Future by Design: Building Creativity and Innovation in a Library Culture

By Shawna Kristin.

Christina Neigel (University of the Fraser Valley, Library and Information Technology Program), Jane Watkins (North Vancouver City Library), and Gordon Yusko (UBC, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre) presented *Future by Design: Building Creativity and Innovation in a Library Culture (S6)* to a capacity crowd at the 2012 B.C. Library Conference. They began by pointing out that libraries have been called on to "innovate or die". They went on to explain that innovation is not about small changes; libraries of today need to not only reinvent what they do, but they need to reinvent how they are doing it.

Throughout the session the presenters used examples of how libraries throughout British Columbia have embraced creativity and innovation. Some libraries have looked to retailers for examples of how to effectively display products, while others have hired individuals with customer service, but not necessarily library, backgrounds. A library opened its doors at midnight to enable patrons to pick up copies of Harry Potter while another library has reinvented the traditional bookmobile.

In order to come up with creative and innovative ideas, attendees were encouraged to involve patrons in the brainstorming process and to embrace innovation in all job descriptions. Attendees were also encouraged to partner with outside organizations, and to "manage connections over collections".

Throughout the session, the presenters referenced the "Google 9 Principles of Innovation" and applied the principles to a library culture. Following are the nine principles and how they can be applied to a library culture as provided on the session handout (Neigel, Watkins & Yusko, 2012):

- Ideas come from everywhere – anyone in any unit or department, regardless of position can propose an innovative idea and it will be considered.
- Innovation, not instant perfection – test early and often and evaluate based on small versions or pilot projects.
- License to pursue dreams – allow individuals opportunities and flexibility to pursue ideas and concepts that interest them (and that are relevant to creating/sustaining an innovative organization).
- Morph projects, don't kill them – there are often useful, effective elements of programs or services that can be preserved or transferred to a renewed or updated version or to other initiatives.
- Share as much information as you can – ensure internal mechanisms are in place that enable collaboration.
- Users, users, users – continually bring their focus and feedback into discussions around planning, implementing and evaluating programs and services.
- Data is apolitical – opinion and hierarchy still matter, but be rigorous in the use of metrics.
- Creativity loves constraints – articulate the vision, then set parameters for available resources and timelines or deadlines.
- You're brilliant? We're hiring – recognize innovators when you see them, hire them if you can, or if you can't, consider collaboration or other ways to get them involved.

Presentation slides and further information can be found at http://libraryspeak.ca/reading-and-resources/.

References

Neigel, C., Watkins, J. & Yusko, G. (2012). *Future by Design: Building Creativity and Innovation in a Library Culture*. [Conference handout]. British Columbia Library Association Conference, Richmond, BC.

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