

Many faces of sustainability

Like many others, I read the list of topics for the sustainability *inCite* and pondered – “is there one of those that I could write an article about?” I tossed around various ideas before a thunderbolt struck. As the 1955 song *Love and marriage*, sung by Frank Sinatra, goes “you can’t have one without the other”. Here is what I mean:

Professional sustainability – in our library staff of eight, there have been three retirements in the last 6 months, taking about 100 years experience and knowledge out of the library in one short period. How do we make libraries a viable career option for a new generation? By providing excellent education in the field, that is relevant to the skills that today’s workforce will need. In other words, by educational sustainability. For library trainers and educators to know which skills and abilities graduates will need, they need examples from the real library world, right across the spectrum – environmentally sustainable libraries, libraries where staff skills are sustained in new and emerging areas, next generation libraries budgeting under reduced circumstances for financial sustainability. To be a viable career option we must provide staff with opportunities to act in higher roles where possible, mentor and nurture the best and brightest to make not only their career but our professional future just that – bright and the best.

Educational sustainability – our trainers need to have a real understanding of the new directions in libraries – not to have just read about them. They need to have experienced and worked with these emerging areas. Systems such as ‘return to work’ for library educators or guest lecturers from cutting edge practitioners are all vital to maintain. Work placement is, I believe, another crucial factor – let the student experience first hand what a library of the 21st Century really is. Some people still enter the field because it is a nice, quiet environment.

Workplace sustainability – does having staff who are encouraged to give it a go, to provide excellent services, who have a strong team focus and commitment, and who want to stay because it is a great place to work come first, or, does providing the opportunity for staff to go to useful staff developments and then apply that knowledge to their work and share it with their colleagues come first? Another real issue for workplace sustainability is giving the library manager, no matter what the sector of the economy, full control over their staff makeup – no ‘jobs for the boys’ or passing poor staff around an enterprise. So too, staff unwilling to keep their skills up-to-date need to see that their hesitation has widespread implications for the whole library.

Our *social sustainability* will be a direct result of our *financial sustainability* and an indirect result of our *skills* and *environmental sustainability*. With our current skills we can engage in a whole new range of ways with new clients. These new clients, like our traditional ones, may come to view us as indispensable and we can add them to our advocacy bank. Skilled up library staff in an organisation can breach the technology divide and act as technology enablers and educators and further push our indispensability. What better way to prove our indispensability than providing financial benefits to our organisation? Library staff are in an excellent position to facilitate movement to electronic document delivery – saving postage, staff time, and more; and electronic repositories for knowledge – saving costs in terms of space, staff time in hunting down misplaced documents, and much more.

As each library makes moves towards sustainability, we need to remember that the term sustainability is much bigger than the green theme we so often hear in the media.

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100 and counting

In the centenary year of the Mitchell Library, along with a landmark exhibition and other celebratory events, the State Library of NSW commenced a sustainability initiative – an organisational gift that we hope will keep on giving!

Greening the Library, as the initiative is named, supports the library’s strategic priorities, which include environmental sustainability. Two of the State Library’s top line KPIs underpin this commitment.

The program kicked off in early 2010, with a call for staff to nominate to join the team. This keen staff group drives the program and engages with our staff to improve the organisation’s environmental performance. Current areas of focus are reducing staff paper consumption and overall energy use.

Activities include a weekly ‘Green tips’ staff blog posting. These include messages encouraging low effort and impactful behavioural changes, such as how to set PCs to double-sided printing and the energy reduction benefits of turning off computer monitors.

The Greening the Library team is also delivering presentations to all our teams, which is proving most worthwhile in gathering ideas and feedback. We are also monitoring blogs and other professional literature, and engaging with our sister local cultural and creative institutions about this critical issue.

From these small beginnings, we will develop a larger program while acknowledging amenity upgrades already achieved, such as provision of bike racks and showering facilities, supporting staff cycling to work.

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