



Being an intrapreneur and creating a successful information service within your organization

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'You may imagine that intrapreneurs are a relatively recent breed of worker; but the term is based on the word "entrepreneur"... by 1800, the French economist J.B. Say had expanded the definition to someone who moves economic resources into an area of higher productivity and greater yield.'

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Abstract

Suggests various ways in which library and information professionals can and should demonstrate to their organizations and to the public that their function is not merely useful but provides an essential service. These are likely to include a combination of marketing, corporate intelligence, management skills and innovative thought and to be based on the belief that library and information professionals are best equipped to make sense of the new areas of information and knowledge management that are currently proliferating. Argues that the key to success lies in a new style of management, defined as 'intrapreneurial' as applied to library and information service management. The fundamental nature and characteristics of intrapreneurs are discussed. These qualities include the ability to: allocate resources for service quality; delegate and organize; reduce individual and team stress; accept responsibility of leadership; motivate at all levels; select a good team; and develop a good team. The five requirements identified as being essential to allow the growth of intrapreneurship comprise: encouragement of risk-taking; financing, rewarding and recognizing innovation; improved means for dissemination of innovation in the public sector; provision of political leadership; and development of a new breed of public sector managers who are trained and motivated as intrapreneurs.

Entrepreneur to intrapreneur

No matter how much or for how long, library and information professionals may have been talking about the potential of the information revolution, many still don't seem to be able to shake off their image problem. This is not news, but it does colour the way in which all kinds of organizations consider their information and library services, and the public perception of the librarian. Herbert S. White, Dean of the School of Library Science at Bloomington University, once noted that corporate libraries generally have the potential for development with minimal interference from the rest of the organization, because the organization considers it to be a safe environment that operates quietly and does not make waves. This may be true in many settings, but it is not the way that the future lies, and it is time that both the library and the organization were surprised by the immense potential benefit that lies even in traditional information work (which was White's point).

In this article we suggest various ways in which library and information professionals can – and should – demonstrate to their organizations and to the public, through a combination of marketing, corporate intelligence, management skills and innovative thought, that their function is not merely useful but provides an essential service at the start of the new millennium.

Lateral-thinking and innovative library and information professionals have opportunities to demonstrate their value by developing these new skills, and entering new kinds of work such as knowledge management. A number of other professions are staking their claims to these areas of work, and the new technologies are blurring the boundaries. But we firmly believe that library and information professionals are best equipped to make sense of these new areas. The key lies in a new style of management, which is described as *intrapreneurial*, and in its application to information and library service management.

What are intrapreneurs?

First of all, what exactly do we mean by 'intrapreneur'? You may imagine that intrapreneurs are a relatively recent breed of worker; but the term is based on the word 'entrepreneur', and that word itself is rather older than perhaps might be thought. It dates back at least to the writer Richard Cantillon, who used it in 1734 to describe

someone who bought cheap and sold dear. By 1800, the French economist J.B. Say had expanded the definition to someone who moves economic resources into an area of higher productivity and greater yield. In time the meaning has widened to denote a freewheeling and dynamic style of business management, often based on personal style and risk.

We first begin to hear of intrapreneurs in the 1980s, when it was realized that these characteristics existed not only in business environments but also within larger public sector and commercial organizations. In these bodies, some of those who wished to act as entrepreneurs were unable to do so, because of the organizations' structures around them. This might be perhaps because the body was publicly funded and therefore subject to particular accounting rules, or because they were proposing a commercial activity within a non-commercial environment, or a business activity that conflicted with the main business of the organization. But there was no fundamental reason why people should not act as entrepreneurs, within the structure of their organizations, whilst complying with most or all of the rules of the body in which they were employed.

Much of the development of the concept of the intrapreneur has been the work of the writer Gifford Pinchot. His was the realization that not only is it possible for organizations to agree to a form of internal market and entrepreneurial behaviour, but it could be a positive benefit. At the simplest level, the intrapreneur can be a person with an innovative idea who creates the atmosphere where that idea can be put into practice and can succeed in bringing a benefit to the organization.

Characteristics of the intrapreneur

Some of the personality characteristics of the entrepreneur have been described in print. They have been seen as individuals who may be isolated within society; they may fit poorly with society, and may be spurred into entrepreneurial action by this. They may indeed be members of some minority. The personality traits of librarians have often been described similarly; the time is now for those librarians who fit this stereotype to develop its positive features.

A survey of UK school principals carried out in 1993 identified some desirable characteristics of educational entrepreneurs. As it should already be clear that one of

the abilities of the intrapreneur is to read across the possibilities of one situation to another, let us consider the applications of these characteristics to the library and information professional:

- vision
- ability to think long term.

Intrapreneurs need to see the big picture, the possibilities of a situation. Library and information professionals have a broad canvas on which to paint their vision. The ability to think long term clearly forms part of that vision. The intrapreneur must consider what influences will affect service in the future, and how services will be continued during the transition and development periods.

A number of management skills were also identified as important in the survey, including the ability to:

- allocate resources for service quality (which is particularly relevant to the management of service development and innovation)
- delegate
- organize.

Interestingly, many of the remaining characteristics relate to team working and management. They are:

- the ability to reduce individual and team stress
- the acceptance of responsibility of leadership
- the ability to motivate at all levels
- the ability to select a good team
- the ability to develop a good team.

The think-tank Demos published a further survey that identified five requirements to allow the growth of intrapreneurship, which Demos calls 'civil entrepreneurship'. They were:

- the encouragement of risk-taking
- financing, rewarding and recognizing innovation

- improved means for dissemination of innovation in the public sector
- providing political leadership
- development of a new breed of public sector managers who are trained and motivated as intrapreneurs.

There are concrete examples of some of these behaviours. The dissemination of innovation takes place for example through the adoptions of Lessons Learned Units, an idea that is already widely used in the USA: many military establishments and some government agencies routinely post information about their Lessons Learned on their Web sites. And intrapreneurial political leadership is visible in local government reforms that are following the first direct elections in the UK for mayors of London and other cities.

The information intrapreneur

Companies and public bodies spend millions of pounds annually on acquiring information in all shapes and forms. Much of it is bought in multiple copies, badly managed and ultimately abandoned or lost. When it is needed urgently, it may well be purchased a second time. Information is lost at an alarming rate, whilst inaccurate information replaces it from informal and formal resources. This causes unnecessary expense and creates competitive disadvantage for organizations, whilst it can have potentially serious consequences for individuals.

The rapid emergence of the Internet and way in which it has captured the popular imagination have led to a new and widespread appreciation of the issues and problems of information management. The public and corporate management, have become aware of the problems of access to a world-wide fund of information, through its sheer size, the difficulty of navigating it, and the conflicts of information within it. Library and information staff have been talking about it for years and were, sadly, unheeded – but now the popular media are describing it and everyone is suddenly an expert on information management!

The information and library service is an ideal place for the intrapreneurial spirit to flourish, although it is clear that many librarians need more training and development in order to act as guides and coaches through the information maze. It is the skills and training of the li-

brary and information professional, which can resolve the problems and provide the ideal background for an intrapreneurial approach to corporate information management.

Many library and information professionals are already used in some measure to this kind of operation, for example, by having to market their services in an organization which does not otherwise carry out internal or external marketing, or by needing to take a wider view of their role in the organization in order to ensure survival during downsizing.

This holds good in every sector of library and information work. In the public sector, communities will often remark on the librarian's skills in networking for general benefit, but fail to exploit those same skills when other local projects are being undertaken. The public library will in many cases be the only collective source of information about its locality. The community information networks maintained by librarians are often recognized as valuable but viewed as passive tools, to be constructed and then consulted almost as a last resort. The innovative library and information professional has the ability to make these resources into proactive tools.

In the academic and research sectors the library and information professional also has a range of opportunities to move from being the guardian of a reactive store to managing a central and crucial resource for the parent organization. In an environment which is founded on research there will be little need to promote the scholarly aspects of the work of the library, but it may well need to be made clear at an organization-wide level that its professional managers have a strong management contribution to make as well as a fund of information.

What do information intrapreneurs do?

The first part of the job of an information intrapreneur is to make sure that the organization realizes that there is no viable alternative to a professional information and library service – only a non-viable alternative, which is to do without information. Doing without works fine until a blunder is made through lack of information. When the blunder is sufficiently great, the problem will disappear as the organization goes out of existence or the community splinters through lack of communication.

The second part of the job is to ensure that the organization realizes that its information and library services

are not simply a cost overhead, but can contribute to the bottom line. The contribution can be easily identified in terms of value added and perhaps in hard cash. Even if more money cannot be voted to the information and library service, the service should at least be able to show that it is providing more value for every pound, dollar or euro than in the past. An information and library service that can demonstrate this approach has the right to be heard, and respected for its contribution.

The organization and the information intrapreneur

Intrapreneurs work within an employing organization to achieve their own targets but in doing so they must further the ends of that organization. They have to understand not only their own position and activities, but also how these relate to the employer's business.

The style of behaviour which we are describing here is adaptable. It does not matter what words are used to describe the style of activity or its contribution to the organization. What matters is the managerial, business-like approach to information services, and the frame of mind which goes with managing it. It does not, by the way, even matter whether the librarian is paid or voluntary; well-considered intrapreneurial behaviour might contribute greatly to a charity's efforts.

Some ways to achieve this approach might be to consider:

- what the organization's objectives are
- who are the movers and shakers
- how people use information
- how the information intrapreneur fits into these patterns.

The objectives of the organization

Every collection should be tailored for its users, so that maximum use is made of it. Every book its reader, and every reader his book – the trick is to bring the readers and the books together in the right place at the right

time. So it follows that library and information professionals should be seeking to know what sort of information is used by their clients, and how they use it, in order to ensure that the collection best meets their needs.

Organizations generally have a wealth of information which is held by the various departments, divisions, sections and even individual staff members. Before a relevant service can be provided the information professional needs to build up a picture of the organization's information assets, their relations to one another, and the areas in which they are deficient (so that people may be going elsewhere or using informal networks).

The tool by which this is done is an information audit. We believe that it has equal potential in all types of information environments, not simply in the special library services where it was first developed. It is an important and valuable technique, which yields data about the information resources held within the organization or community, its match to the information requirements of the customer group, and the opportunities for intrapreneurial behaviour.

An information audit will seek to answer a number of questions about information and its use in the organization. It will pose a number of questions which should persuade management (or the people funding the service) of the value of time and effort spent on the information audit activity. And it will consider a number of problems which may be met in the organization's behaviour in the use of information, which will in turn affect the chosen content for the library and information service collections.

This clearly applies to any kind of library collection, although it is rather easier to develop these techniques within closed organizations such as companies. In some communities, perhaps there is a preponderance of small businesses, which do not support a library of their own and need information and reference support from the public business library service, but the basic techniques remain the same.

To find out whether the information resources exposed by the audit are appropriate, the library and information professional must find out more about the organization itself. The specialist working within the organization will have a number of routes to find out about the aims and objectives of the body, some formal and some informal. They may be people-based or document-based. They include:

- organizational publications

- people within the organization
- library-derived information
- library-sponsored research.

Aims and objectives may well be listed in reports and other publications, and if not, they can be deduced from the narrative. Whilst these documents inevitably look backwards over recent achievements, they will also provide some clues about current and future concerns.

Newsletters of various kinds are a source which amply repay the reading. You may be certain that any initiatives or projects mentioned in them will be close to the hearts of those concerned, and may well be their pet projects. Contacting people, offering support and development ideas will be made easier using such publications, which are often left in information points and libraries by their producers. Best of all, the key people will probably be named in the article, and their telephone number or Email address included too!

It would be useful, of course, if the librarian of an organization did not have to resort to reading public documents to find out what was happening or likely to happen. It should be possible to keep in touch with developments through the organization's communications channels – and simply by talking to other people there. (Nothing replaces walking around and discussing information needs and resources with potential and actual clients.) But to whom should the library and information staff be talking?

Established users

It is surprisingly simple to overlook established users of a library and information service as a source of information about the organization. Yet many of them will be willing to tell you what is going on in their area and allow the library and information staff to identify resources to support these developments. The librarian's natural sociability will help to establish good relationships and networks that can assist the users.

Potential new users

As important are potential new users – those who have not yet realized that information can make a difference. Studies in Canada and the UK have demonstrated that information resources, once potential users have been alerted to them, have an important input to business processes. The library and information professional

needs to read the clues to produce a service to suit the potential users (if necessary by asking them!).

Rising stars

In the light of the previous two categories, the rising stars – people destined to be prominent in the organization in the near future – are perhaps the most interesting and important group of users to identify. The difference between them and the other groups is that they will develop new areas of work or society, whereas the current and potential users from the core area represent present requirements and demands. Information can be an important tool in the career of the rising star, and the library and information professional can usefully be associated with that career. In the local authority context, for example, gaining a local personality as a user will be a selling point for the service. In a company a new director can be enlisted. University users are already used to coming to the library, but association with a new and dynamic area of work will – if suitably acknowledged – give the library greater knowledge of the developing areas of work.

Knowledge of the developing aims and objectives of the organization (as opposed to knowing what was important last year) comes from active involvement by the information and library service in its community. And those rising stars or indeed established directors who are convinced users of information services, can be champions for the information and library services.

Information and knowledge management

The current buzz phrases are ‘information management’ and ‘knowledge management’. But these are in many ways just the latest reincarnation of the basic principles of information and library work, and may turn out to be short-lived trends. The people associated with the start-up phase of these initiatives are often considered vulnerable as the trends go out of fashion and they may move on rapidly as their stars wane. So it pays to find emerging champions in case of casualties on your management board, to ensure that your library and information service continues to play a vital role in the life of the organization.

Knowledge management

Knowledge management is a relatively new technique which is attracting increasing attention, particularly in mainstream management and IT literature. It is described in terms of which these are typical:

- disclosure or sharing of knowledge (e.g. lessons learned, best practices) so that members of an organization can use that knowledge in their roles within the organization
- ensuring that information is available at the location where it is most crucial for decision-making processes
- ensuring that knowledge is available when it is needed
- ensuring that it is possible for new knowledge to be created, e.g. through research and development operations
- ensuring that everyone in the organization knows who has knowledge and where it is.

Information and library professionals will recognize these terms when they are reduced to simpler words. A library or document centre helps to share knowledge, especially when professional skills are applied to its organization. The operations of special libraries, and increasingly of others serving specialist sectors of the community at large, support the creation of new information. It amounts to ‘the right information (or book, or document) at the right time in the right place’ – although there is a skill to knowing which is the right place and the right time.

The new techniques of knowledge management actually call for the skills that information specialists have had all along. Those skills certainly include locating information in documents and organizing the retrieval of those documents to respond to requests for knowledge. But they also involve ‘knowing what we know’, that is, knowing what information resides in an organization and knowing who has it. This is something which information specialists have also been doing informally for years, and they are good at ensuring relevant information is shared.

One of the recurring themes in knowledge management literature is the problem of people who believe knowledge (or information) is power and do not share it

with colleagues, thus destroying the possibility of increasing knowledge through synergy. The problem in many organizations is that the adoption of knowledge management entails recognition of the power, which goes with the understanding of knowledge flows and ownership within the organization or community. This puts information specialists into a stunningly strong position, perhaps stronger than that of some directors and senior managers.

A change of style

It follows that librarians/information specialists need to change their behaviour. First, they need to take a wider view of their professional interest within an organization, so that they use their skills to address not only information (particularly printed information) but knowledge, including who knows what, who knows whom, and where the knowledge resides. For this reason, there are great advantages when libraries undertake a range of functions like maintaining the organizational directory, managing public contacts by letter or telephone, or putting 'yellow pages' onto an intranet, as well as simply maintaining the library. Information workers need to act as if their role mattered, and they must be willing to promote both themselves and their achievements at every level. 'It's important that companies exploit the skills of people with librarianship and published information backgrounds' was the view of one senior manager in the pharmaceutical industry.

Work on defining the role of the chief knowledge officer (CKO) in organizations has identified a series of tasks commonly performed by this person. They include:

- content acquisition and management
- information audit – identification of internal information sources
- design of content management tools
- putting a structure on the information
- understanding external sources
- enabling timely delivery
- design of communication formats

- effective utilization of information.

We examine some of these topics – notably information audit – in more detail in our book *Becoming a Successful Intrapreneur*. But there is nothing in the role of the chief knowledge officer which falls outside the competencies of the library and information professional. The roles are allied and frequently overlap.

There is scarcely room here to cover the topic of knowledge management in depth, but one other common event is worthy of note. It frequently happens that disillusionment occurs with the first phase of knowledge management in an organization. This is the moment when the organization often despairs of managing the multitude of external information sources and decides instead to concentrate on organizing and indexing what it already knows and owns. At this point the library and its catalogue are revealed as the treasure house of the intelligent, learning organization. The intrapreneurial information and library professionals will already have prepared for that event and will welcome their colleagues to the library with open arms (and, we may hope a guided tour).

Keeping ahead

Audit is not a once-and-for-all activity. If the information and library service is to be a success and of value to its users, keeping one step ahead of the customers is essential. Each staff member of an information service must keep up-to-date in a number of areas such as:

- knowing what is happening in the organization
- knowing what is happening in the information supply industry – especially developments in tools and technology
- knowing about the latest publications in the subject areas covered
- knowing about the latest electronic publications such as databases, CD-ROMs and Internet based resources
- knowing about the various library plans and strategies – local, national and perhaps international – which may affect your service.

Perhaps the most important activity of all is to keep up to date with the people in your organization. We saw above that the librarian's existing networking skills were an essential means of helping to map knowledge and information flows in an organization, especially in the light of the rapid development of knowledge management. This brings to mind Dr Johnson's dictum that it is as important to know where or with whom knowledge resides as it is to know something ourselves.

Meeting and managing expectations

We know that most customers have expectations, make demands upon the information services, and have perceptions of what the service may or may not provide. Here is a source of potential conflict between the intrapreneurial service and the customer – particularly where the service appears to be neglecting or discarding traditional work to focus on new and more exciting services. It could be dangerous to discontinue a little-used facility which is highly valued by a senior personality in the name of intrapreneurial service development – unless you have the results of an information audit to hand!

Where users question the need for the intrapreneur's new approach to these old-style services, it may be necessary to point to documents recording their creation and the expectations for them. A service level agreement can be helpful to define the services, which you can reasonably be expected to give and which the customer can reasonably expect to receive. Your agreement can also reflect customer responsibilities.

Giving the answers before the questions are asked

A good intrapreneurial service should constantly surprise its users. One method is by providing excellent intelligence about events of interest to the organization – giving answers before the questions are asked by your customers.

Information audits provide a great deal of knowledge about an information service's customer base, whatever kind of organization or community it is located in. It will provide a reasonable idea of where customers are located, the type of information they need (or think they

need), their current information demands and, most importantly, their future plans of work. From this knowledge the information centre will be able to identify information that will help them keep ahead, whatever the requirement. The subject field will have its own databases and specialist information sources, which can be drawn upon in the ways that we have described. You will need to be wary only of using information on databases in ways for which either the databases or your organization are not licensed.

Some other innovative services might include:

- providing a selective current awareness newsletter of recent items of stock or journal articles which can be sent to the customers either on the traditional paper format or via the Email. A response form can be included so that the customer can reply by Email and ask for a loan or photocopy. Both the bulletin and the response form can be broadcast on an intranet or via an Internet service and the requests returned to you using forms technology
- providing training courses, so that the customers can use the various databases which have been created and are networked around the organization
- providing induction courses for new members of the organization or department
- providing regular information sessions updating staff or customers on the new services
- offering basic and advanced Internet training courses
- creating databases and CD-ROMs to meet customers' needs
- offering a search service which could be part of a membership package
- offering special membership packages designed for particular groups e.g. lawyers, doctors or small businesses
- offering to run other organizations' information services on contract
- offering to run Internet Web sites for businesses or hosting a site and allow advertising space

- if permitted, offering space within the information services' premises for appropriate businesses and services such as bookshops, stationers or cyber-cafes.

Broadcasting success

Intrapreneurial information services need to recognize their own success and then spread the word about their achievements across the organization. How are these achievements to be judged, and how can the news be broadcast?

Critical Success Factors (CSFs)

Critical success factors must be established for each service. What would have to happen or be achieved in order for the service to be judged a success? Customers' CSFs can be used to measure the success of services in their estimation, but the library and information service should also establish a list from its own point of view. Evaluating service achievements against this second, internal list will help to decide if a service is worth continuing or needs changing. Sometimes harsh decisions need to be made when it is evident that a service is failing, despite the high value users place upon it. However, the information industry may well be developing even better services, which could further improve the flow of information to users, raise customer satisfaction still further and allow new CSFs to be formulated. A constant dialogue must take place between the information service and its customers to give the feedback needed to ensure that the various lists of CSFs are kept in line with one another.

Communicating and marketing the information message

Too often the information service has really wonderful systems and services but no one in the organization seems to be aware of them. We saw at the beginning of this article that most people still have a perception of the library or information centre only as the place where they can escape to avoid other people, or where they can quietly pass the time reading the newspaper. To be sure

that the excellent and useful services that the information service has created are known and well used, some drastic steps are needed.

Members of an organization need to know that there is much to be gained from using information services in a positive way; they must understand that accurate, relevant and timely information is crucial to remaining viable, competitive and ahead of the game in many fields. This message needs to be presented in a similarly positive manner; it is vital that the information and library service makes sure that organizations and managers know the best way to obtain information when it is needed, and understand the value of a continuous supply of background material. In short, information professionals must learn how to market the intrapreneurial information services they have created.

Marketing has a terminology which is new to many information professionals. For example, 'market segmentation' describes ways of dividing the total market containing all the customers and potential customers. The segments can be further divided into smaller groups that may also share common characteristics. For instance, in an academic library the engineering students may form a segment. In a corporate information service a segment may be the legal staff. Once the various segments have been identified, it is possible to market the particular information service, which suits that particular group. These and other concepts from the field of marketing will be valuable in understanding the ways in which these new kinds of information services can be presented to their users.

How can you innovate in your service?

This survey has looked at a range of issues around a variety of means of delivering new and innovative services and the opportunities provided by newly developing areas:

- the opportunities from new technology
- taking part in lifelong learning
- acting as guide and coach
- practical problems in developing services

- new partnerships
- turning information into a value added service.

There are many opportunities to develop new services which, whilst they may not fit into the traditional mainstream of library and information work, nevertheless depend for their success on the wider skills of the library professional. It's time to see beyond the stereotype.

The Library Association has published a number of books by Sheila Pantry and Peter Griffiths that develop the ideas outlined in this article, including:

Becoming an intrapreneur. ISBN 1 85604 292 8. £13.50.

Developing a successful service plan. ISBN 1 85604 329 0. £13.50.

The complete guide to preparing and implementing service level agreements. ISBN 1 85604 239 1. £19.95.

Your successful LIS career: planning your career, CVs, interviews and self-promotion. ISBN 1 85604 329 0. £13.50.

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