



# People and UTS Library

Way back in 2010 my colleagues Belinda Tiffen and Sophie McDonald helped me to produce the video [\*Library of the Future in Plain English\*](#) for a conference in Victoria. Now seems like a good time to look back on it and see how we've gone in each of the areas. Along the way technologies changed and led to some different opportunities for us so that meant changes and we also took advantage of some other opportunities when they cropped up, but we've initiated projects in each of those areas and made progress in all of them. We are looking to visualise some of that progress later this year.

## ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

We are now more flexible and not too rigid about or wedded to our administrative structure. Staff are trusted to do their jobs and to take the initiative within their roles. Together we developed a plan for future organisation that we can evolve into that is consistent with major future initiatives and milestones. Some structure is still evident as it makes most people feel comfortable and can help them understand their role. There is now more cooperation across departmental lines, especially on whole-of-library projects such as: Open Access; Discovery enhancements; the implementation of an underground and automated Library Retrieval System; and RFID tagging of our entire print collection. Other examples of projects in which we've applied and benefited from such cultural change include new services and events like data management, Play Day (for first year students), enhanced reference services (including online), digital reformatting projects, a new collection management group and cross campus library staff exchanges (because we still operate libraries at two different Sydney campuses).

Staff have been encouraged to take the initiative, to play and experiment and to learn from their experiences. This has been encouraged by all levels of management and a lot of TRUST has been critical (both ways). It may sound glib, but it has all been done via encouragement, trusting staff to do what they are paid to do, experimentation, play, and through making engagement in our community very important at all levels. Staff have also been encouraged to share what they have learnt; not just internally, but in a much broader sense.

Over the last few years I think we have really developed a unique and very cohesive culture in our library. It is almost like an extended family and we do care for each other. Maybe it doesn't sit that well with contemporary management theory, but I really don't care. All too often I have heard older conservative librarians say "well, we can't all do what UTS Library does" in reference to our organisational culture. That makes me both sad and angry. Why not if they want to? I think the reason is that far too many library managers and leaders fear a loss of control; they fear ambiguity; they fear the unknown; and they are now immune to learning through play.

Management can block movement towards beneficial changes in culture, but there is still some scope for initiative if you are really determined:

- Learn to manage up.
- Learn to seek forgiveness rather than waiting for permission to do something.
- Don't just watch others with envy or read about it: learn by doing!
- Share what you do and engage with others (including your managers).

- Be patient as it probably won't happen overnight. Changing hard-wired habits takes practice and a lot of determination.
- Encourage those who are early adopters and comfortable with change to support others who might be left behind. They may need help to catch up.

---

## WORK CONDITIONS

This is one area that might seem to have been less active than most of the others and major change probably awaits the move into our future library in several years time, but there has been some progress. Some existing areas for staff have been redesigned and opened up. Our staff have codesigned their underground workspace in the new Library Retrieval System facility that opens up in 2014.

Recently a flooding and power emergency forced our main library to close for a full week and many staff gained first-hand experience at working under very different (usually remote and online) conditions. It made us think about how we work together, how flexible work conditions could be used and how we communicate with each other.

Over the last few years we've also taken serious steps to genuinely recognise high performing staff or team initiatives via both library and university recognition and award schemes. experience during recent emergency & offering services online to students (including communications).

We've begun discussing a move towards extended opening hours in our future library: possibly 24/7 operations. This will substantially impact on the design of the space for our patrons but also for our staff and we are looking at that very carefully over the next year or so of conceptual design development.

---

## SERVICE MODELS

In a general sense this has meant: being more creative in the services we offer and the ways we promote them (including the use of social media); experimenting with very different service offerings (and dropping them if unsuccessful); being more open and responsive to patron feedback; extending our offering specifically for researchers; anticipating new patron needs; offering more personal and personalised services (where possible); and being more collaborative with other university service providers.

Some further examples include:

- teaching skills when they are needed for students and researchers (not when it suits us);
- collaborating with other UTS units (English language assistance, the Graduate Research School, careers advisers, student housing, peer assisted study volunteers and the eResearch strategy group);
- working with others to improve our graduate attributes by building helpful library classes into the curriculum;
- improving our teaching and learning services in line with future learning directions at our university (e.g. more awareness of our support for "flipped learning" and open education resources);
- enhanced self-service and faster loans for clients through RFID;

- new services for researchers and learners that we've developed over the years including: a suite of workshops on data, Copyright, Open Access, referencing, bibliometrics, enhanced first year experience services, new forms and delivery methods for information literacy, workshops for our graduate school, connecting early career researchers and offering power sessions for researchers in their faculties, reading and research blogs, a Food for Fines program, online “Answers” (student interaction through answering as well as asking questions), student competitions (library videos, book plate design), and a consolidated Find Articles service online (applying much UX research and design);
- the development of a new form of service delivery from the library retrieval system (located away from the current main library in another part of the campus); and
- explorative current-state service mapping work with a service design firm.

---

## SUSTAINABILITY

We've taken a number of in-house steps to reduce waste, decrease our carbon footprint and encourage a healthy lifestyle for both staff and students. The in-house initiatives were kicked off and facilitated by a co-design consultant with an interest in sustainability and staff teams came up with several programs that targeted staff waste measurement reduction (through the use of re-usable containers), water conservation (by gaining discounts for those buying coffee in re-usable cups) and general health (encouraging the use of the stairs vice the lifts). We've also greatly expanded the number of teams we have on the annual Ten Thousand Steps program that encourages staff to be much less sedentary during their working day.

Our library retrieval system facility has been designed to the highest sustainable/green standards and as an underground compact storage facility for the majority of our print collection it will greatly save on the future use of electricity through enormously reducing the need for heating, cooling, lighting and cleaning of those collection items (unlike traditional library shelving).

We've also done a fair bit on awareness raising and advocacy in this area by promoting our in-house initiatives with our patrons and through collaborating with UTS Sustainability staff on their Earth Day programs and by running debates and talks on sustainability related topics.

---

## PEOPLE

I'm not really sure where Organisational Culture ends and where People begins, but I've tried to make a distinction and to present different material for this area. It is probably a very blurry line between the two, so forgive me if there is a bit of overlap or repetition here.

Trust in the workplace was key here, particularly in recognising those who are good at certain services and imaginative about new Library events and then letting them have their head. Experimentation and play really were encouraged. For example: in the use of social media and other forms of client interaction and on collaborative creative projects with our various elements of our design school, our Artists-in-Residence, and with various professional design mentors. Staff have also been encouraged to start developing contemporary special collections to capture the culture of creativity at UTS.

Many UTS librarians now share their experience regularly with others (on invitation) and we've become a much more popular choice as a workplace.

Over the last few years, many staff have been acting in higher level or different positions building leadership, management and other skills including experience across the many different areas of the library.

Working with design mentors has helped a lot. Design Thinking as a process has been very helpful and has impacted on both organisational culture and the attitude of our people. I'm really over boring arguments about data assessment, which methodology to use and which lame question to ask in more dull surveys. There are other approaches as Brian Mathews recently outlined in <http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/theubiquitouslibrarian/2013/09/18/moving-from-data-driven-to-design-driven-innovation/> Our library has been working in that space for several years now and I recently outlined a fair bit of our progress in learning about, and using design thinking processes here: <http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/blog/university-librarian/2013/08/design-thinking-and-uts-library>

I understand the need for data, but if we rigorously and blindly depend solely on such data and assessment driven methods and decision making we can often completely miss the mark and wonder why our patrons do not engage with whatever the outcome was. It all too often leaves out the human factor or “the heart” as Michael Stephens has long reminded us. If you look through my Slideshare (linked to above), that point comes out in slide #11. That slide is my sketch notes from Dick Rijken's closing keynote at our 2013 national library conference in Australia. He reminded us of the importance of culture, understanding the reality of ambiguity, trusting our intuition and the purpose of meaning in what we do. Those elements are all too often forgotten, dismissed or discounted by bean-counters, but I believe they are critical in innovation.

More recently, I've been wondering why I am so impressed by that wonderful [Hunt Library Story video](#) about their new library at NCSU. I'm heading there to see it for myself in early October 2013. To me, what they have done at NCSU goes beyond simple spatial and technological innovation. What I get from that video is that they've managed to include some "heart" and meaning and that comes from the people involved in the innovation process at all levels. I'm pretty sure I won't be disappointed by the real thing.

That's about it for the audit on where we are at and *what* we've done. If you're interested, and very determined to read even more the next few pages might be helpful as they are my attempt to outline some of the *how* ... They are just my tips and it probably isn't an awfully exhaustive listing.

Mal Booth

University Librarian

University of Technology, Sydney

19 September 2013

---

---

## Learning to get on, not to compete

To survive we must learn to get on with each other at work and to appreciate the diversity in our workforce. If allowed and encouraged, this diversity can deliver many different perspectives to problem solving and represent the diverse nature of our community. We spend most of our waking hours at work with each other and must learn to be more tolerant and appreciative of each other.

This also helps create an environment that encourages collaborative creativity, for hardly ever will good ideas be feasible if only one individual or one team is involved. Happy, cooperative teams also adapt better to changes and new challenges.

---

## Community & connections: people count

We are learning to rediscover our role at the heart of the UTS community and to engage better with the people across that community. Those connections are formed by individuals in the Library with individuals in the UTS community. This happens on a more personal basis than say by membership of a committee or a board. Engagement is a responsibility for all of us and the links we form benefit our users or clients as well as the Library and its future.

Some of us are still too slack in getting out amongst our communities and establishing genuine links or connections. We should not just be a neutral space. We should be actively connecting people with each other and with knowledge and culture.

A broader, deeper effort in engaging with our community partners helps us to stay aware of new directions, trends and initiatives such as enhanced cross-disciplinary programs, as well as new research and learning programs. Getting immersed in these initiatives gives us a deeper understanding of the support we need to provide and more time for us to prepare for that. Some of those connections, e.g. with our design school programs have proved extremely beneficial for the Library from 2011 on.

It is important for us to recognise our position in the University as a neutral space. We also function as a connector, helping to connect students, academics and researchers who may not be aware of each other and the potential links between their work. Facilitating these connections, particularly with regard to knowledge and culture is a function of the collaborative nature of the Library itself.

We engage with and facilitate connections in our community in both the online spaces and in face-to-face activities. Both are important and they relate very strongly to each other.

---

## Asking, not telling

Managers in the Library are learning to ask their colleagues to perform and to encourage better performance by allocating more responsibility and decision making to those who need it most. Freeing our people from micro-management and control helps create a work environment in which our employees feel more empowered and engaged in getting their work done. They feel more able to contribute new ideas and to suggest improvements.

Our employees need to feel special, respected and that they have a valued role to play in our operations and in our future. We are all part of one team and managers and employees need to feel like peers in our team, all with a necessary role to play in contributing to our outcomes.

---

## Library as advocate

There are new challenges for us that we need to be more active in understanding and then advocating and modeling, within our communities at least. We see the need for our Library to be an active and strong advocate for important contemporary issues in our society, including social justice, equity, sustainability, respect for diverse cultural backgrounds and open, equitable access to knowledge. As such we must continue to try and facilitate awareness of these issues through our own initiatives, however small, and by facilitating debate and supporting the initiatives of others.

Some of our newer Cultural initiatives are very effective but not too confronting ways that we can make progress in these fields.

Are we, or should we also be an advocate or role model for things like Design Thinking, Codesign, Open Access, Sustainability and other contemporary social issues within UTS?

How can we become or even hope to be an advocate if we are not really seen as a vital and genuinely engaged partner for both learning and research in our institution and by our community?

---

## Inspiration via vision (not fear)

It is important to develop and refine our own big idea before someone else tells us what it is. It is also essential for our staff to know what that goal is and how their work and the projects we initiate relate to it.

We have established a vision for the future UTS Library to develop as a hub, connecting people with knowledge and culture within the UTS community. As such, it should begin to function as the “heart” of this institution for learning and research. Some of the enabling ground work for this has already been laid for us with plans for a future library building that is central to the redeveloped City Campus, and significant investments being made in new enabling technology such as ASRS, RFID, open source technology, online resources and new discovery services.

The Vision, however, needs to be codesigned and further developed in much more detail as a synthesis of empathy, observation intuition and imagination from librarians, the UTS community, designers, architects, engineers, etc.

The challenges we face in developing the future library are design challenges: designing the spaces, design our services and designing a new organisation that is capable of delivering the vision. To do this we must be more familiar with the design process and this makes Design Thinking critical to us.

Again, a stronger and more active cultural presence in the Library is beneficial in communicating our Vision and in getting our community to engage with it.

---

## Change is inevitable

Many librarians are: too slow moving (always playing catch up), unaware that they've been left behind, shy, too wedded to ancient and irrelevant practices and processes, resistant to change (which is now a constant and picking up pace), and too obsessed to structured data and archaic taxonomies. These people need to be stimulated, energised, prodded into taking action, take

more risks and be challenged. We also need to be more engaged in our communities and more visible. To do that we must have something they want on offer.

We know that we must move away from the concept of the Library as a book storage facility full of shelving deserts and staff processing transactions towards a new more agile and porous facility that is more people-friendly, providing more active services and assistance relevant to new and evolving forms of learning and research.

That isn't the end-point of our journey. We need to embrace the inevitability of constant change, new ideas and new ways for us to do our business. Markets for knowledge and culture and the demands of our users are changing too. We must be prepared to move with the times and continue to deliver relevant services.

Our community is a network of communities with different experiences, needs and desires in regard to their library. For those who love the book and love their library, these changes can be difficult, there is a lot of emotion around the changes on both sides (clients and library staff). Change is always difficult and there are many people who don't want the library to change. If we want to carry those supporters forward with our expanded vision of what the library is and can be, we need to take great care to manage the changes and how we communicate them.

---

## Technology & architecture as an enabler (not usually the total solution)

We have employed new technologies to support and assist both our staff and our clients, not to de-humanise them nor to de-personalise their interactions with the Library. For us, technology itself is not usually the end point or solution, but we must continue to provide our services via the platforms that people want to use. As the Library for a university of technology, however, we should strive to keep pace with developments in technologies, particularly ICT and the application of technologies relevant to research and learning. This means we need to focus increasingly on what data means, how it is used and managed and how we can assist in this endeavor within UTS. The 'gamification' and MOOC-ing of certain aspects of learning and more innovative use of new forms of media are other examples of technological advances that already require our attention and involvement.

We need to learn how to be less obsessed with efficiencies and explore other ways to delight our clients.

We are still too miserly with our search interfaces. They are not well connected and fail to deliver what our users expect in the Google age (i.e. everything, delivered quickly and easily). We don't offer real discovery services, nor actively encourage serendipitous discovery and tend to dismiss it as unwanted or only of minor importance when the issue is raised. Our search services are efficient, targeted, specific, advanced, expanded and mostly text-biased, but our discovery services I think need to be more accidental, incidental, non-text, browsable, shared and more pro-active (on our part).

---

## Fun, not toil

Our managers should continue to appreciate the benefits of an enjoyable workplace, one in which our employees are truly happy. Small initiatives like our planning days, an Edible Books day and Play Day certainly have helped us in this respect. These events help to break down

barriers between teams and between managers and employees and they are essential in encouraging a collaboratively creative workplace.

Fun can also be a really useful way to influence behaviour, start something new or introduce a new direction; for both staff and our users.

---

## Challenging the norm; re-inventing ourselves

Establishing and promoting a relevant and contemporary identity within our communities is essential now. Libraries have existed for some time in the "Google age". That train has now left the platform and a lot of libraries and librarians were not on board. Some resisted it. We need to be part of that train and then take some risks in establishing our place and doing things that Google cannot do or provide. Place, space, mediated services and face-to-face value-add are a good start.

We are too obsessed with text based knowledge. There are many other forms of communication, culture, knowledge sharing and media. I don't think we understand them very well at all. Maybe we are moving from the Google age to the YouTube age (if we are not already there)?

Increasingly, I think we need more people around us who will help us to challenge the norm for library practice, particularly for academic libraries. It should not just be about making what we have always done simply more efficient. To do this I think we need to listen to more people who do not know the rules. They can assist us in a process of creative decommissioning that will be necessary to develop our future service model, because it isn't realistic to assume it can be done through growth.

There are examples of other libraries who have done something similar, such as the British Library (& their BIPC), London's Idea Stores, The Edge at SLQ and also in other cultural institutions who have changed enormously over the last two decades like the V&A, the Tate, the AWM and many others.

Some libraries have become increasingly irrelevant to many people and this is what hasn't been handled well by most librarians. They've had over 20 years of the internet to rethink what they do and how they do it. Libraries are closing or being gutted all over the world partly because they haven't been able to make changes and/or make a good enough case to keep them by staying relevant and showing how they add value to their community.

---

## Building an environment & culture that encourages collaborative creativity & imagination

We are almost completely risk-averse and this has led to a cult of plagiarism in our industry. Nobody is willing to do or try anything new unless someone else has already done it. This attitude stifles innovation and we therefore fail to fully engage with our communities and stimulate their curiosity for our institutions, services and collections. Many hide behind the need for "evidence-based practice" and bench marking exercises, but I think this mostly leads us to copying, imitating or simply reinterpreting the work of others. Thus, we fail to be original, creative, experimental, innovative, diverse and edgy. Addressing this needs trust, permission and encouragement to experiment and learn from making mistakes at all levels in the Library.



Libraries need to be rejuvenated with more people from outside the traditional professional feeder groups. People who don't know the rules and who can stimulate us and steer us in new directions. I think we all need 360 degree mentoring and our culture needs to be more open to new ideas from within and without.

Do our people have the space to fail, permission to innovate, time to think, freedom to partner, etc.? Are ideas welcomed, encouraged and cross-pollinated? Or is it all too hard and do we make it too difficult ourselves or simply avoid all of this?

---

## Asking users & UX research

I think some of our services, perhaps all of them need to be redesigned with more of a user focus that is based on real ethnographic user experience research and testing. We then need to understand more about the design process, so we don't go developing very static (unchanging) things that nobody wants, needs or can understand. These services need to be customisable, iterative and personalised to fit with contemporary expectations. A vanilla flavoured one-size-fits-all approach isn't workable now.

We continually need to find out what users need, expect and do in the Library. What else could they do? We must collect and analyse real ethnographic data about how users use our resources and services. We are not our users and cannot rely on many assumptions that we make about them. Our empathy for their situation and their needs isn't enough.

---

## No silver bullet

It isn't about the internet, or books, or services, or social media, a new shiny piece of technology or the catalogue. It is about all of the things we do and possibly about imagining and creating some new services and programs that we can add to our range. There is no such thing as a digital library. Well, not in any lasting sense.

---

## Incubation & curation

We fail to realise that we are cultural institutions, not just information or knowledge repositories. I like thinking of cultures as maps of meaning. What do we need to do to rediscover the role of a cultural institution? How to we create a flavour, some excitement, a more playful and engaging environment.

We've forgotten the extent of the curatorial process (research, acquire, arrange, describe, provide - at least in my mind), particularly at the start and end of the cycle. This must be re-learned and we must also learn what is involved in the creative process by creating cultural or knowledge works ourselves or by incubating the work of others.

Many of us are far too specialised (& in the middle of the curatorial cycle above) and disconnected from the communities we serve.

---

## Hire some students

Encourage them to tell you things. Listen.