
'A sort of tender curiosity' – different ways of looking at change

Trudy Turner
Assistant Director (Library Collections)
Templeman Library
University of Kent Canterbury
t.turner@kent.ac.uk

When we think about skills, do we set our thinking in the context of the broader recruitment landscape? Do we free ourselves sufficiently from the professional paradigm within which we in the information professions exist? Can we imagine the possibilities for the future if we develop our people and our teams with an eye to how things need to look in five years' time? Academic libraries are poised to make significant contributions to the changing higher education landscape through their position at the frontiers of the knowledge society. To add the most value for our sector, there is an urgent need for structured and focused change management programmes. At the University of Kent, we use a project management framework to deliver our considerable change programme, underpinned by a good level of development and knowledge-sharing activities within and across our teams. At the beginning of our major change programme in 2010, we identified a fundamental need to pump prime our project management expertise and support our teams to work effectively as project managers and as part of project teams delivering change.

SMALL CHANGES, BIG IMPACT

At Kent we are a converged service, our library and IT aligned within the Information Services (IS) directorate. Library Collections comprise Academic Liaison, Collection Management and Special Collections. One of the unrealised benefits to the library of working closely with IT had been the exposure to and adoption of project management approaches and methodologies. Upon the departure of our metadata librarian in 2011, we took a calculated risk: we decided to recruit a fixed-term project manager who could take for-

ward the portfolio of change projects in a focused, energised, structured way and would not be derailed or distracted by the day-to-day concerns of operational and team management. The metadata team explored the issues this might raise for them and agreed there were risks that could be mitigated. A full-time Library Collections project manager started work with us in March 2012.

Another opportunity arose with the departure of our principal library assistant for Digital Resources and Serials in February 2012. Again, it was felt that the risks of not filling this role on a like-for-like basis were outweighed by the potential benefits of further boosting our project management capabilities. In the wider Information Services directorate, we already had a project co-ordinator looking after the broad portfolio of projects across library and IT. We were asking our teams in Library Collections to embrace radical new ways of working and felt we needed additional support for those teams, close to their day-to-day activity. A full-time Library Collections project co-ordinator was recruited to the team in June 2012.

We lost some of our traditional professional capacity, which was challenging, but the team made plans to mitigate the loss. We did, however, gain some significant new skills, which are helping us make those strategic shifts. Both these new posts are fixed term, for two years.

CHANGE CAN FEEL GOOD

The project manager and project co-ordinator are responsible for building capacity and capability to deliver a portfolio of more than 20 projects over two years, including a new reading list system, library reclassification, shelf-ready services, CLA (Copyright Licensing Agency) scanning service modernisation, digital archiving, research data development and resource discovery. As we move through this change agenda, we expect new work will emerge: new projects that take us into new knowledge realms. We need to be ready to seize opportunities. As well as delivering some of the highest profile and highest risk projects, the project manager operates as an exemplar and provides support and mentoring to Library Collections staff who are managing their own projects. The project co-ordinator monitors project milestones, flags up and helps to resolve delivery issues and supports the delivery of business cases, project plans and project resourcing plans. The project co-ordinator has designed and delivered a series of project management events that encour-

age knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning, building a community of highly effective project managers and helping to establish a project management culture. The project roles are fixed term because if successful, by definition they will not be required after two years. This was made very clear at recruitment and we were seeking to appoint individuals who were prepared to take a professional risk in order to be part of an exciting, challenging transformational change programme. We recruited well.

HERE COMES EVERYONE

By summer 2014 we aim to have a team of confident, competent and enthusiastic project managers who can turn their hands to any project assigned to them, allowing us to move forward with emerging ideas. But, working effectively as project managers isn't just about business cases and Gantt charts. To achieve commitment and buy in to the project management process, to move firmly away from crisis management defaults, to encourage innovation within a clear, visible and managed framework, and to truly embed a project management culture requires a shift in attitude, mind set and outlook. We are asking people to step outside their comfort zones. They're probably going to make mistakes while they are learning. This requires a good level of well-targeted support, investment, reassurance and trust. It requires a no-blame culture and a learning culture. Everyone needs to be involved with this kind of shift and we can't achieve it simply through 'doing' project management.

But how do we achieve our own paradigm shift? How do we get where we need to be? We can celebrate achievement. Information Services has established an annual awards ceremony for staff who have made outstanding contributions. More glitteringly, The Times Higher Education Awards, now in their ninth year, are a celebration of the best in the sector and have the inevitable and important focus on our research and teaching activity. But might it also be interesting to reflect on different awards ceremonies? TARGETjobs, the National Graduate Recruitment awards, present an annual opportunity to take stock of the recruitment landscape. In all our recruitment, training and development activities, we should have an eye to the wider landscape. Attitude, mind set and outlook are all highlighted as critical factors for employers in today's challenging graduate jobs market. They should be no less important to us.

Here at Kent, we understand the importance of a supportive team culture. We have done several exercises looking at team values and working with teams to develop shared understandings of what the future might look like. We've begun to test what that means in terms of our skills and our ways of working. IS has now got a staff development group through which we are able to identify strategic skills gaps. We undertake regular peer assist activities with other institutions, and have regular Lib Chat/Tech Talk events, inviting folk from other institutions to come to talk with us and share learning and experiences.

At the SCONUL winter conference in 2012, New Teams for a New Era, there were some thoughtful observations about future skills. Descriptors such as agile, flexible, proactive, influencing, data savvy, IT savvy, innovating, collaborating, change agents, risk takers, values driven, project managers and strong leaders bounced around the room. We don't disagree with any of them.

Your organisation has a responsibility to support and develop you. It should challenge you and help you to expand your professional capabilities and aspirations. But what are your responsibilities to your organisation and, more importantly, to the users of the services you provide? Are you open to learning new things and seeing things through the eyes of the user? Are you flexible, prepared to take a lead, keen to collaborate? Whether you are just beginning your career as a new graduate, or are an established professional – consider taking the occasional risk. When was the last time you thought about changing your role, moving to a new organisation or, even more interesting, to a new sector? Can you find ways in your current organisation to make personal shifts within your role that will reignite your professional passion? The opportunities are always there, you just need to discover them, or create them – and then embrace them with 'a tender curiosity'.