



LIBRARIES AS OPEN INNOVATORS: Q&A

The way we access information is rapidly changing. While the library catalogue used to be the main point of contact for scholarly material, researchers and students now frequently go online to find information. This change is strengthened by movements such as Open Access (OA) and Open Science. Instead of signalling the end of the library, these developments open up a range of possibilities and new roles for research libraries and librarians.

The new role of libraries and librarians as open innovators and leaders was explored during a LIBER 2020 Online session, Libraries as Open Innovators¹. Since it was not possible to answer all questions during the discussion which followed, our speakers kindly took the time to answer questions offline. Their insights are presented in this document.

Questions for Kimmo Koskinen and Markku Roinila, Helsinki University Library

Did this project generate debate in student and academic community about the future of academic publishing and discussions about the open access?

Markku Roinila: This pilot was directed to one specific course and the journal produced remained unpublished, so it was meant to generate discussion outside of the pilot project.

Do you think that Editori could be also used for teaching the facts of open access in the future?

Kimmo Koskinen: This is definitely our intention. It would make sense to use an open platform for experiential learning about basic facts of Open Scholarship.

Were you as librarians already familiar with using OJS, or did you also have to learn how to use it? And for the teachers, did they have any previous experience with editing in OJS?

Kimmo Koskinen: We started the pilot by exploring and learning the OJS system at the library. We did not have previous experience of the platform, nor did the three teachers leading the course.

In the future, would other organisations use Editori, too, would it be possible?

Kimmo Koskinen: Editori is an institutional service for the University of Helsinki. For national services the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, perhaps together with the National Library of Finland, would provide a possible solution for training in Open Access publishing.



¹ <https://youtu.be/jKEdoaQkEgc>



Questions for Coen Wilders and Martine Pronk, Utrecht University Library

Can you talk a little more about how you trained managers to deliver this type of organizational change?

Coen Wilders: As a management team, we have followed a joint leadership program. Supported by experts on organizational development, we learned about different organizational cultures, different types of leadership styles, and reflected on our organization and on ourselves. This leadership program took over a year, almost every month an entire day. It also included all managers having a professional coach, which helped us all individually working on this new type of leadership. Moreover, at a university level, we also had a couple of sessions with managers from other sectors of the organization. We learned and discussed with each other themes like what it means to 'manage on the basis of trust'. So, all in all, it was and still is very intensive. And, as mentioned in the presentation, we still have a lot to learn.

Martine Pronk: In The Netherlands we don't have an 'information science' study programme with special focus on libraries anymore. In our recruitment strategy job profiles for managers were specifically focused on leadership skills that can facilitate the change we are in, not so much on a library background. Of course that places us as managers in for the challenge to learn what specific values and traditions we want to keep and how we can translate them into future services. To state it boldly: what makes a library different from a study-hall or amazon.com :).

In moving staff towards building a user-focused service, and providing consultancy, what are the challenges, such as time, around your staff getting to grips with the unique problems of individual research projects that you may be committed to helping them solve, when the outcomes don't always apply to other research projects? How do you stop getting dragged in too far in helping them or managing user's expectations around that?

Coen Wilders: This is indeed a huge challenge. First of all, we experience to a large extent that our teams are very aware of this – scalability of our services is high on the agenda of our conversation with each other. Our strategy is to make research as self-sufficient as possible, by providing researchers with information, tools, etc. If they need help, they can get support, but this is primarily in the form of advice, aimed at getting the researcher (again) to become self-sufficient as much as possible. But of course, sometimes researchers have issues that are not easily solved and take more time from us. By focusing on scalable services, we want to keep room to continue working on these more complex issues.

This is a very delicate balance, which the teams monitor closely. How many people do we help? How much time does it take? Can things be more efficient, so that we keep time for customization? These are all questions that are included in the reports of the reporting teams to the management.

Martine Pronk: we also ask the teams to propose solutions. And the solution to 'stop providing this service' is also an option. At this moment we face the challenge of our very popular R-courses. And in line with this, of course, other programming languages are waiting to be next. This course started as a pilot, to see if, and if so, what we could do in the field of coding and software, about 3 years ago. Nowadays we have waiting for the lists months ahead. The courses did serve as a great way to get in touch with



researchers to start a conversation about how they handle their data and the reproducibility of their code. And it gave us the opportunity to develop our services on these topics further. But now that we can ship in a busload of colleagues to do these courses if we would want to, it also poses the question: 'Is this something we, as a library, want to do?' and 'What are the pro's and con's?'. We haven't decided yet but the teams are very valuable to discuss the issue of user needs in combination with library strategy and vision.

With the new organizational structure of teams, do you feel that you have a coherent enough organization? No silos?

Coen Wilders: We come from an organization with many silos. And is not easy to change that. In our experience, it has not so much to do with the organizational structure, but mainly with culture, behavior and leadership, etc.. However, as we work on the cultural change we envision, we see that the silos are becoming less determining. We see, for instance, employees getting in contact with members from other teams or departments, without getting the managers involved – feel free to cooperate with each other!

As a result, there are many connections between the teams, especially because they need each other's expertise in order to achieve the results they need to work on themselves. And an important responsibility for all teams is to ensure that everyone in the organization gets the information they need. We spend a lot of time training, giving (short) presentations, etc. And this ensures that there is a lot of exchange between the teams. So, we think we are on the right track, but it remains a point that requires much attention.

Martine Pronk: I also would like to mention that the teams are not static entities that have a specific number of FTE assigned to them. They are flexible and (unless you are hired specifically as a data expert or OA expert) we try to move people around between teams. And most colleagues work either in several teams (become more than average experienced in those topics) or work as a faculty liaison for a faculty as well. So the teams are only part of the story, we basically work in a matrix combining discipline specific tasks with topic related expertise (the teams as presented). Our goal is to have a first point of contact for every faculty on every theme and have expert teams that develop, evaluate and monitor services and share knowledge with the larger group of colleagues. This way we hope to be able to cover the large field of new and quickly evolving developments libraries face.

Librarians have long been experts in their tasks (metadata, circulation, etc.). Are these disappearing completely? Which new expertise are you seeing emerging? If no longer around tasks, what is the new guiding principle for building skills and expertise?

Martine Pronk: What we do is translate our centuries old skills like making research output findable, available, interoperable and (re)usable to the new world. Where in the old days a library had only a lot of shelves with paper materials on it that you could see (after making an appointment?) at a specific location, nowadays technology gives us the opportunity to deploy these skills in a completely new way. An example is, of course, the work we all do in research data management. There is a lot of similarity between the skills needed by our metadata specialist working with our repository and the challenges our data managers (who are outsourced to research projects) face. This is all about metadata, standards, persistent identifiers, vocabularies etc. Of course you need to deal with new forms of research outputs and learn about all the challenges that come with the



data itself, modern technologies and the new context of an open access world. But in the end we believe it is a new form of the decade old skills we as a library can provide.

Do you have a written "frame assignments" for the different teams? In order for the groups to know the scope and responsibilities.

Coen Wilders: Yes, we have a more general framework in which is stated what we expect from all the teams. And more specifically, for all the teams we have short assignments what the focus is of the services they are responsible for. However, in the new organization culture we envision for ourselves, managers should no longer tell their employees exactly what to do and especially not how to do it. Therefore, the teams to a very large extent make this framework themselves.

Yearly, the teams make a proposal on the results they want to work on, in the larger framework of the organizational strategy. How they come to these results is the responsibility of the teams. The manager's role in this process is mainly to monitor whether the goals of the team fit within the goals of the organization, and to distribute people and resources (which are always scarce) among the teams.

Did you have specific initiatives to develop trust in your employees?

Martine Pronk: Sorry to tell you we don't have a special trick that covers it all. What I experienced in the last 5 years working for the library is that we went on a journey together. No one knew exactly where we were going, we were all feeling the urgency (because what are you going to do if there are no more books and everything is OA...?), we also had a vision that we needed to become advisors and consultants (but what are we going to advise and consult about...?) so, what do you do? What I think brought us to where we are now is that we constantly kept the conversation going, exploring different angles, coming back to decisions made earlier. Like the example of the data catalog: we did propose to build a catalog almost 5 years ago... simply because we didn't fully grasp the idea of our searching and finding vision. But when we started to take the vision into account, we could only conclude that an Utrecht catalog was not the only or best possible solution. Questioning every decision we make together: is this in line with our view of the future? Listening to our experts, making them responsible and being a back-up when something is not going as expected. And be human: nobody knows everything and some things hurt. This way of practicing leadership means that sometimes you are vulnerable as well, having to admit that you have no clue, or don't understand. To me this is very important, inviting people to step in and let them excel, not the manager. Be there to help them to get even better in what they do and develop themselves or catch them if they fall :). And sometimes something is just not possible, and then explain why. So I guess it is all about connecting.