Predicting Innovation in Library Environments

Michael Germano, Business, Law and Economics Librarian,
California State University, Los Angeles

Abstract

Useful, valuable innovation is never accidental. It occurs in environments and organizations that exhibit climates and values that allow innovation to take root and flourish. The most significant influences, both negative and positive, upon innovation and the likelihood of innovating include leadership, competitive knowledge and teamwork. The session will examine, through live polling and discussion, these three specific factors as they exist in participants' libraries with an eye towards gauging their role in organizational cultures that support innovation. If libraries wish to innovate in meaningful ways that improve the user experience there needs to be an understanding of the role that organizational culture and values play in that effort. The session will permit a deeper understanding of the ways leadership, teamwork and competitive advantage work to ensure that innovation efforts produce results.

Specific take-aways will include an understanding of the leadership styles most frequently used in attendees' libraries and the role they play in supporting innovation. A self-assessment exercise will also be conducted in order to understand individual leadership styles and their effect in supporting or quashing innovation efforts. Additionally we will explore the critical role of teamwork or shared purpose as well as competitive advantage in order to arrive at concrete steps that can be taken to ensure these values exist in order to support a library's innovation efforts.

Discussion

Description

Grounded in recent literature on innovation environments including examination of the cultures, value and leadership required to sustain them, the session was organized around a power point presentation that informed attendees and provoked discussion on the topic of innovation environment needs: climate/culture, values and leadership.

Examining each of these, by defining them and connecting their importance to innovation, the presentation summarized their centrality to the creation of healthy innovation environments generally. Each was subsequently applied to library environments specifically in order to achieve a greater understanding of the potential barriers to sustained, meaningful innovation in libraries. Attendees were challenged to consider the climate/cultures, values and leadership that exists in libraries generally and their libraries specifically in order to determine what systemic changes might be required in order to facilitate the development of a more innovation-centric environment.

Live online polls were conducted in order to facilitate discussion regarding innovation environments and the mostly widely perceived barriers to innovation in attendees' libraries. Poll Everywhere (www.polleverywhere.com) was used for polling attendees. They could participate via laptop or mobile device (phone, smartphone, tablet etc.)

Key Points
Innovation Needs
- Climate/Culture
- Values
- Leadership

Organizational Culture/Climate
- Collective behavior, shared ideas, normative thinking of an organization
- Social and emotional operating environment
- Affects the way people interact with one another (internal and external)
- Formed by values, leadership vision
- Climate is the manifestation of culture--the things the culture produces or what is seen

Why is Culture/Climate Important?
- Employees and customers receive signals almost immediately about--becomes part of an impression
- Culture is a direct driver of morale, employee commitment and productivity
- It also has a pronounced impact on customer retention and loyalty

Innovation Cultures
- Accountability
- Assessment/Evidence Based
- Change Tolerant
- Confident
- Creative
- Competitive
- Fearless
- Positive/Supportive
- Reward Oriented
- Vision Driven

Library Cultures
- Need for permanency
- Order/structure is important
- Policies underpin many processes
- Detail orientation and the 'innovation paradox'
- Not everyone who implements innovates and not everyone innovates implements

Values
- Standards of behavior that govern individual behaviors
- Typically formed/articulated by leaders and in alignment with organizational purpose
- Need constant reinforcement and structural inclusion to take hold

Innovation Values
- Risk tolerance
- Flexibility
- Boundarylessness
- Customer Focus
- Shared Purpose
- Value/Empower People
- Results Oriented
- Sense of Urgency
- Low Tolerance for Repetition

Library Values
- Organized and Predictable
- Permanency
- Shared Purpose/Collaborative
- Service

Leadership
- The process of influencing others to engage in a shared task or purpose
- Leading/leaders not the same as managing/managers
- Has enormous impact on determining and organization's culture and values

Type of Leaders and Innovation
- Autocratic
- Democratic
- Bureaucratic
- Charismatic
- Situational
- Transactional
- Transformational

Influencing Innovation Probabilities
- Rejecting status quo requires:
  - Communication
  - Leadership
- Not always focusing on the obvious
- Marketing (true sense of the word…)
- Freedom from planning, process and rigid structures

- Innovation is predictable when…
- Transformational leadership and change tolerance/acceptance abound
- Risk is tolerated and rewarded
- Negativity diminished
- Processes, policies and structures take a back seat to vision, mission and outcomes

- Collaborative, team environments with no fiefdoms, silos or territoriality
- Valued, empowered people who care urgently about customers and competition

Polling Questions and Responses (Samples)
The following live polls were conducted to solicit feedback and provoke discussion about participants' library innovation environments. Questions considered values, leadership and climate/culture.

It is easy to get things done in my library since there are few fiefdoms or silos.

ⓘ **Start** this poll to accept responses

Agree Strongly	8%
Agree	13%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3%
Disagree	21%
Disagree Strongly	56%

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22
Total Results: 39

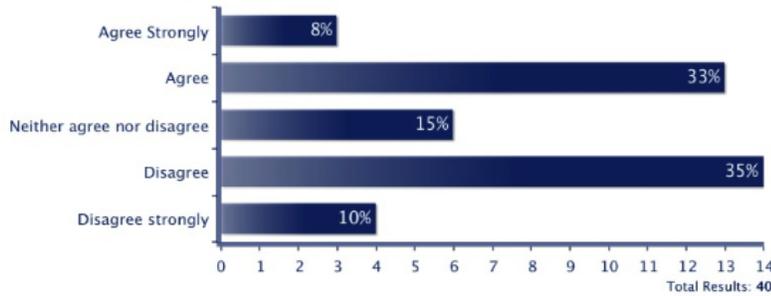powered by **Poll Everywhere**   Live Audience Polling
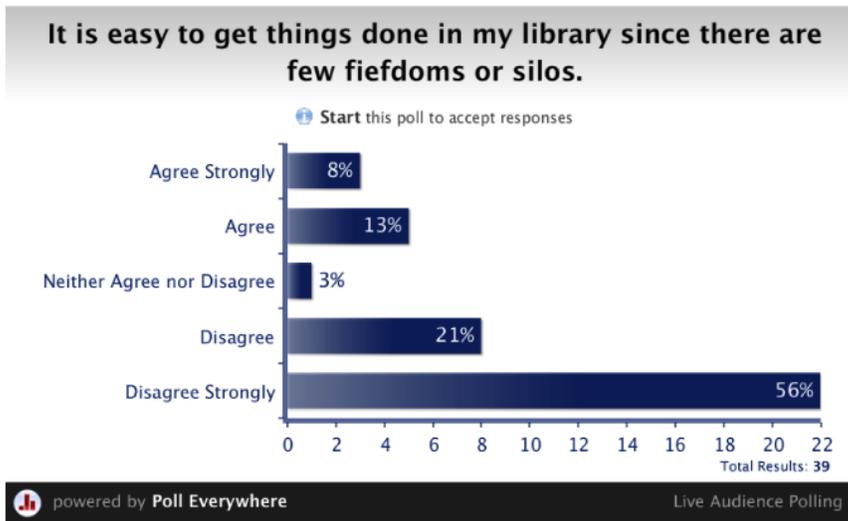
Territoriality (as suggested above) is a strong barrier to innovation. It results in obstructionism and the inability to try new things. Participants lamented this a frequent barrier to innovation but admitted it was oftentimes self-imposed, self-sustained and could be minimized by demonstrating a willingness to be less controlling and more cooperative in work environments.

I feel empowered by my library's leadership, policies and culture in order to try new things even if they are risky or might fail.

ⓘ This poll has received the maximum number of votes

Yes	45%
No	55%

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22
Total Results: 40

powered by **Poll Everywhere**   Live Audience Polling

Lack of empowerment and inability to engage in risk taking based upon control desires of upper managers in libraries represents a negative upon innovation environments. Respondees who felt they could take risks and were rewarded for trying even when failing shared the positive impact this had on innovation especially with regards to delivery of services.

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Playing devil's advocate and constantly questioning change or new ways of doing things is reflective of a 'thoughtful' planning process that promotes useful innovation.
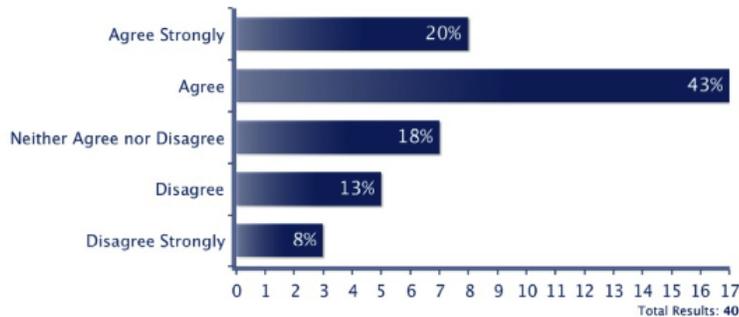
This poll has received the maximum number of votes

Response	Percentage
Agree Strongly	8%
Agree	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%
Disagree	35%
Disagree strongly	10%

Total Results: 40

powered by **Poll Everywhere**   Live Audience Polling

Participants were fairly split between agree and disagree responses on this question. Many librarians praise the concept of deliberativeness and careful, measured decision-making. Others recognized that such thought processes can be detrimental to trying new things in timely ways that provide the best results for patrons.

On a day to day basis, I am considered valuable due to what I produce.

This poll has received the maximum number of votes

Response	Percentage
Agree Strongly	20%
Agree	43%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18%
Disagree	13%
Disagree Strongly	8%

Total Results: 40

powered by **Poll Everywhere**   Live Audience Polling

Environments that support innovation value people and the contributions they make. Response to the question above indicates that most librarians feel valued in terms of what they do and produce, which is a positive influencer of innovation and creativity. Participants shared this strong feeling of value, which oftentimes comes from patrons and not the organization, as a driver and motivator for trying new tings and taking risks.

Word cloud for open-ended responses to the question "My library's leadership is best described as…."

Word cloud for open-ended responses to the question "The values most important to my library are…"

Further Reading

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