

## **'THE GOOGLE AMENDMENT': ACHIEVING NEW WAYS OF WORKING WITHIN TRADITIONAL**

### **CONSTRAINTS**

In June 2012, Deloitte announced the establishment of a Centre for the Edge, with its own Chief Edge Officer, in order to make sense of the changing digital world for senior business executives. While universities—and by extension information services—may not go to such lengths to explore new territory, it is clear looking into the future that innovation will be a cornerstone in the use of technology in higher education.

Griffith University's Scholarly Information and Research (SIR) portfolio has been undergoing a business initiative labelled 'Turning a New Page' (TNP) since mid 2011 . SIR provides many traditional library services such as lending, procurement and collection management, but also includes both the dynamic eResearch group and Library and IT Help, which includes the contact centre and provides initial support for IT for staff and students. TNP is designed to position SIR to be ready for, and to evolve to meet, the opportunities and challenges resulting from changes, both externally and internally, in teaching, learning and research now and into the future.

The TNP work has identified the need for staff to be creative and innovative and leverage the available technology to its fullest potential. SIR has many experienced staff, a number of whom are becoming increasingly involved in new roles around e-research. The challenge has been to find ways to encourage and enable staff to engage with innovation and to explore and experiment, within a traditional and hierarchical organisational structure and human resource environment.

It was decided to embed innovation and provide the opportunity to be creative by allowing free time for exploration and development for all staff, a model adapted from the New York Times report of the work style used to encourage innovation for Google employees. In an attempt to embed this into the culture of the organisation, discussions were held with human resources staff to consider addition of the 'Google amendment', a statement describing this opportunity to be innovative, to staff position descriptions. They were enthusiastic about the idea, but could not understand how this could be achieved in practical terms, or how it was necessary in addition to the existing ability to assign staff to project work. An alternative had to be found.

As an additional challenge, the normal work environment for many staff, especially those with operational duties and rosters to fill, doesn't allow for this free time. It was also

important to make available reflective and experimental time at a point when the staff member was stimulated and open to new ideas and technologies, and was most likely to be the most creative in applying technologies to achieve benefit. Allocating a few hours in a roster was unlikely to achieve the objective.

After some reflection, it was realised that when staff have recently attended events such as seminars or conferences away from normal routine, it would be more likely that they would be receptive and stimulated from hearing and thinking about new and different ideas. If a person could 'claim' some time immediately following conference attendance to focus on creative ideas and turn them into projects and outcomes, a culture of innovation could emerge which could flow on to others.

An opportunity to trial this idea became available when a staff member, an experienced librarian, returned from m-Libraries, an international conference held in 2012 in the UK. The staff member was keen to capture ideas generated from the conference and eager to see how they could be applied to the Griffith context. The staff member worked "off line" for a few days to consider ideas and conduct research without the pressure of normal duties. In keeping with the brief, ideas captured were not subjected to any limitations or mind sets around project size, staffing, IT capacity and capabilities or funding limitations.

The staff member was encouraged to engage with others across the SIR portfolio to further explore ideas and as a result, a small working group was established to see where the ideas and the trial would lead. The cross-organisational group was self-managing, with very loose reporting requirements. There were a few mistakes and a few wrong turns along the way, however the nature of the trial and the emphasis on creativity in the spirit of the 'Google amendment' combined with the group's motivation to see ideas implemented lead to successful outcomes. The group's innovation has seen the creation of new library services deliverable via mobile devices using mobile technologies such as QR coding and augmented reality. An SMS notification service advising clients of renewal dates or hold notifications was also delivered as a result of the trial. SMS notifications for workshop reminders are next on the group's agenda.

This paper discusses how the necessity of embedding innovation identified by TNP was brought to life by offering one staff member the opportunity to work differently. It explores the experience from the staff member's point of view, impact on co-workers, and achievement of organisational objectives. It offers a model which could be applied more broadly within organisations irrespective of type.

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