception and developed work processes to best meet those demands.

Initially we met with them to introduce the topic of learning objects and how digital assets can be pulled apart, re-constructed and re-used to create new learning resources. In order for this project to meet its agreed goals, we needed to influence the way in which this team constructed online learning materials.

Communication with this team has been on a regular, but infrequent basis with the intention of suggesting new ways of working, selling the benefits to them and demonstrating how changing work flows and practices now will lead to greater efficiencies later.

As with other teams, we needed to understand how this team work:

- What are their workflows
- Where do they store objects now
- How do they construct learning content.

We also need to influence their mind-set; introduce them to professional development (guest speakers, published research papers) to inform them of how they can work differently. This must be a gradual process of change and involves mapping the way to new work practices.

I am aware of the capabilities of the small team who manage this project and I encourage them to take on challenges or find better ways of doing their job. The project team use the same strategies with the stakeholders. They actively listen to stakeholders, see what excites them in their work, what makes it interesting for them. Whenever possible, I encourage my team to make decisions about their work and give them freedom and choice on how they are going to achieve agreed-on performance measures.

I have great confidence in the people in my team and publicly recognise their skills and any initiatives or innovations they may have contributed to the workplace. I observe the people in my team, other library staff and stakeholders and talk to them about their aspirations,

goals and what they want to achieve from their work and offer support and encouragement in achieving their goals.

4. The Library as Change Agents

Throughout these major and continuous changes at Southbank, the library staff have been effective change agents. The library is seen as “non-threatening” agents of change. Liaison librarians in particular have well established communication networks and are often called upon to utilise these networks to influence and lead institute staff in the process of embracing all forms of change.

It is important to be cheerful and open to suggestions. The project team, indeed all the library staff, value the work of educational staff and openly admire their skills and achievements. A sense of humour and fun are essential ingredients for a positive work environment as is empathy and encouragement.

There exists within TAFE Qld a culture among educational staff that the workbooks and resources that they produce for their students are “owned” by the creator, this is a moral rights issue and must be acknowledged. There is also the fear of giving away “what makes me a good teacher”, on the other hand, some may be reluctant to share the materials to their peers for fear of ridicule. It is necessary for that culture to change if the Digibank project is to be successful.

An objective of the communication plan is to gain the trust of the teachers so that they willingly “surrender” their resources and open them up to sharing with other educational staff in the institute. Communication is the key to gaining that trust. Informing teachers of the purpose of the project and selling the benefits that relate directly to them – “what’s in it for me”, has allowed teaching staff to trust and involve the project team in understanding their workflows and procedures. The project team are well versed in answering questions and responding to rumours by addressing them at demonstrations and training sessions. The project team are always complimentary to the teaching profession and genuinely want to help and make a teacher’s life easier – freeing them up to do what they do best, teach.

Throughout the project we have embraced the creed – “target the willing and the others will follow”. Those teaching staff who are keen to be involved, unafraid of technology and can really see how they can benefit from the project have become our advocates in the faculties. We don’t have to sell the project, they do it for us. Other teachers see the improvements in workflow and the ease with which Digibank provides resources to meet a need either in the classroom or online and their interest is piqued.

Changes that this project will bring about.

- Create a new way for teachers to resource their teaching
- Teachers will be working with digital materials rather than print and will be working online as well as face to face
- Centralised repository of all teaching and learning resources and the management and tracking of any intellectual property embedded in those resources.

How to manage these changes?

- In large part the Communication Plan addresses these changes by keeping stakeholders informed and involved. Teachers have influence over the final product
- Increasing dialogue between the project team and stakeholders
- Select key people to be change champions within the faculties
- Professional development for teachers, librarians and educational designers
- Offer a supportive environment and address concerns openly and honestly
- Incorporate user requirements as much as possible.

5. Communication Plan

The aim of this plan is to ensure that Southbank staff are provided with adequate information about the Digibank project management plan, its objectives and progress against deliverables. The intention is dual: to promote a professional and intellectual climate conducive to the ongoing development of the plan and its implementation; and to minimise uncertainty, confusion and stress for staff during this period of change.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is a discipline where change happens rapidly and can have major impacts on the way people work. Technology must not drive the changes. The project team are constantly adapting the technology to the way people work to make their work easier. We actively listen to stakeholder suggestions and are keen to implement ideas that add value to what we do. We encourage open discussion in forums but also ask a variety of people (different faculties, different work teams) questions about their requirements and needs, then align those requirement and needs with project scope and software capabilities.

Part of the communication process involves the end users in building the repository, how should the input screens look, does it make sense to the teacher. Inviting the users to be involved in the decisions in designing the process; gathering feedback from them to ascertain the “usefulness” of different aspects of the project, has allowed them to gain some ownership in the project and they are therefore committed to the project goals and objectives.

Plan Purpose

The role of this communication plan is to minimise the impact of change and uncertainty by establishing a communication system and network which will be consultative, informative, responsive and comprehensive by the forming the following strategies:

Communicate Project Mission and Goals

- Task Group meetings
- Presentations to executive management
- Presentations to educational staff
- Presentations to liaison librarians
- Project Management Plan currency and communication

Influence Groups and Individuals

- Consultation with stakeholders
- Negotiate with Educational Leaders and educational staff
- Ongoing research into what others in the educational market place are achieving with repositories with similar functions
- Staying within scope but allowing flexibility and adaptability when responding to feedback from users and potential users
- Local, state and national conference presentations

Build and Support Teams

- Delegate to appropriate team members some communication tasks
- Encourage team members to make decisions and initiate tasks based on feedback and team decisions
- Reward team members through recognition and praise for work well done, individually and as a team
- Listen to team members' ideas, suggestions and concerns and address these positively

Stakeholders

Stakeholders at all levels need to be involved in a consultative process. In order to effectively manage stakeholders, it is necessary to involve the groups in tasks that have a direct impact on them in order to gather their input and meet their needs. Stakeholder analysis establishes the importance of the group to the project and therefore what communication format is best suited to that group.

- **Holistic:**

These stakeholders are at executive level in the organisation, they have limited time available and have a lot of information flowing

across their desks. Therefore, information should be disseminated to this group personally and backed up with submission of written reports. They are then able to scan the information about the progress of the project or receive it face to face where they can ask questions and receive quick responses.

- **Educational:**

This group of stakeholders are also time poor, but they are often also the end users. Communication with this group will need to be as convenient as possible. Face to face, more frequently than with the above group. Teachers are mostly in class and not often easy to catch in the staff room or at their desk so they will require a number of different communication methods – email, face to face meetings, letter drops in pigeon holes. Probably the best communication tool for this group however, is the Liaison Librarian network. Liaison librarians are trusted allies for teachers and often share information willingly. This form of communication will be in an exchange, informing educational staff of the progress of the project as well as gathering information about their specific needs and requirements as well as feedback and suggestions.

- **Support Groups:**

Support groups are formed specific to tasks as outlined in the project management plan. Information can be disseminated to this group through emails, while exchange of information and resolving differences are conducted face to face at a frequency set by the task at hand.

- **Technical:**

Similar to support groups, these stakeholders are communicated with on an ad hoc basis, as and when required so this would require disseminating information to this group, exchanging information to find a workable solution as well as resolving differences and working around technical shortcomings.

Outputs/deliverables:

- Digibank project management plan to be communicated to all levels of the institute
- Raise awareness of the project using various communication channels
- All forms of communications (internal and external to the organisation)
 - Forums
 - Formal organisational networks
 - Staff induction
 - Institute publications

- Noticeboards
- Email
- Blackboard
- Desktop interventions
- Intranet
- Conferences
- Target opinion leaders
- Feedback mechanisms
- Identification of target market groups
- All teams within faculties have Study and Assessment Guides on Digibank by Semester 1, 2007

Constraints

- Groups who will be hard to reach
- Skills issues
- Cultural issues
- Methods of communication
- Limited resources (time etc)

Risk Management

Every project management plan, or part of, such as a communications plan must assess risk events and put in place procedures for monitoring these events early in the project lifecycle. Cultural change management is probably the most complex and important part of the project critical success factors. As project manager, my responsibility on the project is to recognise and work through blockages (both cultural and physical) to ensure the project completes on time and on budget. It is also necessary to supply consistent and timely communication about the project to stakeholders.

6. Personal Insights, Understandings, and Skills Developed

- Model the way is a strategy I use consistently in my work. I have the same expectations of my team as I do of myself
- As project manager, I have to change roles according to the circumstances; sometimes the team looks to me to make decisions about the direction we will take, at other times I listen to the opinions of my team members and action the decisions that come out of those discussions
- Weekly meetings with the whole project team and fortnightly meetings with team members on a one on one basis
- Regular meetings every 3 weeks with the Task Group. As I am on other committees with Task Group members, we have the opportunity to talk about the project in different circumstances and can pull together the various strands of this project as well as other initiatives happening in the organisation so that the project is aligned with organisational goals and objectives

- Select members of the project team have opportunities to meet with other organisations with similar projects to discuss ideas, blockages and solutions
- Team conflict is dealt with empathetically, openly and quickly
- Project management plan is regularly updated and re-aligned with changes in direction or new initiatives so that all team members can refer to this “living document” for guidance and decision making
- Maintain a sense of humour.

The Digibank project team is quite small (5 part time team members) and are key identifiable people that educational staff can relate to. The Liaison Librarians and the Educational Leaders already have well established communication networks which can be used to our advantage.

Liaison Librarians are also trained so that they can promote the project to their faculties in a supportive and unobtrusive manner. As much as possible by tapping into existing communications networks; every conversation is an opportunity to promote the project.

It has proven difficult to include all managers, directors etc in all communications, nevertheless, I have spoken to many people individually to clarify issues, build consensus and ensure that we all share the same, or similar vision of the future. The process is time consuming (I have to endeavour to always be available) and requires strong negotiation and communication skills in order to represent the interests of others and find consensus or compromises.

Everything comes at a price. This project has never had a budget, all expenses must come from existing library budgets, particularly staff time. Although the project team endeavour to use only existing resources readily available to us, those resources still require costing if the project is to reflect the true costs of implementation.

7. Conclusion

The Digibank project supports the institute’s move toward online learning and represents a significant change in the culture of educational delivery. It is important that the new culture be promoted vigorously so that staff are both accepting of it and enthusiastic about the advantages, alternatives and challenges that it offers.

The continuing evolution of the blended librarian, Southbank’s own Liaison Librarian Project and our leadership journey are all part of the Digibank Project. This project is another building block in the library’s integration into the infrastructure of the organisation, librarians and faculty working together in curriculum planning and teaching as well as seamless integration of library resources and instruction with teaching and learning.

The Southbank library takes risks with new technology and services, allowing itself to fail in instructive ways as well as to succeed. There are perils involved with the library running such a project, but the benefits far out way the risks when the library takes a leadership role in promoting change and models the way forward.

Key understandings:

- Negotiate compromises in order to create “a good fit” with user needs without compromising functionality
- The need to consult with as many users as possible. This gives a much broader understanding of needs and requirements
- Identify those who are innovators and early adopters as these will become the project’s advocates. Keep them informed and satisfied with project direction and they will sell the project for you. Be aware of how representative they are of a particular group of stakeholders or users
- Use existing networks to gather and disseminate information about the project
- Address concerns openly and honestly
- Endeavour to maintain clear and open communication channels, nip any rumours in the bud
- Stay within scope, but negotiate solutions that meet user needs as much as possible
- Stakeholders without ownership of the project will not be as willing to participate and accept the project outcomes.

These are the experiences of library management and the project team in implementing and managing the multifaceted change processes occurring in our workplace. We have been fortunate to be allowed the opportunity to change and influence others in making Southbank Institute of Technology a positive work environment.

I hope our failures and successes, as documented here assist others along their path of discovery and change.