

IFLA Knowledge Cafe

Continuous Learning in Libraries and their Communities

Summary of 2016 World Library and Information Conference Knowledge Café Program

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The Knowledge Café at the 2016 IFLA World Conference was an interactive discussion focused on a series of challenges and opportunities that libraries are facing in keeping their staff up-to-date as well as helping their communities learn. Using round tables and facilitators, conversations were lively, insightful, and provided a great deal of practical ideas to take home. About 200 attendees gained insights for building their own learning strategies as well as shared their stories and experiences.

Table topics are listed below:

1. *Learning Strategies for Staff*
2. *Team Building and Team Leadership*
3. *Learning within the Constraints of Limited Staff and Budgeting*
4. *Mentoring and Coaching*
5. *Transforming the Library with Creativity*
6. *Developing an Innovative Culture in the Workplace*
7. *Innovative Ideas*
8. *Digital libraries, Digital Futures: How to Develop and Keep Up Skill Sets*

Discussion summaries are as follows:

1. Learning Strategies for Staff

Discussion Leader: Jennifer Bartlett (University of Kentucky, USA)

Summary submitted by Ewa Stenberg, Rapporteur (Malmo University, Sweden)

New staff: Organize an orientation schedule and introduction visits to other parts of the library/other libraries in the system. Put together a "Document for basic skills." Hold both face-to-face and online introductions.

When staff retires: Train new people (at least two - three colleagues) before retiring. Write down knowledge and positions instead of names. It is better to hand over all of this information in a timely manner. Have a system of cross training and strategy for sharing. Documentation is important. The learner writes down the knowledge, makes a manual and the learner suggests updating. Working teams can promote shared knowledge and learning.

Good learning environment: Have a holistic approach over time. Require mandatory training. Show that training is a basic skill. Make sure that other staff besides librarians also get training. Put together an annual business plan in addition to a personal development plan. Develop a knowledge bank. Include things like "You are supposed to go to conferences" in job descriptions. Hold monthly staff meetings to exchange training experiences. Also, hold face-to-face trainings once a year for all staff, closing the libraries during the meeting. Institute train-the-trainer programs.

CPD examples: OCLC Webinar "Self-Directed Achievement"

http://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Self_Directed_Achievement.html.

Cambridge University Library, 100 libraries, 300 staff – general basic training 10 hours during autumn, individualized advanced training in spring.

[The 23 Things \(2006\)](#) is a good tool for learning. Learning has evolved and has opened up another way of thinking.

...and an addition, not from the table discussions: [IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development](#)

2. Team Building and Team Leadership

Discussion Leader: Catharina Isberg (Helsingborgs Library, Sweden)

Summary submitted by Steve Wise, Rapporteur (House of Commons Library, U.K.)

Catharina Isberg started the discussion by showing participants a set of skills that contribute to leadership. It was agreed that trust is key, not just between staff and team leaders but across the team as a whole.

Other important attributes and characteristics were thought to be:

- Honest & open communications, speaking the truth
- Empathy and self-awareness
- Making oneself available and accessible
- Mutual respect
- Authentic leadership
- Clarity & common understanding of vision, aims & objectives of the team
- Celebrating success

Some of the questions and experiences raised at the table included:

- Are soft skills recognised sufficiently when often the focus is on hard skills and experience?
- It is important to remember that there may be people who are effective team leaders who may not be managers.
- We need to be aware that personal values can sometimes get in the way of or conflict with organisational values. However, it is important to keep the core values of the organisation in mind as staff represent these.
- Where there are cultural differences, these should be respected.
- We need to be aware of people's expectations and how these may vary (both between different members of the team and over time as jobs and organisations change).
- There can be a risk of spending too much time breaking down silos and encouraging collaboration between teams so that not enough time is spent on developing the team itself.
- Sometimes it can be the small things that help build teams and relationships (e.g. celebrating birthdays, flexibility with leave, etc).
- The problem of 'millennials' – if they don't like it, they will leave. We are now in a world of portfolio careers and long-term loyalty should not be expected.
- Examples of approaches and techniques that had been successfully used included:
 - Team building events and retreats (these can vary considerably and success depends on the leadership, objectives, and the team having ownership of the event).
 - Away-days. These can bring out the individual personalities within the team and break down hierarchies. It is important to 'humanise' members of the team and leaders, to get a rounded picture of the individual and not just the professional face.
 - Providing opportunities for feedback within team meetings.
 - *StrengthsFinder* from Gallup – a book and personal development toolkit (see <http://strengths.gallup.com/110440/about-strengthsfinder-20.aspx>)
 - Listening sessions with all team members to build up a picture of the team as a whole.
 - Annual/ongoing dialogue with team members on individual and team objectives & performance.

3. Learning within the Constraints of Limited Staff and Budgeting

Discussion Leader: Jane Dysart (Dysart & Jones, Canada)

Summary submitted by Adolfo Furtado, Rapporteur (Legislative Consultancy Dept., Brazil)

The table had three rounds of discussions. The facilitator started each round by asking people to introduce themselves, naming the institutions they represented and the reasons why they felt they related to the theme. The sample of libraries was vast, comprising all continents and library sizes, from a one-librarian-does-it-all scientific library in Italy to a public library in California with a staff of 800.

All libraries that showed up at the table suffer severe budget constraints, which deeply affect continuous learning activities and projects. Most people said that their libraries were far away from meeting CPDWL Guidelines of allocating 0.5% - 1.0% of their budgets to training activities. Librarians also do not meet the parameter of using at least 10% of their working hours in learning activities.

Many librarians who work for governmental institutions mentioned that there is a gap between tenure-track staff and other employees, as far as training opportunities are concerned. While the former generally have the opportunity to participate in conferences and seminars such as WLIC, with costs met by their employers, the latter are likely to receive no training at all.

The lack of resources forces libraries to be creative, though. Many participants reported that their institutions run some sort of peer-based knowledge transfer and/or training. It is common for librarians who are able to attend conferences and seminars to share their experiences and notes with colleagues. The US Congressional Research Service, for instance, uses a variety of methods, such as organizing webinars, as well as internal coaching and mentoring programs. Many libraries also take advantage of free training resources and communities of practice, which are available on the internet. Other participants reported using social media closed groups and newsletters within their organizations to foster knowledge sharing. Finally, it was mentioned that job exchanges between libraries could be a very efficient way of promoting lifelong learning. The European Union, for example, has a specific program to promote the temporary exchange of librarians between different countries.

4. Mentoring and Coaching

Discussion Leader: Ulrike Lang (State and University Library, Hamburg, Germany)

Summary submitted by Gillian Hallam, Rapporteur (Queensland University of Technology, Australia)

The contributions from the participants in the three rounds of discussion were very interesting. A good proportion of the participants had been involved in some form of mentoring or coaching as a development process, while others were ready to introduce a program at their workplace and were therefore keen to learn more.

To open the discussions, we explored the people's understandings of the notions of 'mentoring' and 'coaching' and how they might be used effectively in career development. Coaching tended to have a more direct skills focus, or indeed, in some situations a behavioral focus, with very specific objectives for the individual. Mentoring was viewed as having a much broader focus, with individual personal growth and maturity at its heart. While coaching was context-specific, mentoring was more holistic, even philosophical. The discussions then explored the opportunities for mentoring programs in greater detail.

Mentoring could either be an internal program within the organisation, or involve mentors from other institutions. There were also examples of peer mentoring programs, avoiding a hierarchical relationship. Some people felt it was important to have the mentoring relationship within a specific area of practice, e.g. academic libraries, public libraries, law libraries etc., while others felt that there was value in relating their development needs to working environments beyond their own.

These discussions took into consideration the career stages where mentoring might be beneficial, with examples of programs for students, interns, new librarians, middle management and senior management. Some universities ran career-mentoring programs to connect students with industry professionals who could

provide guidance about the desired skills, attributes and attitudes required in a successful career. Specific attention was given to leadership development programs: both for grooming a person for a specific role, and for more general career development. Some concerns were expressed about situations where a senior managers may be trying to develop a clone of themselves, to step into their shoes; most participants felt it was important to adopt a more open process where the protégé's own personality and strengths were central.

In terms of geographical aspects, participants discussed the merits of local programs, where people could meet face-to-face, and regional, national and indeed international mentoring programs where the communication was virtual. Regardless of location, it was important to take into account the cultural differences of individuals, as well as wider cultural issues when designing a mentoring program. The value of mentoring was directly aligned with the contemporary understanding of multi-cultural, multi-generational workplaces. Participants provided rich examples of programs they had been involved in, highlighting some of the critical success factors, especially the need for good preparation for mentors and protégés and the clear articulation of people's expectations.

It was agreed that you could not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring. All those involved needed to understand the philosophies and principles of mentoring. The benefits of mentoring were mutual and reciprocal for mentors and protégés, as identified in a number of research studies that had been conducted. However, beyond the individual and organisational benefits, there were also immense benefits to the profession as a whole. There was support for the idea that professional associations could play a strong role in establishing and supporting mentoring programs and that this could be a positive benefit for members. There were many good resources on the topic of mentoring, within and beyond the LIS profession, and that it would be helpful to develop some ways of making people more aware of these. The participants felt encouraged by the discussions and hoped to take some of the ideas further after the conference.

5. Transforming the Library with Creativity

Discussion Leader: Mary Augusta Thomas (Smithsonian Institution, USA)

Summary submitted by Ellie Valentine, Rapporteur (Freelance Librarian, USA)

From Flying Squirrels to the Grey Goose (Vodka? Or Icelandic tale?)

The sessions were led by Mary Augusta Thomas who shared a recent staff innovation from the Smithsonian Institution – staffers' blogging on Tumblr to promote their digitized collection.

The Smithsonian Libraries is the world's largest museum library system, serving the Smithsonian Institution, the American people, and the world! It] collections have grown to support the curatorial and research needs of the Smithsonian, and cover subject areas from Art to Zoology. Most (99.9%) of the images posted here come from the SI Libraries' [digitization programs](#) and are in the public domain. Four staff contribute to this blog, mostly on their lunch breaks. They use Tumblr because it is the sassiest of all the social media platforms.

See: The Flying Squirrel GIF - <http://smithsonianlibraries.tumblr.com/post/108766082950/one-more-for-squirrel-appreciation-day-then>

The word “creativity” or “innovation” is very broad.

Everyone has creative potential but needs the opportunity to express it. This can happen in many ways:

- Exhibits
- Meetings
- Events
- Committees of users
- Use of social media
- Staff committees and celebrations
- Strategic Planning Processes - and instilling ownership in new ideas
- Surveys of users or stakeholders

Essential elements to promote innovation and creativity include:

- Building Trust
- Getting to know people
- Flexibility – in time, and space and even equipment and furniture

Who needs to be creative?

- Everyone!: managers, staff, stakeholders – and ourselves!

Creativity doesn't have to be expensive or focused on technology

- Old processes can be used for a new purpose.
- "It's what we do – we are good at inventory control, so why not check out \$100,000 equipment in an engineering library?"

What are ways to foster creativity?

- Awards – for teams especially and encouraging them to submit for another level of recognition
- Incorporating creative solutions into the annual performance process so that creative stories are captured.
- Staff "Away Days" or weekends or even just an evening out in an informal setting can allow creative ideas to surface.

6. Developing an Innovative Culture in the Workplace

Discussion Leader: Karin Finer (European Parliamentary Research Service, Belgium)

Summary submitted by Liz Turner, Rapporteur (TPG Global, USA)

Formal Strategies

- Share a common definition of innovation and creativity around the organization
- Align new ideas to vision/strategy/goals and published metrics
- Publish job descriptions, duties, and skills so required employees can match roles to skill sets
- Consider means for project-based and operationalized (process-based) innovation
- Determine what dollar amount is available within the budget for employees to experiment. Is \$100 or \$1000 acceptable for your department/organization?
- Consider design structure for new proposals and prototyping/agile development methods to provide frequent feedback for new or experimental projects

Informal Strategies

- Innovation is open to all voices at all levels of the organization. All ideas are heard
- Allow for a culture where failure is permissible
- Debate and tension in the workplace is natural and normal. Toxicity is not acceptable.
- Create an open forum – physical space or visible web presence where ideas are captured and translated to action
- Remember that ideas can't be confined to a time boundary and could occur at any time.
- Expose employees to peer organizations and other areas of industry where possible to glean new ideas

7. Share Your Innovative Programs

Discussion Leader: K. Jane Burpee (McGill University, Canada)

Summary submitted by Maria Ohlsson, Rapporteur (Lund University Libraries, Sweden)

Following are ideas submitted by table attendees:

- Heather Crozier, Ada, Ohio: AdaChat: "TedTalks light," where faculty and students talk about research in everyday language, open for all.

- Jona, Iceland PL: Art gallery in the library, change exhibition every 3-4 weeks, shows local artists, free for the artist. Also cultural evening, different cultures and themes. Singing, talks, writers talk about their books. Refreshments served (vodka provided by embassy of Russia).
- Adam, Library of Palm Beach, FLA: Lending librarians to government agencies/non-profit agencies. They work embedded and help with grant application writing, writing reports, finding sources etc.
- Eileen Lewis, Legislative assembly of Canada: Trying to break down silos. How do we package our information?
- Paola, Italy Parliament library: Gives IT courses to Italian MP's staff. Small lessons to explain databases etc.
- Iain Watts, EU Parliament library: Focus on delivering documents with added value information, resource guides on different topics (a recent guide on the International Day of Happiness got a lot of attention). At first a bit uncomfortable for staff, being used to only find UN documents. Many lessons to be learned, some were enthusiastic, some more conservative. Another idea: Innovation hub as wiki, a way of getting ideas up to management,
- Kristijane, Iceland, Independent Institution for Scholars: works to help Icelandic researchers/authors to get their books into Hathi trust and Google books. Contacts Icelandic authors, helps them with OA procedure. Negotiates rights for authors and monitors Icelandic publishing. Emails books to be scanned to Google.
- Jane McGill: staff created organizational citizen program, to promote positive attitude towards colleagues, to communicate respectfully. "Pay it forward".
- Chicago PL: Mini grant project, first training staff in Design thinking, after that encourage staff to submit project ideas. Passes an advisory board of external people who give feedback on the ideas, if the ideas are not accepted they give suggestions for revision, feedback to improve proposals, and the idea can be re-submitted. Examples of successful ideas: Game committee, unconference sessions, lending out instruments plus library materials (scores etc.).
- Helene Blowers, OCLC: "Mini-Fulbright", to foster innovation, development program for 6 months, budget from administration, to gather true passion
- Grant Lynch, Washington PL: Post labour environment: trying to give staff a voice and to start creativity. Mentorship is the next step, to establish trust.
- Someone told about a staff award that recognized failure, "cliff jumper award", to award stretching outside the comfort zone. "We need to fail forward, and fail fast".
- University of Cape Town: Reconstructing the library, into library as a publisher, have published eight books, OA textbooks in LIS, three journals.
- Qatar National Library: new library being built, forced to experiment, staff given freedom to be creative (staff 90 % expats). Lends out music instruments and has a silent music studio where people can have silent jams.
- Jane Grace (Australia): Green screen in the library where people can get pictures of themselves from different "locations" as backdrop (Valentine's day kissing in Paris, in the snow, in London etc.). Also working with maker space. Has an idea to create a "Myers-Briggs for reading" app that gives reading suggestions based on profile.
- Cambridge: UX mini projects, investigating library spaces, method called "space finder", analyzes how people use the library space. Space finder app: helps to find place to study.
- UK Gov't Westminster: Creating a knowledge network. Using OPAC to organize knowledge to leaflets.
- Congress library: Supporting Congress, consultancies partner. Collaborate with analysts, seeking resources and information. Supporting IT, HR, Knowledge network embedded.

8. Digital Libraries, Digital Futures: How to Develop and Keep Up Skill Sets

Discussion Leader: Gert-Jan Lodder (House of Representatives, Netherlands)

Summary submitted by Clara Bessa da Costa, Rapporteur (Senate Digital Library, Brazil)

During the activity, we had all kinds of libraries, staff and situations presented at our table. Some topics were recurrent and we had good debates, but at the end, we were left with more questions than solutions about how to deal with the current fast changing environment that is pushing us towards a digital reality.

Considering staff, we notice that age is not a determinant on whether a person is willing to adopt new technologies or not, since some library professors identified the profile of their undergrads as "old fashioned". Digital literacy is very important today, since one needs be able to understand technical language to translate it for users, colleagues and suppliers. Training opportunities should be constantly available, in a safe environment so people can deal with change easily, and avoid that experienced teams fail to notice new trends and the need for new skills. When hiring, the challenge is to identify people who are willing to go the hard way to find solutions and can complement current teams, adding new skills and perspectives and avoid hiring people more focused on systems than users' needs.

From the institutional perspective, it was noticed that organizations could not react as fast as we would like. It may be because sometimes managers don't know how to ask for help when it comes to understanding new trends and innovations available which we considered important highlight since they are the ones responsible for identifying opportunities and providing training. The result of this late perception of ICT can lead to problems like systems that do not communicate with each other, online presence that does not focus on creating a single identity or brand for the institution, users having access to interfaces that librarians can't interact with, tablets that are locked or with access restricted to prevent damage to the equipment and doubts on how to deal with users who still want access to paper versions of materials that have been digitalized.

Among solutions presented were peer-to-peer training, the ample use of mobile technologies to reach our users more easily and change their perspective throughout access to library products and services, the creation of a Librarians' Cloud to share solutions, gadgets evaluations and look for peers in our communities to help you with new skills development.

There is no easy answer, but we need to be systematic with our teams and Institutions so we do not miss great opportunities to innovate and be ready to serve our users in this new digital world.