

LIANZA Conference

Monday 16 October 2000

Stream 2, 3.30pm – 4.15pm

Debbie Dawson, Human Resources Manager, Christchurch City Libraries

How to develop knowledge and learning in your library team

Supported by PowerPoint slides shown in text by bold 12pt text

Abstract

A look at the changing role of team leaders in organisations, and how multi-skilling and project based work can facilitate the flow of information within and across teams, assist with the management of fluctuating work flows and provide colleagues with opportunities for career development.

Introduction

Thank you for choosing this session today. I am assuming that some of you will be Managers in your libraries looking for ways to get the most out of your team structures, that some of you will be Team Leaders looking for ideas to keep your teams ahead of the changes, and some of you will be team members wondering what all the fuss is about and if things really can be different.

I want to start today with a brief look at why many of us are seeking to change the way we arrange ourselves in our organisations, and what it is we are trying to achieve.

Then I want to share with you some of the ideas and concepts that we are currently implementing at the Christchurch City Libraries.

And finally, given that many of the changes depend on strong leadership, what is the impact of these changes on the role of Team Leader?

Much of what I want to share with you today is learning from our recent restructuring projects – the review of our technical services directly affecting around 30 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), and also our Central City Library involving around 74 FTE.

Why do we need to change our team structures?

Why are we moving away from hierarchical team structures? (ask group)

- **Team Leader can't know everything – there's too much to know**
- **Information can no longer be tightly controlled and channeled through one person**
- **Specialised knowledge often not shared**
- **Too slow to respond to needs of the business because of the bureaucratic processes**
- **Team members often don't know what else is going on**
- **Customer problems often have to be referred on**

A big problem with hierarchical team structures is that they are too slow, they lack flexibility, and they are no longer comfortable environments for people to work in. All this makes them unsuitable for meeting the ever increasing sophisticated demands of our customers, who want things done quickly, done to suit them and their particular circumstances, and done to a high standard.

Given our history as preserving and historical institutions, and the corresponding values of many of our colleagues, how can we meet today's challenges of an ever changing business environment, increased financial accountability and the increasing sophistication of customer demand?

How do we ensure that knowledge becomes part of our organisational learning, which means that it is shared and disseminated amongst colleagues? At the Christchurch City Libraries we are doing this through changes to our team structures.

What are we trying to achieve with our new team structures?

What are we trying to achieve with our new team structures?

- **Get as much tacit knowledge out in to the open to increase organisational learning so we keep ahead of customer demand**
- **Develop our specialist knowledge in response to customer demand**
- **Gradually help everyone learn the specialist knowledge to increase everyone's personal knowledge and skill which also increases the organisation's intellectual capital**
- **Increase our ability to respond quickly to customer changes and fluctuations in work load**
- **Help colleagues see the big picture so they can respond to customers as individuals and work flexibly to meet their needs**

How are we doing this at Christchurch City Libraries?

The strategies I am going to share with you today are those we are using at the Christchurch City Libraries to ensure our Teams are customer focused. We are also doing these things to increase individual learning and organisational learning, recognising that much of the value in our business is the knowledge inside the heads of our colleagues. We want to encourage the sharing of that tacit knowledge as much as possible, to build our organisational knowledge to keep ahead of the customer.

How are we achieving this customer focus?

- **Multi-skilling**
- **Dialoguing with customers**
- **Flexible job roles**
- **Actively managing colleague participation**

Multi-skilling

Why are we committed to a multi-skilling approach?

- **Moves tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge**

One of the key benefits of multi-skilling for organisations is that by necessity it involves the sharing of information and this acts to bring out the tacit information within teams, often held by only one person, to be tabled so it may be captured by others. Others learn from it but also add to it, building on what exists already to create 'new' organisational knowledge.

When we tackle things we haven't done before we bring valuable 'fresh eyes' to the process.

- **Helps us spread the workload**

When there is more than one person in a team who knows how to manage a process, the teams vulnerability when people leave or are sick is reduced. It is definitely easier to manage the peak and troughs of the team's work load.

- **Increases skill at the individual level**

Increases career opportunity to build skill which helps colleagues move on and create opportunities for others.

Participation in project work increases the bigger picture, exposes team members to other ways of working, develops personal skill, and acquiring valuable knowledge and contacts to take back to the home team.

- **Increases customer satisfaction**

Satisfies the customer by always having someone who knows or who is willing to find out from someone else, or find out for next time.

When individuals see the bigger picture, they're better able to serve the customer – they are in a better position to be flexible and make decisions to satisfy the customer, all the time knowing the consequences of doing this. It also allows them to see the customer's point of view more easily.

- **Increases organisational learning**

Builds the store and intellectual capital of the team which has the effect of increasing organisational learning. By continually sharing the specialist expertise in our teams, through the need to multi-skill, over time the level of expertise in the whole team grows which is another way of increasing the intellectual capital in our organisation. This also means the knowledge is spread around more people.

Dialoguing with Customers

Dialoguing with customers

- **Regular checking-in with customers**

We are increasing the regular interaction with customers by the development of service level agreements which will provide structured and specific feedback about what we do and what our customers think about it.

The Team Leader is encouraging dialogue with customer, both internal and external, such as “What is it you appreciate about?”, “What would make it better for you?”. This is endorsed by the inclusion of ‘customer liaison’ in our recent job descriptions as a key output area, raising its profile as an important ongoing part of the job.

- **Sharing customer information and feedback with colleagues**

It is the daily interaction with others that converts tacit knowledge inside every individual head into something shared and built that can increase or create new ideas to benefit the customer. This is about sharing the best ways to do things, and frequently comparing notes. This is encouraged by allocating time for training, allowing time for skill to build up, and making the sharing of ideas and feedback a regular part of team time, such as at meetings.

Team Leaders are also encouraging informal daily dialogue between colleagues within the Team to check in with each other about the impact of what they do in their tasks on each other. The Team Leader’s role is to endorse this as legitimate interaction, and not as ‘time-wasting’ or idle chit chat.

Flexible Job Roles

- **Managing the specialist versus generalist tension**

Old style teams where roles are tightly defined mean that knowledge is often vested or held by one person – the expert or in our circles – the ‘specialist’. What happens if this person leaves, or is not on duty that day?

Current management theory is beset with paradoxes. There are no perfect solutions where everything is in balance. There is always tension. For our profession, it is the split between the generalist and the specialist. Go too far down the generalist track and we can quickly lose our competitive edge or have nothing to offer the sophisticated customer. Go too far down the specialist track, we risk satisfying the sophisticated niche customers but failing to meet the needs of the rest of our customers.

The challenge here is to capture the best features of specialist knowledge and roles and minimize the negative. How can we do this?

- **Create moveable specialties**

There is no doubt libraries need to build pockets of specialist expertise. What we need to ensure is that these are flexible enough to change when the business changes.

We are implementing this in two areas of the library. In our Library Resources Services we recognise the need for colleagues to develop expertise in areas like vendor partnerships, database management, and development and training. These specialties are not limited to one team, and may function across several where it would not be sensible to have one person in each team building up the expertise separately.

These are fixed term, and part-time roles. They attract separate remuneration for satisfactory achievement of specific targets, and mean that the opportunity to learn these skills is available to a wider group of people. The fixed term nature of the role also allows changes in specialty focus when business needs change, without altering the colleague's core position.

Recent changes to team structures in the Central City Library also allow for specialist expertise to develop. We have adopted almost a project style approach. Instead of appointing an information professional to a permanent role, which is often linked to a particular customer group, we are identifying what may turn out to be shorter term needs. This is because many of our target groups vary over time. Sometimes in our environment this is in response to political change, so we need to be ready to apply our resources to the current focus of the day. Our recent assignment of the development of library services to ethnic groups to a senior information professional is an example of this.

It is important that we continue to build specialist expertise, in conjunction with multi-skilling, and make sure mechanisms are in place to prevent it becoming the domain of one person.

No permanent specialties – acknowledges specialist expertise, the best, but acknowledges the need to change direction quickly at times

By avoiding assigning permanent specialties, there is more opportunity for more colleagues to be involved and to have a go. By rewarding these roles separately there is an incentive to participate and achieve specific goals.

- **Create the expectation of movement**

We are trying to avoid permanent job roles, and to create the expectation of movement. This is not easy for managers and team leaders of library professionals and colleagues many of whom have strong needs for certainty and stability.

We need this flexibility to survive in the business. We need an increased ability to change direction, redeploy resources, turn our hand to something else, and give up what isn't working or is marginal. We find this difficult to do in libraries. Maybe it is our historical and preserving roots. Nevertheless we can no longer avoid financial accountability, or today's reality which is the need to prioritise. We must move away from "being all things to all people".

What is wonderful about this need for flexibility, is that there are benefits both for the individual and for the organisation. It can be win-win. The business survives, and continues to provide meaningful employment, and the individual gets the chance to build personal skill and competency.

Management needs to be clear in the signal it sends about change. Change is not evil, it is the key to business survival. Many of our people may want consolidation and stability. On an individual level, this may be seen as a reluctance to learn new ways of handling information.

In order to keep up with the changes in the information business, we need to be able to increase the pace of learning with our library people – that is, they need to be able to pick things up more quickly, have a go, without expecting 12 hours of training first. For instance, one of the emerging core capabilities for our people is to be able to apply broad principles learned with existing tools to new tools. It is the responsibility of management to provide an environment where this can happen. An environment which encourages having a go, taking risks and trying new things.

Actively managing colleague participation

Management must be steadfast and actively **expect** participation, both during team restructuring, and during day to day operation.

Actively managing colleague participation

- **Involving colleagues in team design**

There must be no room for sitting out major changes. There can be no exceptions, as change of this type is a team effort, and no one can make these changes alone.

In our two most recent team restructures, there was a firm expectation from library management, that colleagues would be actively involved in the design detail of the new teams.

In the Collection Services review, although the top level changes were defined at the outset of the project, many of the processes at team level were completely re-examined through a number of task force teams. The Team Leaders for these teams were formally selected from the whole library network. The involvement of colleagues from around the network, increased the network's understanding of all the processes and was an opportunity to have input to the new processes as internal customers.

All Collection Services colleagues were assigned to a Task Force. Some were reluctant to participate, seeing themselves as authors of their own demise. This was made worse by the public knowledge that the eventual team numbers would be fewer. Library management decided to take a firm line on this, and there was a clear expectation that all would participate. This was an important way of acknowledging all the knowledge held by these colleagues, and also getting it out, when in the past much of it had been the domain of maybe one or a few people.

At the same time, it was recognised that at a personal level the changes were difficult for many colleagues with impending job losses, and individual career counseling support and change workshops were made available. Though it may have seemed callous at the time, it was important that everyone had the opportunity to be involved in the process redesign, and therefore maximise their chances of competing for the available jobs.

The second project has involved the restructuring of all out teams in the Central City Library affecting over 100 library colleagues. Again the changes are about increasing the focus on the customer. Existing team structures were functionally based, where the accountability for serving particular customer groups was not clear. The previous teams were based around general functions such as user education, rather than areas of customer focus such as leisure or business. This project is about grouping teams to serve particular groups of customers, so they can focus on the needs of their particular customer group, taking initiative and making decisions on the services for this group.

Once again with this project, library management decided that the team structure would change, and identified the number of teams in the new structure, but the form and shape of those teams was decided by library colleagues. Interested colleagues worked on the team of their choice developing a vision for the team, outlining proposed services, and identifying the capabilities required of colleagues to work in these teams.

The team concepts were further embedded by the groups working on a presentation for colleagues, and this was also videoed. The work these teams did on identifying the capabilities required to work in the team was very useful for colleagues when they came to apply for the new team positions.

Involve colleagues in the design of the new team to

- **Build commitment to end result**
 - **Encourage creativity**
 - **Get the tacit knowledge on the table**
 - **Get the hard work done quickly**
 - **Increase individual skill and confidence to participate and contribute**
-
- **Expecting day to day participation**

The Team Leader has an important role in expecting day to day participation from members of her/his Team. Especially during times of change, and when things are new, there will be a tendency for colleagues to want to return to the old ways, and this may threaten the sharing of information within the team.

Team Leaders themselves can model the behaviours they wish to see, such as conveying the 'big picture' to their team. This encourages individuals to see how they fit, and how everyone else fits as well.

So what does all this mean for the role of Team Leader? It means that our expectations of Team Leaders are quite different from what we expected in the past.

Role of the new age Team Leader

What do we need from Team Leaders today?

- **Do not need to be a technical expert**

In contrast to the past, we no longer need our Team Leader to be a technical expert. It can be helpful but it may not be essential. Once promoted for their technical specialties, we now look for people who want to develop others and spend up to 80% if necessary of their time in the job doing this.

- **Need to be able to set clear expectations, challenge and confront, motivate**

This is the bit that could be up to 80% of the job, especially in times of change or when team structures are new. This is about continually reminding the team of why the team exists, and what it exists to do. It is also about being very clear about behavioural expectations both within and outside the team.

- **Need to be able to articulate the big picture**

One of the main tasks of the Team Leader is to break down the big pictures into smaller pictures for the Team. This means the Team Leader has to understand and support the organisation's strategic directions and how the team contributes to these. This is also about being clear about how the team fits into the bigger picture, and the value that it adds to the organisation.

- **Need to understand the business environment and financial accountability**

Increasingly, we are looking for Team Leaders who can see and operate their team in a business like way, understanding the need to be financially accountable for the resources they use.

- **Need to be able to liaise with customers to main business and team's existence**

An important part of running the team in a business like fashion is keeping an eye on the outside environment, to ensure the services still meet the needs of the Team's customers. It is the role of the Team Leader to manage key customer relationships at the top level, and ensure that members of the team also liaise regularly with customers.

- **Need to ensure the environment encourages the behaviours we want such as multi-skilling and sharing of information, and 'rewarding' colleagues according to this**

Team Leaders need to actively manage the 'culture' of their Teams. They need to set the tone by setting clear expectations, role modeling the behaviours they want to see, consistently and relentlessly challenging inappropriate team behaviours. They need to achieve the tricky balance of rewarding those who perform and giving these

colleagues their share of time and attention, as well as managing those who are under performing.

- **Need to be able to report to management on all of this**

A significant part of the Team Leader's role is to report on the performance of their team to library management. We need Team Leaders who will actively do this without being chased or reminded for the information.

We also need Team Leaders who are able to stand apart from the team when necessary. This detachment is necessary because there are times when the Team Leader may have to deliver unpalatable messages in their role as library management or handle difficult personal situations. Team Leaders need to see themselves more as part of management, than as 'just another member of the team'.

Conclusion/Summary

Benefits of these strategies ...

For the individual

- **Opportunity to learn new things**
- **Increases career opportunities both within and out of the organisation**
- **Encourages networking with colleagues**
- **Better understanding of the big picture leading to more job satisfaction**
- **Increased customer satisfaction makes work more personally rewarding especially when receiving positive feedback**

For the organisation

- **Colleagues understand the bigger picture so are able to give consistent, aligned, customer service**
- **Workload is shared and managed more easily especially if people leave or are away**
- **The need for specialist knowledge is regularly reviewed and assessed against business needs, and adjusted if necessary**
- **Team Leader can think for the business instead of doing the thinking for the whole team**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences at the Christchurch City Libraries. We are excited about our recent changes to our team structures because we believe that they make us more change adaptive as an organisation. If our people are able to learn new skills quickly and are actively seeking to understand and anticipate the customer's changing needs, and our Team Leaders are constantly reassessing the value and contribution of their team to the overall organisational goals, then we are in a strong position to lead the way in the information industry.

Thank you for your time and attention.