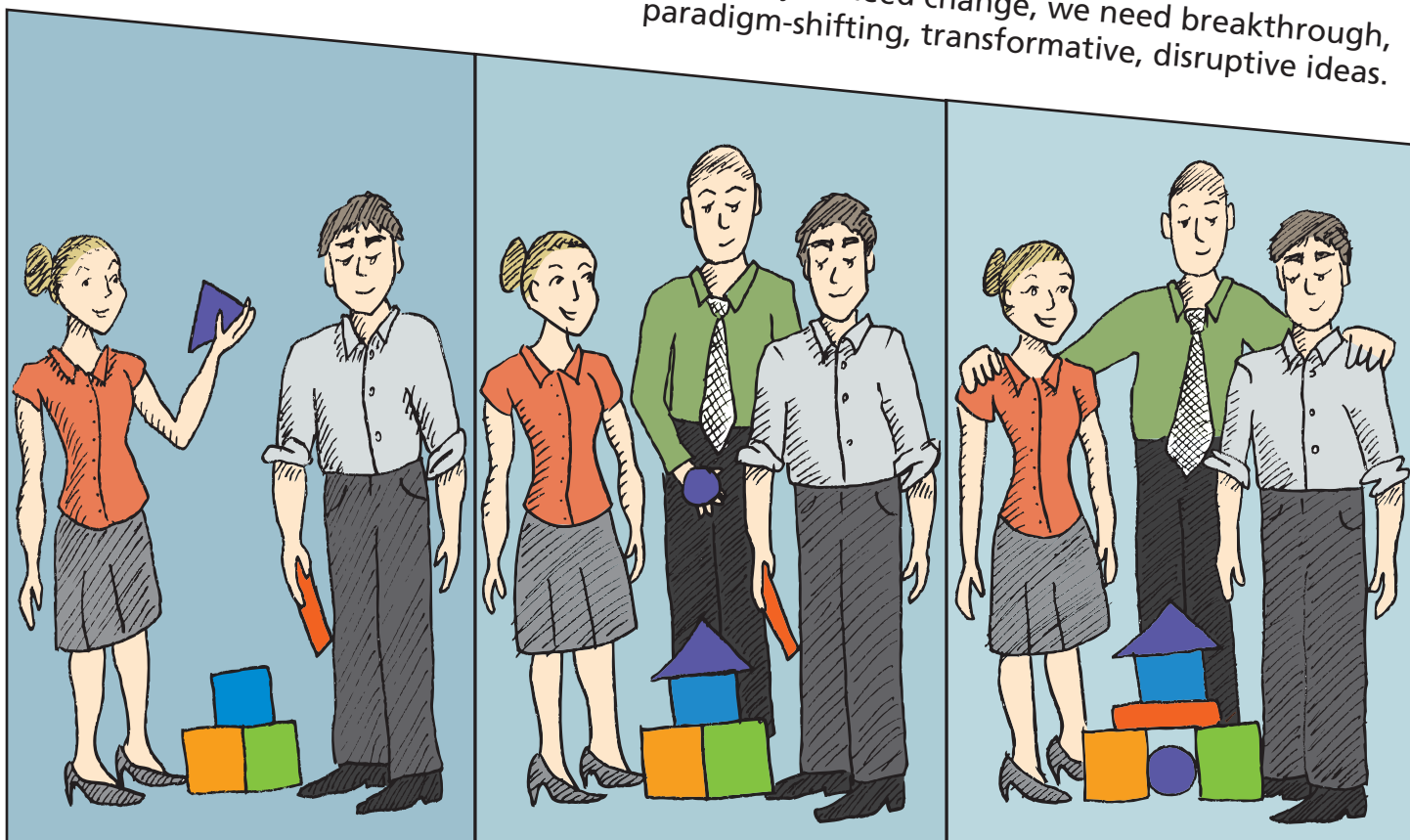# Facing the Future

We don't just need change, we need breakthrough, paradigm-shifting, transformative, disruptive ideas.

THINK LIKE A STARTUP

A white paper to inspire library entrepreneurialism

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"Don't think about better vacuum cleaners, think about cleaner floors." That's what I frequently remind my staff during our brainstorming sessions. Get beyond what's familiar. It's easy to just focus on making small tweaks to existing services, rather than considering the bigger, bolder, broader possibilities.

Vacuum-cleaner-thinking is about asking: "How do we make it better?" A stylish new design? Stronger suction? Larger capacity? Attachments? Quieter motors? It's all about building better features. And there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, we should definitely strive for incremental improvement; but we have to go beyond that. We have to exceed our imaginations. We can't just find new ways of doing the same old things. What we really need right now are breakthrough, paradigm-shifting, transformative, and disruptive ideas.

When searching for "what's next" we can't focus on building a better vacuum cleaner, but rather, we need to set our minds to maintaining cleaner floors. That's the real question at hand. It's not about adding features, but about new processes. It's not about modifying the reference desk model or purchasing ebooks. That's just more of the same, but a little different. Instead we ought to consider a more central question: how can libraries support 21st century learners? Follow that thread and you'll find transformative change.

We have to face the future boldly. We have to peer upwards and outwards through telescopes, not downwards into microscopes. Over the next decade we need to implement big new ideas, otherwise the role of the library will become marginalized in higher education. We'll become the keepers of the campus proxy, rather than information authorities. We'll become just another campus utility like parking, dining services, and IT rather than the intellectual soul of the community.

Now is the time to "zoom out" rather than "zoom in."[1] Let's not pigeonhole ourselves into finite roles, such as print collections, computer labs, or information literacy. These self-imposed limitations will only ensure our vulnerability and gradual decline. We can't abide by the dictionary definition of "library." We can't stay basically the same and only make small changes. Not only will that constrain the library, but it will also hold back scholarship and learning. With or without us the nature of information, knowledge creation, and content sharing is going to evolve. It's already happening.

Which side of the revolution will we be on? Dyson offers beautiful state-of-the-art vacuum machines. Their tools are top of the line. But ultimately, it's still a chore to push a vacuum cleaner around the floor. If we're talking about transformative ideas then iRobot is the place to focus your attention. Their machines are autonomous. Vacuuming isn't a chore; it's just something that happens while you sleep, work, or run errands. Their focus isn't on providing new hardware, but on providing an ingenuous system that cleans surfaces for you. Carpets. Tiles. Hardwood. Pools. The Roomba is a revolution! It's a new way of thinking. It's solving a problem in a different way. And that's what we need right now. We need to reinvent not just what we do, but how we think about it.

This document is intended to inspire transformative thinking using insight into startup culture and innovation methodologies. It's a collection of talking points intended to stir the entrepreneurial spirit in library leaders at every level.

1 Is Higher Education Too Big to Fail?

Flip through the headlines and you'll see that there is much to be concerned about: bankruptcy,[2] mergers,[3] and closures.[4] Even Harvard is reducing library hours and laying off staff.[5]

While state budgets swing between bad and worse, something else is happening-- something more than just financial hardship. Higher education is facing increasing public criticism, and it's possible (perhaps even inevitable) that the bubble is going to burst.[6] Of course it won't vanish; it will just evolve, like everything does, but traditional educational delivery is about to be disrupted.[7] New options are emerging such as StraigterLine, UnCollege, and Udacity.

There is no shortage of doom and gloom scenarios for the academic library.[8] I hate adding more to the pile, but let's face it: we're vulnerable. While many of the services we provide are indeed essential to the academic mission, nothing says in stone that they must remain under our domain:

• What if Residence Halls and Student Centers managed learning commons spaces?
• What if the Office of Research managed campus-wide electronic database subscriptions and on-demand access to digital scholarly materials?
• What if Facilities managed the off-campus warehouses where books and other print artifacts are stored?
• What if the majority of scholarly information becomes open? Libraries would no longer need to acquire and control access to materials.
• What if all students are given eBook readers and an annual allotment to purchase the books, articles, and other media necessary for their academic pursuits and cultural interests?[9] Collections become personalized, on-demand, instantaneous, and lifelong learning resources.
• What if local museums oversaw special collections and preservation?
• What if graduate assistants, teaching fellows, post-docs, and undergraduate peer leaders managed database training, research assistance, and information literacy instruction?
• What if the Office of Information Technology managed computer labs, proxy access, and lending technology and gadgets?

Some of these are real possibilities over the next twenty years. Colleges and universities are highly competitive environments; everyone wants to expand, but funding is limited. If financial resources continue to decrease (as we expect that they will at public institutions) we're likely to see some large-scale reorganization and reallocations take place.[10]

In the future you may still work as a librarian, just not in a traditional physical library. Many of the things we currently do could be assimilated elsewhere. This is why we need to be open to the definition of what an academic library is and focus on what people need it to become.

> Our jobs are shifting from doing what we've always done very well, to always being on the lookout for new opportunities to advance teaching, learning, service, and research.

How do we help the individuals at our institutions become more successful? That's the goal.

Of course, this leads to a lot of controversy. Take collections for example. Several years ago it was impossible to imagine a research library without a significantly massive collection in print. Now I can't envision a future without the majority of scholarly content being digital. But this isn't just about books; it's about libraries redefining what a collection is. As information migrates to digital platforms, let's imagine what's next:
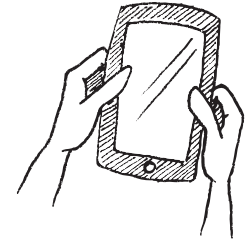
Google-like search capabilities across millions of books, articles, and multimedia.

An iTunes-like interface for quickly acquiring and accessing content anytime, anywhere, on any device.
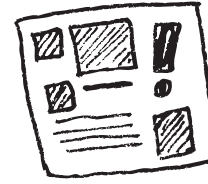
Facebook-like communities for students and scholars to discover, build, publish, and share new knowledge.

Mobile computing in everyone's hands.

This is what I'm hearing around campus. This is what students, researchers, and administrations expect us to offer. This is the future they want to see. And if we don't do it someone else will.

Perhaps our future isn't centered on access to content, but rather, the usage of it. Maybe there is a greater emphasis on community building, connecting people, engaging students, assisting researchers, and advancing knowledge production?

Are academic libraries too important to fail? Maybe. If we remain steeped in nostalgia then I think we're in trouble. At some point we have to take a leap into the future. Our focus can't just be about adding features, but about redefining and realigning the role and identity of the academic library. We can't map our value to outdated needs and practices, but instead, must intertwine ourselves with what's needed next. It's time to innovate.

2 Innovators Wanted

Change is going to be difficult, but the good news is that we know it's necessary. Glance though the academic library job postings and you'll see what I mean. Over and over again the word innovation pops up. There is a huge demand for librarians who "think different."

In fact, this theme of change has become a part of our landscape. Change is the new normal. Change is the only constant. Here is a sampling from some current ARL job listings:

- **ever-changing environment**
- **an evolving program of research services**
- **changing user preferences**
- **receptive to and fostering new ideas**
- **nimble**
- **adaptive**
- **flexible**
- **self-starter**

We're looking for people who are comfortable with change. We're looking for people who can innovate. But is that what we really want? Innovation is messy. It takes many wild ideas that flop in order to find transformative gold. Innovation demands leaders who are persistent and who can challenge the status quo.[11] Innovation requires organizations to live in liminality. Is your library ready for disruption?

We can't hire a few creative and improvisational individuals and expect them to deliver new service models if the work culture is not ready for new service models. We can't expect entrepreneurialism to flourish in a tradition-obsessed environment. We can't just talk about change; it must be embedded in the actions of employees. Innovation is a team sport that has to be practiced regularly.

So how do we get there?

3 Think Like a Startup

To become innovative organizations we need to emulate innovative organizations. Startups are a perfect model for guiding this change.

The media and pop culture provide us with romanticized visions of dorm room ideas becoming billion dollar IPOs. And indeed, that does happen sometimes, but startups are more than rags to riches stories. In concise terms: startups are organizations dedicated to creating something new under conditions of extreme uncertainty.[12] This sounds exactly like an academic library to me. Not only are we trying to survive, but we're also trying to transform our organizations into a viable service for 21st century scholars and learners. Here are a few considerations:

Startups condition us for constant change.

It's not about what's-now but about what's-next. Startups probe for new possibilities. They examine what else needs to be done and then launch a path for that destination. Thinking like a startup positions us to think aspirationally about change. It requires and rewards innovation and creativity. It causes us to constantly reevaluate our organization, purpose, and drive: not against what it is or what it has been, but against what it needs to become.

Startups are about building a platform,

not necessarily profit. Obviously for businesses, financial validation is necessary for survival, but the incubation stage is more about trying to develop good ideas into working models. The film The Social Network provides a dramatic representation of this situation. The co-founders of Facebook ponder its future. One of them wants to monetize right away, while the other insists, "We don't even know what it is yet." That's where we are with the future of academic libraries. We're still in the early stages of our next evolution. It's too early to know what libraries will become, but we know they'll never be the same. Rather than getting bogged down with a definition, the time is ideal for launching new products, programs, and partnerships. The library is not a building, a website, or a person; it is a platform for scholars, students, cultural enthusiasts, and others who want to absorb and advance knowledge.

Startups provide us a framework for action.

They give us a way to analyze what we do, why we do it, and how we might implement change. The lean startup methodology accelerates discovering possibilities, addressing needs, and proposing solutions. Whether launching new initiatives or addressing existing ones, the startup mindset challenges us to test and validate our assumptions.

Lastly, startup is a culture.

It bonds us together. It connects us with our users. It forces us beyond satisfaction metrics and into the difficult but rewarding position of needs-based librarianship. Our profession invests a lot of time measuring how well we did, and hardly any time leap-frogging into what is going to be important in the future. Embracing startup culture is embracing a forward-thinking and future-oriented perspective.

What can we create today that will be essential tomorrow?

4 Most Startups Fail; Learn From the Ones That Didn't

If most startups fail then why should we follow their lead? Indeed, studies suggest that as many as nine out of ten of these companies fall apart.[13] But let's flip that question and ask: what can we learn from the 10% that succeed? What did they do right? How did they think and act differently?

The Lean Startup methodology addresses this perspective.[14] Here are a few key insights:

Fail Faster, Fail Smarter

Investing too much time on something that doesn't work is a common startup mistake. Their concepts are not viable, but they don't discover that until it is too late. Instead, build "failure" or adjustment into the process. Seek to validate your ideas early on and then expand, edit, and revise them along the way.

Good Enough is Good Enough to Start

New ideas are exciting. You want to launch them as quickly as possible, but often you might feel "it's just not ready yet." That's a surefire way to inhibit success. Instead, distill the concept into a raw form and then go with it. Get it into others' hands and see what happens. If you are too hung up on creating policies and procedures, workflows and logistics, wordsmithing and committee debates then your idea doesn't stand a chance. The project will stall out before you can even find out if it's worth all the effort. When it's good enough, go with it. Build upon success. That should be your initial objective. In the business lit they call this the minimum viable product. In Web 2.0 the motto is: everything is beta.

Feed the Feedback Loop

Real estate is driven by location, location, location. With innovation it's iteration, iteration, iteration. Your outlook should be to grow your idea by constantly building feedback into the developmental process. Let potential customers help nurture the concept to make it better. Don't just cook it up in your office or meeting rooms-- test it in the field.

Pivot Toward Success

You might begin traveling along one path but need to change the route in order to reach the destination. In fact, you might even need to change your destination. Successful startups are attuned to this. Facebook moved beyond just a college-oriented social network. Groupon shifted from social activism to social shopping. Realizing when you may need to pivot your idea in a new direction is critical toward cultivating innovation. Let it grow naturally. Don't force it to become something it doesn't want to be.

Don't Get Stuck Following Plan A; Instead Get to A Plan That Works[15]

Who doesn't love following a great plan? Crossing off completed tasks. Reaching milestones. Launching on deadline. The problem, though, is that while we can follow a plan perfectly, it doesn't mean it's a good plan. We can follow a good plan right off a cliff. We can miss out on new opportunities because we're too busy following the prescribed strategy. Instead, the goal should be to draft a good Plan A with the intention of it helping us get to plans B, C, and D.

Plant Many Seeds[16]

Instead of focusing on one perfect idea, try lots of decent ideas instead. See what works and what doesn't. See what gains interest or has a positive impact. Nurture the projects that show the most potential.

Seize the White Space[17]

What isn't being done? What opportunities exist to help people in new ways? Don't limit your innovation to traditional library boundaries, but consider the entire teaching, learning, and research enterprise. What are the areas of untapped potential? Translation services? 3D Printing? Experimental classrooms? An important local collection? How might we fill a new role and not only expand the library's portfolio, but also empower people by addressing unmet needs?
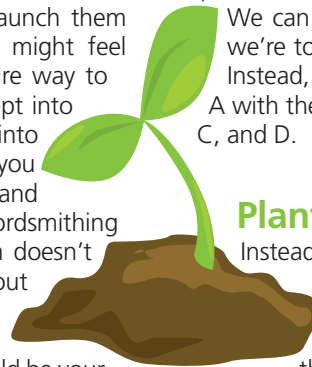
5 Build, Measure, Learn: The Methodology
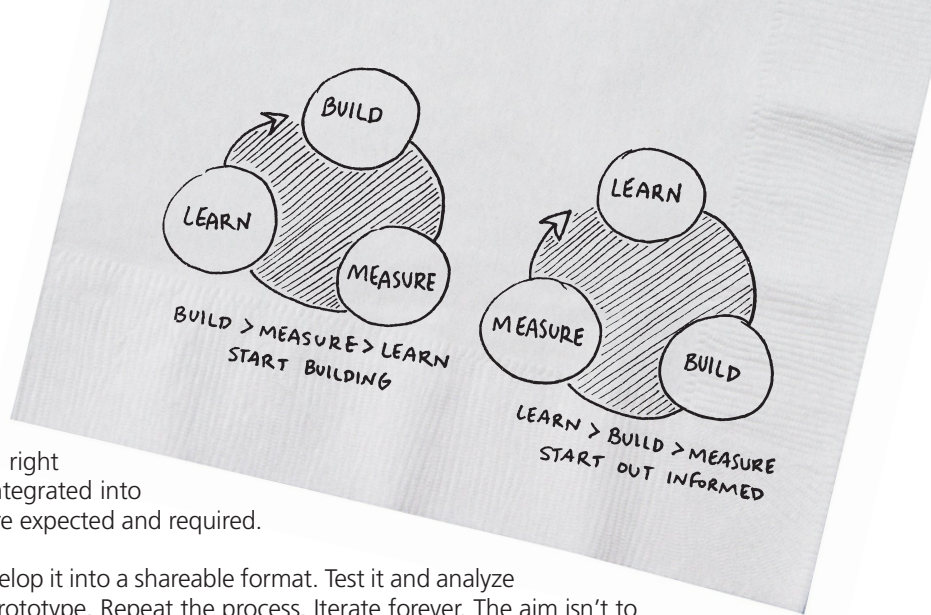
The lean startup method encourages a phased process right from the start.[18] Building, measuring, and learning are integrated into the workflow. Changes to the idea, product, or service are expected and required.

This is how it works: you take your initial concept and develop it into a shareable format. Test it and analyze the reaction. You then use this insight to build a better prototype. Repeat the process. Iterate forever. The aim isn't to develop a finished product, but to continuous evaluate and evolve the concept. This cycle of rapid development keeps you on track for constant improvement instead of clinging to services that are no longer needed.

While this process is ideal for software development, it also works well in other areas. For example, the Newman Library at Virginia Tech experimented by hosting writing center tutors at a table in a commons area. Based upon this successful trial the writing center staff left their former location and set up shop in the library full-time. During the incubation period they tested the concept: location, staffing, hours of operation, publicity, perceived value, etc. The resulting insight enabled the library and writing center to flesh out a successful concept before committing money and floor space.

Thinking like a startup means getting your idea out quickly. Test it, improve it, and then try it again. And then repeat the process, refining the concept along the way.

A variation of this model comes from the user experience domain and argues to shift the order of steps to Learn, Build, Measure.[19] This sequence places a greater emphasis on investing a small amount of time upfront engaging people. After learning about any potential problems, address those needs by either tweaking the idea or pivoting the concept. Next measure behaviors or perceptions and gain insights from actual usage. This will then stimulate another round of learning, building, and measuring.

Perhaps you already employ a form of this model. The point is to make it explicit in your operations. Whether launching a new service, developing a new space, or reviewing current workflows, build this continuous feedback loop into your process. The cycles should be more frequent at first and then taper off, but the important thing is stay focused on constant improvement: growing and pivoting, expanding and contracting. This practice of constant refinement will challenge us to think about what's next rather than just clinging to what's worked before.

The NCSU Libraries have long practiced this good entrepreneurial development.[20] Let's look at two examples:

D. H. Hill Library Learning Commons

During the early stages of their Commons development the library ran into a funding delay and was consequently left with a large open space. To bridge the gap, the library provided hundreds of beanbags. This temporary solution was fortuitous because it opened their eyes to what the library needed to become. Students were drawn to the open space and started bringing their own accessories and furniture. Watching the way the area was used, the librarians realized their initial plan was flawed; the way that students used the space was completely different than originally anticipated. NCSU had greatly underestimated the desire for social learning and collaboration. The architect was able to adjust the design, and they eventually constructed an environment more attuned to user preferences. The Libraries have since incorporated user-driven insight to inform all subsequent renovations.

Web Initiatives[21]

NCSU uses a variation of the Build, Measure, Learn method with many of its online projects as well. New digital collections are often rolled out quickly and then enhancements are added over time, making extensive use of web analytics and tracking on individual interfaces to review how the systems are being used. The NCSU Libraries have increasingly taken the approach of developing their applications in such a way that they generate the kind of data necessary to evaluate how the tool, content, or service is being used, so staff can respond to emerging patterns of use. They can grow the initiative according to what their users need it to become.

6 Three Essential Qualities of Inspiring Products

"Entrepreneurship is a lot like to a science experiment; you're constantly creating and testing new theses and seeing what works."

"Entrepreneurship is similar to a science experiment; you're constantly creating and testing new theses and seeing what works." That's the advice from Bob Summer, founder of TechPad, a Blacksburg startup co-working office space.[22]

Bob has been involved with startups from many dimensions, as a founder as well as a venture investor. At TechPad he is more than a property manager, serving as a mentor to several early-stage companies. He believes that successful ideas can be boiled down to three essential qualities:[23]

Usability. Feasibility. Value.

If your concept is lacking one of these attributes, it's less likely to succeed. Some examples:

Open Floor Plans
A library I worked in wanted to offer a flexible, customizable, commons environment. High-end designer tables and chairs were installed that were lightweight, on casters, and very easy to move. From a cost and square footage standpoint this was feasible to make happen. In terms of value, many students enjoyed being able to create the type of space they needed on the fly. However, usability was questionable. While it was easy to move furniture around, the problem was excessive mobility. Students often left the tables and chairs in arrangements that were chaotic, confusing, and unnavigable.

Exam Cram
During finals week I often observed small groups cramming together for their last minute preparations before tests. I wanted to enhance this, especially for large general classes like biology and calculus. My concept: what if you could study with your friends, and a few others, and have the session facilitated by a teaching assistant? There was great value in this venture because many campus units partnered with us, and students turned out to take advantage of the program. It also had great usability because it worked well. Students discovered the program, found the locations, and commented that it helped them prepare for their tests. The issue was feasibility; it couldn't scale. Some sessions had over 75 students show up but only enough room for 25. We encountered some reliability issues, too. Some teaching assistants didn't show up and this caused anger, disappointment, and anxiety among the students. While the concept was good, the library was limited in being able to coordinate and scale to the demand.

Skype a Librarian[24]
Char Booth describes her experience with the implementation of Skype reference at Ohio University. They experimented with setting up a Skype kiosk in various locations, enabling students to interact with librarians. After several iterations of location, signage, and software configuration, they decided to end the project. It was feasible and usable; from a technical standpoint the tools worked well and cost was minimal. The problem was value. Students just didn't use the service. Maybe Char's team was too ahead of the curve; Skype has only recently become a standard communications tool. Or maybe students just didn't want to video chat with librarians.

All three of these are examples of failure. Not epic, million-dollar catastrophes, but great ideas that just didn't turn out as planned. And that's okay. Forgiveness has to be built into the experience. We shouldn't look at failure as finality, but rather as a test bed to help ideas evolve.

Iteration.

Iteration.

Iteration.

The library with furniture chaos built table management into someone's job responsibilities. This person was able to monitor the pulse of student needs and managed the learning space more effectively. The Exam Cram concept spun off from the library into the dining halls and dorms where it was more manageable and linked to the living-learning community. And the library that experimented with Skype gained insight about user preferences and were able to focus service toward anonymous and mobile platforms like instant messaging and texting.

We have to look at our efforts beyond successes or failures, beyond black and white, and be comfortable with gray. We have to give our ideas enough time and room to grow. And we have to learn when to let them go. Building on the core elements of usability, feasibility, and value greatly increases the likelihood of developing ideas that people will adopt.

7 Too Much Assessment, Not Enough Innovation

We invest a lot of time, money, and effort into metrics. Entire journals and conferences are dedicated to library assessment. There are assessment librarian positions and even assessment departments. It's obviously something we believe in.

But does it work? Does it matter? Does it produce something useful? Does it encourage innovation? Does it nurture breakthrough, paradigm-shifting, transformative ideas? Or put another way: if we stopped all of our assessment programs today would our patrons notice anything different tomorrow?

I'll admit that I've grown skeptical of traditional library assessment. After spending time with startup founders and other entrepreneurs, as well as market researchers from Fortune 500 companies, I think it boils down one central difference: we're asking the wrong questions.

The problem with traditional library assessment is that it's predominantly linked to satisfaction and performance. We're focused on things like: how many articles are downloaded, how many pre-prints are in the repository, how many classes do we teach, or how our students feel about the library commons.

This is all well and good. Obviously we want to measure and learn from how well our current services, processes, and products are performing. That's just the tip of the iceberg. We stop short of discovering real transformative insights. We don't ask big enough questions. We don't follow the rabbit down the hole. We don't break out of our comfort zones. We don't seek out disruption. We're too focused on trying to please our users rather than trying to anticipate their unarticulated needs. Assessment isn't about developing breakthrough ideas. In short: we focus on service sustainability rather than revolutionary or evolutionary new services.

As we think about the direction libraries are heading, the focus can't remain on how well we're doing right now, but on where we should be heading. It's not about making our services incrementally better, but about developing completely new services and service models.

We don't ask BIG ENOUGH questions.

Instead of assessment, we need to invest in R&D. We need to infuse the entrepreneurial spirit into our local efforts and into our professional conversations. R&D empowers us to move away from our niche and dabble in new arenas.

Let's take a look at instruction. Instead of continuing the library-centered perspective of infusing information literacy (something that we feel is critical) into the classroom, we could take a more empathic or user-sensitive approach of understanding the common barriers that students face with their assignments and then build instructional support to address these needs. We could take that even further by imagining the types of tools and services that would enable students to be more successful: project management, resource sharing, discovery tools and filters, processes for synthesizing information, and so forth. This more user-focused (as opposed to information-focused) approach moves us closer to addressing actual needs and further associates the library with user perceptions of scholarly achievement.

The need for R&D isn't new. Skunk works operations, or independent teams working on secret projects, have been proposed for libraries before.[25] But we need more than just "the innovation department" - we need a culture of innovation. We need to encourage everyone at every level to be on the lookout for breakthrough, paradigm-shifting, transformative ideas. Innovation needs to happen out in the open. It needs to be in everyone's job description.

Here are some approaches to get you started:

Academic Librarianship by Design[26]
Academic Librarianship by Design.   Steven Bell and John Shank adapted the IDEO design-thinking method for the library environment. Innovation is a process: understand, observe, visualize, evaluate, refine, and implement. They argue for a more holistic approach to librarianship with goals such as improving faculty collaboration, connecting with learners, and taking on leadership to integrate the library into the total learning process.

Studying Students[27]
Nancy Foster and Susan Gibbons (and their staff) experimented with ethnographic techniques as a means of better understanding their student population. Anthropological methods of observation and community-study have blossomed in our field. This book reflects on involving library personnel in the process.

The Starbucks Experience[28]
Joseph Michelli provides insight that propelled Starbucks from turning ordinary into extraordinary experiences. His vision is based on the process of making a personal connection with people through a framework based on connecting, discovering, and responding. This transforms patrons into people and makes library usage personal. By focusing on relationship building instead of service excellence, organizations can uncover new needs and be in position to make a stronger impact.

8 A Strategic Culture (Instead of a Strategic Plan)

Many library strategic plans read more like to-do lists rather than entrepreneurial visions. With all the effort that goes into these documents I'm not sure that we're getting a good return. You can easily pick out who wrote which parts: there is a section for public services, a section for technical services, something about information literacy, something about open access, something about providing service excellence. These are highly predictable documents.

They don't say: we're going to develop three big ideas that will shift the way we operate. They don't say: we're going delight our patrons by anticipating their needs. They don't say: we're going to transform how scholarship happens. They don't attempt to dent the universe.

A common strategy for innovation is the "copy-and-paste" method-- see what others are doing and then follow suit. Alter the name or modify the template, but largely our ideas come from other libraries. I observed this narrow-sightedness when I led a User Experience (UX) unit.[29] Numerous librarians and administrators contacted me to inquire about my position. They remarked that they wanted to develop a similar position but didn't know exactly what I did. UX was a sexy title back then and many libraries felt the need to jump on the bandwagon
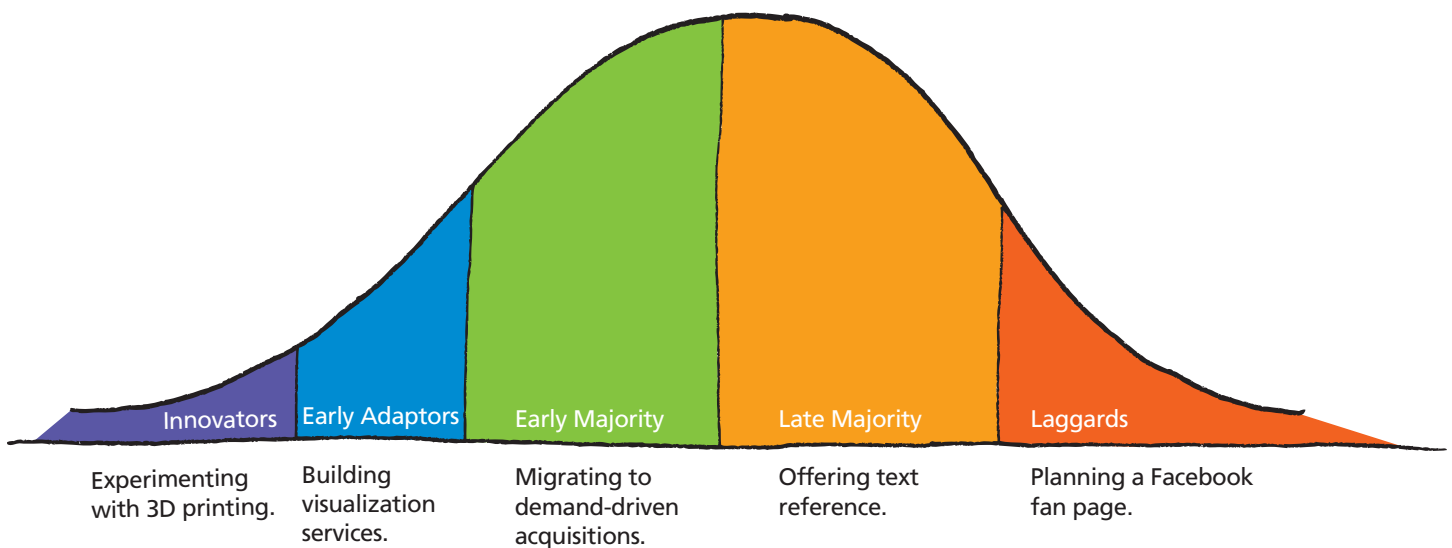
without understanding what it was. Sadly, over the last few years the user experience librarian trend has evolved into a website design, usability, and analytics role rather than one focused on improving the patron's total library experience.

Another example is the information/learning commons model. Here is the formula: lots of computers with software + designer furniture + café + research & tech help = a commons. Similar to UX librarians, every academic library had to have a learning commons over the last decade. We're a copy-and-paste profession. When I've asked librarians about their design principles, critical success factors, or cultural and pedagogical outcomes they look at me strangely. We don't typically link science and psychology to the spaces we develop. It's easier to just select from the Steelcase or Herman Miller catalog without having a narrative behind what's being developed. Too often our renovations are about refreshing the space, instead of revitalizing the way the organization operates.

Being strategic should be about pushing the boundaries. Instead you are more likely to see something like: "embed information literacy into the curriculum" rather than "build a curriculum to prepare students for 21st century literacies." Stretching not sustaining. A strategic instructional venture isn't about just training students how to search database interfaces, but about building their fluency with data, visual, spatial, media, information, and technology literacies. This is how we can advance the role of the library. This is how we transform scholarship.

It's not about books migrating from print to digital.

How innovative is your library?[33]

Innovators	Early Adaptors	Early Majority	Late Majority	Laggards
Experimenting with 3D printing.	Building visualization services.	Migrating to demand-driven acquisitions.	Offering text reference.	Planning a Facebook fan page.

Xerox provides us with a great example of strategic thinking.[30] After dominating the marketplace with photocopiers and printers, they realized they needed to change. The rise of digital communications was impacting their core business, and instead of just building better hardware they expanded their identity. Xerox evolved from being a photocopy company to one that emphasizes business support services. They developed new areas such as document management, IT outsourcing, HR and accounting support, and data entry. They redefined themselves not by better document reproduction, but by becoming an integral partner in business operations infrastructure.[31]

We need to undergo a similar transformation. What's the role for the library beyond providing access to information and a space to study? How can we make an impact on the teaching and learning process? How can we become an integral partner with faculty involved in the business of research? How can we stimulate knowledge production and sharing? These are the important questions that we need to ask. This is the important work that we need to figure out. This is beyond books migrating from print to digital platforms, but rather, it's about libraries staking a claim in other parts of the scholarly enterprise.

The most vital component to our success and survival is building a culture that inspires a strategic mindset -- a culture that embraces and rewards imagination, experimentation, teamwork, and initiative. The best way to do that is to fund it.[32] Library administrators should serve as venture capitalists investing in creative concepts that show promise. They should invest in ideas that are, usable, feasible, and valuable. And they should invest in projects that are iterative and adapt to changes along the way. This investment should extend beyond project funding, and also include recruiting and developing talent and skill sets too. Administrators who aspire to be forward-thinking, user-focused, and entrepreneurial should demonstrate to their organizations that they are willing to embrace bold ideas that might not work out as planned.

Startup culture is an attitude. It's the responsibility of the administration to foster and inspire the entrepreneurial spirit. It's the role of librarians and staff to push the boundaries, to find what's next, and to redefine our profession.

Libraries need to be a cause, a purpose, and the reason you get out of bed and are excited to get to work.[34] Libraries are about people, not books or technology. It's about the outcome for patrons interacting with everything we do and offer. If we are seeking breakthrough ideas that change service paradigms, then we need to be ready for disruption. If we're serious about innovation then we need to go "all in" and can't only bet on sure things. Entrepreneurialism is a cultural imperative, not something that should only happen in small pockets of your organization.

Or as Steve Jobs preached, we need to strive to "dent the universe," "build the impossible," and offer "insanely great" services, products, and spaces.[35] Until then we're just building a better vacuum cleaner, rather than building breakthrough ideas.

9 Microscopes & Telescopes

Famed venture capitalist and business writer Guy Kawasaki offers a great metaphor for looking at strategic outlooks: telescopes and microscopes.[36] Here is a paraphrase of his description:

Microscopes magnify every detail, line item, expenditure, and demand full-blown forecasts. Microscopes are a cry for level-headed thinking, a return to fundamentals, and a "back to basics" approach.

Telescopes bring the future closer. They dream up "the next big thing" and seek to change the world. Lots of ideas are tossed around. Some ideas stick and those move forward.

The reality is that you need both perspectives. We can't focus exclusively on traveling to the future scholarly universe. And at the same time we can't remain static and nostalgic about what libraries have been.

How we manage to pass through this crucible moment will define us.[37] This decade before us will shape the future of what academic libraries will become. Change is inevitable and vital. Accepting this reality empowers us. This is change that we have a say in. This is change that we can guide: telescopes and microscopes working to see, plan, and implement the transformation together.

10 "REAL ARTISTS SHIP!"[38]

Ideas are the easy part. Coming up with them doesn't make you an innovator or a game-changer or a change-agent. True innovators get their hands dirty. It means taking ownership of the concept, believing it, advocating for it, fighting for it, shaping it, breathing life into it, and turning it into a reality. If you came up with the idea, then it's your responsibility to see it through to the end.[39] It's your responsibility to stick it out.

Real entrepreneurs are personally invested. Startup founders are not just in it for fame or fortune, but are driven to develop something new and to make their ideas tangible. The goal is to build something that doesn't exist and to create something that wasn't there before that is now absolutely essential. We in the library world need to feel that way too.

That's the heart and soul of startup culture. That's what we need to tap into. It's on our shoulders to find the future. It's up to us to define what libraries will become. It won't be easy, but how often do you get to redefine a profession? It's not the time to do more of the same, arranging the same old blocks in different patterns. We need to change more than the packaging, add more than a shiny new wrapper. This transformation isn't just about moving collections and services online, it's about changing the DNA of our organizations.

As Steve Jobs said, "real artists ship." Real artists get their ideas out there. Real innovators deliver. Real entrepreneurs develop. Real startups launch. This is our time to face the future and redefine what libraries do.

What will you invent next? Who will you partner with tomorrow? How will you plant the seeds of entrepreneurialism for the future?

The direction academic libraries take is up to us. It's ours to figure out. So let's not be satisfied by adding small features, but instead, let's use our imaginations to dream big and create amazing experiences that transform our users.

True innovators get their hands dirty.

Summary

Startups are organizations dedicated to creating something new under conditions of extreme uncertainty.

Now is not the time to find new ways of doing the same old thing.

Launching a good idea is always better than not launching an awesome one.

Don't just expand services: solve problems.

The library is a platform, not a place, website, or person.

Libraries need less assessment and more R&D.

Focus on relationship building instead of service excellence and satisfaction.

Don't just copy & paste from other libraries: invent!

Grow your ideas: Build, Measure, Learn.

Iterate & Prototype.

Plant many seeds; nurture the ones that grow.

Seize the whitespace.

Good ideas are usable, feasible, and valuable.

Give new ideas a place to incubate.

Give new ideas enough time to blossom.

Give new ideas a way to get funded.

Give new ideas the talent they require.

Give new ideas room to fail… and then evolve.

Give up on a new idea if it just don't work.

Innovation happens out in the open—not behind closed doors.

Innovation is a team sport. Practice it regularly.

Innovation is messy.

Innovation is disruptive.

Real innovators get their hands dirty.

Being strategic is about stretching not sustaining.

Stake a claim in other parts of the scholarly enterprise.

Build a strategic culture, not a strategic plan.

Entrepreneurialism is a cultural imperative, not something that should only happen in small pockets of your organization.

Strive to change the profession.

Aim for epiphanies.

We don't just need change, we need breakthrough, paradigm-shifting, transformative, disruptive ideas.

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