

A Prototype 21st Century University Library: a Case Study of Change at the University of New South Wales Library

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a case study of organizational change at an academic library

Design/methodology/approach – The change process employed scenario modeling techniques

Findings – The scenario modeling technique was found to be effective in developing shared understandings about the future directions of an organization. The next stage involved identifying the implications involved in implementing organizational change to achieve the future organization outlined in the scenario. This stage identified three issues that would need significant investment before the scenario could be realized. They were skills development, management practices and the structure of the Library. Re-organization requires attention to cultural and personal issues to enable an organization to undergo major change.

Research limitations/implications – A range of techniques, tools and experiments were used. There would be limitations in applying these in a general way to other organizations.

Originality/value – The scale of the change process is significant in terms of the size of the undertaking and the time taken to achieve. This paper describes the process. It is too early to predict whether the organizational change is successful.

Keywords Academic libraries, Change, Scenario Modeling, Restructuring

Paper type Case study

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) is one of Australia's major research universities. Founded in 1949, UNSW has become a large comprehensive university with strengths in professional and technical disciplines. UNSW has about 30,000 students and 5,000 staff. UNSW Library grew substantially in the 1960s to become one of Australia's major academic libraries. The Library was fortunate to have two major Australian librarians oversee its development over its first three decades: John Metcalfe (1960-1966) and Allan Horton (1966-1988).

Given the relative youth of UNSW compared to the few universities established in Australia in the nineteenth century, Allan Horton decided that UNSW Library would primarily focus on the delivery of information services to users. UNSW Library had neither the resources nor space nor time to build large collections. Horton's insight was to develop specialist, discipline based units which were called special libraries. For decades, the entity called UNSW Library was really many separate entities supported by a relatively low staffed set of central support services. The special libraries enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in their operations and services. They developed their own ways of doing things, even adopting separate classification and shelving systems. Each special library had its interlibrary loan service, shelving staff and serials section. There were degrees of tinkering and incremental changes to this model over the next two decades, but fundamentally, it stayed in place for over three decades. The special library model defined library services and provided the framework for library staff promotion.

Why would anyone want to change it?

Understanding the need to change

Like other academic libraries, UNSW Library had general and particular reasons to consider the need to change. The general reasons reflect environmental forces with which librarians are all familiar, but to which we are still grappling to devise effective and compelling responses. In the last ten years, academic libraries have seen their role as the 'first place to go' displaced by the Web (Shuler, 2005). Mediated access to scarce information resources has been replaced by disintermediation and ubiquity of information resources. On campus, the academic library no longer enjoys the gateway role or controls supply of information. With few exceptions, academic libraries "no longer have iconic status within our institutions – indeed, virtually overnight, we are now perceived as irrelevant by many (Tennant, 2006)." Demonstrating how academic libraries contribute to the research, teaching and learning goals of a university is a difficult task in tougher accounting and financial environments. University libraries are expensive and "funding will not continue to flow to the library during periods of simultaneous fiscal pressure and reinvention unless academic librarians do a better job providing a clear picture of the library of tomorrow (Bailey-Hainer, 2005)."

These overall environmental effects – fiscal, technological, organizational – had their particular manifestations at UNSW Library. The special library model was born in a golden period for higher education funding in Australia. The benefit of excellent user service came at the cost of duplicate systems and autonomous processes. As times got harder and technological developments put library budgets under pressure, the costs of maintaining the special library structure came to be questioned more frequently. The structure was developed to support a pre-digital, print-based service model which emphasized on-site physical interaction of users, staff and resources. Trends in usage statistics made clear what library staff could see. Like other academic libraries around the world, measurement showed that times were changing: reference, circulation, and shelving statistics were in a downward trend. Yet allocating sufficient resources to enable innovation, research and development was difficult: the special library model was not flexible enough to meet the new challenges.

Many academic library staff will say "we've all been there." What follows is how UNSW Library dealt with these challenges.

A new story

Our first step was to construct a new future for UNSW Library, and it began with open consultations with library staff. These sessions were held in August 2002, and while they did not deliver consensus about a preferred future, there was little evidence that staff were convinced that the status quo should be maintained. The staff identified five key issues to address. The influence of the changing information environment along with the service challenges presented by it led to identification of staff skills, technological infrastructure, service models and what constitutes a collection for a hybrid library as four major issues. The use of space was the fifth, which reflects another legacy from the print era. UNSW Library's space increasingly resembled a warehouse, with space for student interaction and study literally at the perimeter of the book stacks.

The next step applied scenario modeling using the data generated by the consultation sessions. Three contrasting scenarios were created:

- "Not the Present, but ..." This scenario described the status quo, with incremental changes.
- "Towards the Unseen Digital Library" This outlined a primarily digital library service, occupying much less physical space.
- "The Learning Village". This scenario combined changed use of library space to support a range of learning activities and a strong move towards digital library services.

These scenarios were discussed by a representative group of users covering academic staff and students in February 2003. The 'Learning Village' scenario appealed most to this group. It was a rich concept at the time because it could be associated with the activities of staff and

students using the Library, how the physical spaces of the Library could be changed to better support learning, and to the learning needs of the Library staff.

It was important to maintain momentum and grow the discussion around the University, so an Academic Board forum on the Library was held in May 2003. This forum outlined the need to change and support for a 'Learning Village' type scenario began to emerge. At this stage, it was not intended to precisely define the future; instead, the goal was to raise awareness and generate discussion.

Understanding the implications

The contours of a new future were starting to emerge. It was the Library's task to deliver this future, which led to consideration of what the future would look like, and how we would get there. It was clear that we needed to define better what we were working towards and understand the implications for the Library's staff and users.

In the second half of 2003, a 'Scenario Implications Group' was charged with the dual tasks of defining a future scenario for the Library and preparing a report on its implications. Staff were selected from different seniority levels and organizational units: this enabled different perspectives to be heard. The composition of the group also included staff from units external to the Library, including the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement) and senior staff from learning and teaching units. Two consultants were appointed to guide the group.

The group presented a report in November 2003 to the Library's senior management. It contained a 'working scenario' for the future of the Library in 2007 (appendix 1 to this paper). The working scenario described a different kind of organization. It was light on detail, and intentionally so: the important issues were to describe a possible future and generate discussions around it. There were some radical proposals: it was already clear that a departure from the special library structure was envisaged. Key themes were integration of collections, rationalization of service points, a more consistent user experience, enhancement of digital services and a more outward focus from the Library to the University.

The report described the implications of the working scenario, and cautiously addressed how the Library might start implementing progress towards the future outlined in the scenario. Implications were grouped into three areas:

- Implications for staff. In the future, staff would need to be more outward in their focus and service delivery, and not be so bound by the physical confines of library space. Clearly, skills development, flexibility and adaptability were required too: there was much to learn.
- Implications for services and facilities. The working scenario depicts better control of physical collections, and space less dominated by collections. The Library needed to become a space for people as well as books. Digital services required resources: we needed to move forward from experimental and pioneering approaches to planned and well resourced online services.
- Implications for relationships with our users and our partners. The Library needed to be better integrated with the University and replace a deferential, passive stance with a collegial, service-driven presence.

The report was well received by the Library's senior managers but it was no more than a report at this stage. We had two major challenges to face: how would we get a critical mass of staff supporting the change?; and, how would we implement such a major change? Doubts were aired too, and it was not long before rationalizations for not changing were being expressed: were we trying to "build a fire in the rain?" (Lubans, 2006)

Involving, including and developing library staff

In early 2004, the Scenario Implications Group and senior library staff met several times to design the next stages of the change process. A number of working groups were formed to

discuss ways in which implications for change would be addressed in implementation. While this was useful, we recognized that the change proposal and working scenario were understood by a relatively small number of staff. Given the scale of the proposed change, we faced the challenge of building enough staff support for the change. At this time, an ambitious principle was set: the change process would be as inclusive as possible: opportunities would be created for staff to be involved. This also presented considerable opportunities for learning and staff development.

These deliberations led to the concept of creating the Library Futures Group, which comprised the Library's senior management team, and eight staff members elected by the entire staff. The role of this group was strongly connected with implementing the working scenario, although it was made clear it would not have executive responsibilities. Its roles were to support staff through the change process and advise senior management on priorities and issues to enable the Library to move forward. The Library Futures Group was established as a mechanism to include and involve staff in addressing the challenges of change.

The election for the staff representative places on the Library Futures Group helped generate a sense of excitement and inclusion. The launch of the Library Futures Group was built into a special one day event for all staff called "The Big Day Out" which had the working scenario as its key theme. Staff worked in small groups led by facilitators who guided discussion on their reactions to the working scenario, the current strengths and weaknesses of the Library, and their views about what issues the Library would need to address in order to achieve the proposed change. Data from the small groups was captured, resulting in 1375 statements about UNSW Library made by UNSW Library staff.

The Library Futures Group analyzed these statements by categorizing the statements using an organizational taxonomy comprising: culture; strategy; structure; and, systems. Staff also contributed to this process by each person identifying the top ten statements that matched their concerns or excitement about the current state of the Library and the proposed change. This initial analysis revealed that cultural and systems issues were hindering progress in strategy and structure. The following working definitions and examples illustrate this part of the process:

- Culture: reflects codes of conduct as determined by dominant groups in the workplace. Common statements reflecting assessment of culture included: *disparate; divided; biased; power; trust; don't feel like part of the whole*. The feedback revealed concerns about change and highly personal reflections about relations with others.
- Strategy: involves planning aimed at accomplishing a particular set of goals or intended outcomes. Common statements reflecting assessment of strategy included: *lack of library-wide thinking; need to more pro-active and less reactive; need a master plan so change is not so piecemeal and fragmented*. The feedback revealed that staff were not confident that the Library had the management skills to move the organization forward. It became very clear that the major themes in the working scenario were not yet understood.
- Structure: describes how resources are configured and is frequently illustrated in the form of an organizational chart. Common statements reflecting assessment of structure included: *territoriality; isolation; inconsistencies in service*. It was clear that a majority of staff believed the current structure needed to be changed.
- Systems: describe processes and procedures that enables work to be done and are usually explicit, consistent and not dependent on a specific individual. Typical comments included: *every special library has a different way of doing things; lack of quality control; confusing collection sequences*. Given the library's structure, there was a variety of systems and processes.

The "Big Day Out" was designed to allow staff to vent, to express negative and positive views and to articulate their concerns or excitement about change. It certainly generated conversation. The next challenge was to find focus and determine what activities would enable us to move forward. Or to put in another way, what barriers and obstacles needed to be acknowledged and attacked?

Getting to the key issues

Inclusive and consultative approaches were again used to decide where effort should be directed. After digesting and discussing this considerable amount of data and discussion, the Library Futures Group identified five key issues from the "Big Day Out":

1. The Library's model. The concept of special libraries had underpinned the service delivery model for years. Staff had identified a tension between specialization and integration. The working scenario emphasized integration which represented a substantial shift from the special library model.
2. The management of the Library. Staff expected better management and communication.
3. The staff: achievements and opportunities. Staff recognized the opportunities in the working scenario, even if they were vaguely outlined. This was a positive finding: staff wanted to contribute to realizing the future.
4. The collection layout. This was the major systems-related finding. The Library's print collection sequences were complex, with each special library having different practices.
5. Information technology management and systems. The second systems-related finding recognized the complexity of our online systems and the need for more staff with IT skills to improve services.

At the end of 2004, staff were asked to vote on their top three issues. The results were 1, 2 and 3: library model, management and staff. The University Librarian assumed responsibility for addressing the structure and model of the Library. The Library Futures Group was asked to advise on how to address management practices and staff development. A series of management practices workshops were held for senior staff over a two year period, addressing issues such as effective communication, accountability and responsibility. The communication workshops were repeated for all staff to maintain the principle of inclusiveness. The Library Futures Group played a critical role in assisting staff in dealing with personal reactions to change.

Change keeps on happening

This account may give the impression that this was the only change process underway over a two year period. One way to manage change is to spend a great deal of time in planning and execute the change quickly. This runs the risk of unintentionally reinforcing the status quo. Instead, a number of internal changes were undertaken in parallel. This had a number of advantages and disadvantages.

The chief advantage was found in generating a sense of moving forward. One major change was the re-organization of the technical services area. There were many reasons behind this change, but the key factor associated with the working scenario was the urgent need to build skills and capacity in digital services. This re-organization replaced a traditional technical services operation separated into monographs and serials with three units: electronic resources; physical resources; and, vendor and finance services. The re-organization reduced resources allocated to print materials and redistributed them to electronic materials and database licensing, which reflects the support required for a hybrid library. This took two years to achieve. Along the way, the Library learnt a lot about how it dealt with change, including process and personal perspectives. The Information Technology Department was a smaller scale re-organization, but again, one directed at developing the Library's digital service capabilities as described in the working scenario.

The main disadvantage arose from the adversarial climate change processes can generate. Staff can become cynical about change and the rationales put forward. There is fear and uncertainty to manage. There were retrenchments and retirements.

A parallel physical master planning process was undertaken over these years. Some minor refurbishments provided opportunities to bring the physical aspects of the Learning Village to life. This was a positive process which counterbalanced to some degree the distress

generated by internal organizational changes. Improvements to work areas, introduction of better computing facilities for the library's users and increased attention to the appearance of the Library helped staff see physical manifestations of change and the future.

The new structure

The University Librarian commissioned a review of the Library's information services in 2005. This was intended to address the special library model. There was legitimacy to this task: the conversations and discussions over the last two years had built a sufficient consensus across Library staff and the academic community that change was needed. The Learning Village scenario outlined a strategy: what was needed now was the structure to enable it.

In mid-2006, and after many attempts to get it right, the new structure was unveiled. It was a complete departure from the special library model, and was designed to function across all sites of UNSW Library, whether it operated in one, two or twenty sites. In 2007, the Library's largest facility is the Main Library, along with two small libraries in the Faculty of Law and the College of Fine Arts. The 'Learning Village' term had been a useful one as it had galvanized attention: not everyone liked it, but it stimulated thinking and discussion about the future of the Library.

The formal structure of the Library is now defined by three large departments: Information Services; Information Resources; and Library Information Technology. The recent re-organization of the Information Services Department completes the change process.

In the Information Services Department, four units replace five special libraries and the former User Services Department, which was responsible for circulation and shelving services. Two units have been created to provide enduring library services in new ways:

- Academic Services Unit. Its role is to deliver effective and measurable academic services aligned with the learning, teaching and research mission of UNSW. It is composed of Outreach and Services teams. Outreach teams are responsible for academic liaison and outreach. Services teams are responsible for the delivery of information skills, specialized reference and services to support research. This unit has a delivery focus.
- Client Services Unit. This unit is responsible for physical services to users across all sites of UNSW Library. There are three teams. The Desk Services Team provides basic reference, information and lending services. The Access Team will be responsible for maintaining access to physical collections in all sites and providing generic orientation programs. The Client Facilities Team will ensure our facilities and spaces meet high standards in presentation.

Two new units have been created to address innovation and digital service development.

- Service Innovations Unit. This unit's focus is innovation to meet the needs of our users. To do this, it pays particular attention to developments in the information environment. Market research skills are employed to identify new opportunities that will enable UNSW Library to achieve best practice in its information services. It provides expert advice on service innovation and enhancement as well as expert analysis of usage of services. The unit is expected to make recommendations about introducing new services, changing existing ones, and closing down services that are no longer required.
- Service Development Unit. Its role is to build and deliver consistent, high quality services, information products and content for use by Library staff and clients. The unit will build its products for both the online and physical environments. Much of its work is devoted to developing consistent and appealing online products and services. UNSW Library plans to conduct a smaller number of face to face information skills classes in favour of online tutorials developed and maintained by this team.

Conclusion

This is our organizational response to creating the working scenario developed over three years ago. Some other key elements of the working scenario are falling into place in 2007 too. The collections of three special libraries are being integrated to form the Main Library, with a significant reduction in the number of sequences. Over 100,000 items have been sent to a collaborative storage facility. The institutional research repository has grown considerably. The library's information technology infrastructure and facilities has been significantly developed. Not everything envisaged in the working scenario has come to life, but the thrust of it is visible. The use of the scenario technique provided a destination throughout the change process.

It will be sometime before its success can be gauged. A re-organization in itself does not guarantee adequate responses to the threats of relevance and value faced by university libraries. The re-organization is a platform on which new services can be delivered and revitalized relationships with users can be built. The re-allocation of resources to enable development of digital initiatives involved many hard decisions about radical changes to traditional library services, such as scaling back of desk reference and face to face information skills teaching. For UNSW Library, these decisions became a matter of necessity.

This was a long change process, because a principle of inclusiveness was adopted. Early in the process, it was recognized that a significant period of time was needed to build consensus and prepare staff and users for change. The major restructuring came at the end of the process and was executed relatively quickly. However, it needed years of preparation to address personal, cultural and systemic issues. A conscious decision was made to put these issues first and re-organization second. Time will tell if the right decision was made.

Appendix 1

Vision for the UNSW Library in 2007 – The “Learning Village”: a Working Scenario

In 2007, people coming into any part of the UNSW Library discover attractive and welcoming spaces. UNSW Library now occupies the Main Library in the library complex at Kensington upper campus, the Law Library on Kensington lower campus and the College of Fine Arts Library in Paddington. These three ‘libraries’ provide environments conducive to learning: their equipment, study spaces, group study rooms, flexible expanses and information technology infrastructure are of high quality and readily available. Excellent IT support is available. The main library and two branch libraries have primarily become spaces for undergraduate and postgraduate students. A wide variety of interactions occur every day: students learn from each other; students study quietly; academics and library staff meet to teach and design courses; seminars are held; interesting exhibitions change frequently. Sections of the main library are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A coffee shop and vending machines (including stationery and IT supplies) are available.

The main library has undergone major refurbishment. The tower has become the stack, and most human activities are in the building overlooking the Library Lawn. Service points have been rationalized and people get the information and assistance they need without being referred to other service points. Finding books on the shelves is now much less confusing. The number of sequences in the print collections has been reduced. Users feel they are in one library now, not four. In all libraries, low use material has been sent to a storage facility, collaboratively managed by research libraries in Sydney. Users needing material from storage have it delivered to them within twenty four hours. Journal articles are sent electronically from the store.

The library’s digital operation runs as smoothly and is as attractive as the physical library. Our students enter the Library through the University’s portal or WebCT: our key student systems have been smoothly integrated. Digital services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For example, academic staff can submit and track interlibrary loans from their desktop, any time of the day, anywhere in the world. They can submit course reserve lists and get copyright advice. All users can get online assistance in various forms: FAQs, online chat services, online tutorials. Online transactions such as renewing loans, reserving items, bookings of rooms and equipment are seamless.

Information services staff have developed closer liaison with academic staff. This has enabled them to become discipline specialists: they understand the research, teaching and learning needs of their disciplines and work closely with academic staff, undergraduates and postgraduates. They are involved in course design, physical collection building, identifying digital content and research assistance. They are often out of the Library in the faculties and schools. Together with our divisional colleagues involved in learning and teaching, our students attain excellent information skills. The Learning Centre is now inside the Library to enable collaboration and integrated services to students. All courses now have a mandatory information skills component. The Learning and Teaching Unit is also inside the library and is the focus for staff development in teaching. Workshops with academic and library staff are run in a common flat teaching space.

Skilled management of information supports our services. Our staff have become skilled in dealing with increasingly complex information types and formats. We meet the information needs of our community whether we own or have licenses for the material. The collection management areas of the Library deal with increasing variety and complexity of information. There are more formats. Information is purchased, licensed or identified on the free Web. The Library has commenced building an online repository of research generated by UNSW.

UNSW Library has developed close collaborative relationships with its peers and the community. Our activities with CAUL and U21 have enabled innovation in areas such as scholarly communication, digitization, benchmarking and co-operative storage. Our services to alumni and the community have developed a new set of supporters for UNSW Library. Our collaborations have proved to be mutually beneficial.

UNSW Library has become a coherent and integrated library, providing seamless services to users both physically and virtually. The library plays a central role in furthering education and scholarship in this University. Our users experience a consistent brand and image of our services both online and onsite. The University has recognized the library as one of the key assets in attracting students and as a key indicator of its quality.

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