

# UNDERSTANDING THE INNOVATION PROCESS

"What is the point of making a suggestion when no one listens?"

You will easily think of a number of reasons why someone might ask this question. This article focuses on one of them – a lack of organisational savvy about how to get ideas accepted and implemented. Library and information professionals are typically idealistic, wanting to do the best for their communities, but organisational realities can hobble our enthusiasm. If you make a suggestion and it disappears into your manager's 'too hard' basket, do you give up, or do you reflect on how to give the idea legs? If you are the manager, what do you do with suggestions that are ill-formed or ill-timed?

An innovation process model sheds light on the steps required to come up with ideas and to get them approved and actioned. RMIT University Library has developed a model to ensure all staff are able to clearly understand the process, including the decision-making criteria that managers use. Our model is simple, but allows for greater complexity. The major phases are: Generate,

Develop & Decide, Implement, Review & Report.

**Generate** is when you come up with ideas – these may be about a new service, improving an existing one, or streamlining internal procedures.

Next you need to **Develop** the ideas, strengthening and presenting them to decision makers. At the **Decide** phase, approvals to implement are made. **Develop & Decide** may come in any order: ideas may cycle between decision and further development, strengthening and justification.

The **Implement** phase, getting it done, is the most familiar.

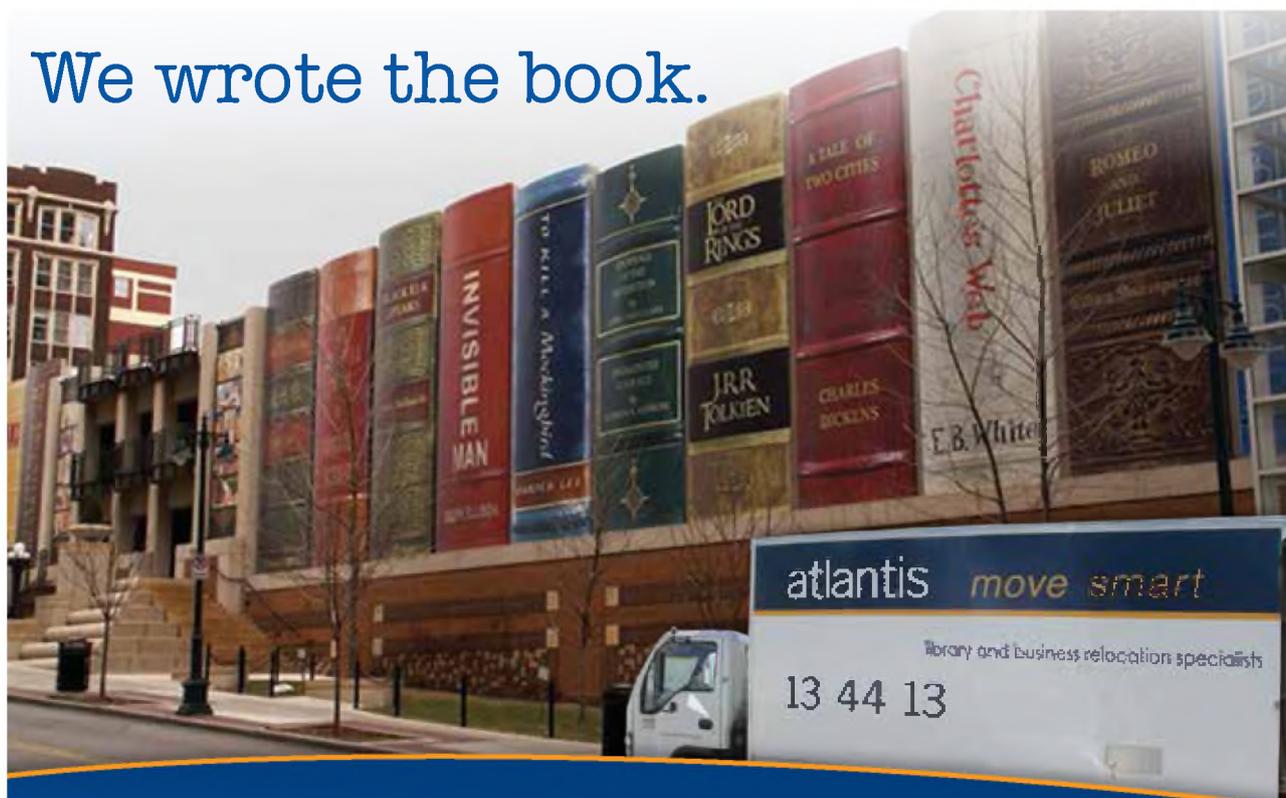
Final steps are **Review**, reflecting on the process and looking for lessons learned, and **Report**.

Although you may already be well-informed about the overall process, there is much to be gained by approaching innovation systematically. In particular, it is important to define an opportunity or problem well, to thoroughly think through an idea before acting, and to capture and use insights gained in one situation or project to improve the next.

In addition to our model and descriptive information about its phases, we are promoting use of a variety of tools such as brain writing, mind mapping, post-it notes, and two-dimensional grids. The aim is to increase creativity levels (and to make our work more fun). While increasing the level of innovation in an organisation requires good processes, other factors are also important. These include organisational goals and linkages which align with innovation, excellent leadership, a learning culture, adequate resources, effective teamwork, and capable individuals. Paying attention to how each supports innovation will promote the united effort needed for success. Our Innovation Process Model is one part of a multi-part effort needed to ensure that library staff members know that our ideas are worth putting forward and will be taken seriously.

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## We wrote the book.



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