

INNOVATORS ARE EVERYWHERE

Diving into the rabbit hole of innovation, JOHN SHIPP finds out that novel ideas don't emanate only from people at the pointy end of organisations.

The Leadership and Innovation forums held in State and Territories late in 2015 demonstrated the vitality of our industry. A wide range of innovations are underway across the country and they are testimony to the profession's determination to ensure that library and information services remain vibrant, relevant and efficient into the future.

Presenters at each forum spoke about the challenges and successes associated with innovative changes with which they had been associated. Not all were on a grand scale but they each demonstrated vision, commitment to improved services and an understanding of the communities they served.

Throughout my career I have been associated with many changes in library and information services. Some flared brightly for a while, others only twinkled in the night and some provided the power for later changes. Irrespective of the success of individual initiatives, they all contributed in some way to future change activities.

Hierarchy and status were strong influences on innovation when I first squeezed through a lowly portal into the library and information world. Changes were driven by senior managers who often assumed that they had acquired increased infallibility as they progressed up the hierarchy. Junior staff were there to serve and were not encouraged to think beyond the tasks assigned to them. There were times when I was sure that some of the characters from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had escaped and had become library managers.

There were the Cheshire Cat managers, who were good at initiating innovation but rarely saw it to fruition. They stayed visible for a short time before they faded away, only to reappear unexpectedly with another bright idea. The Queen of Hearts type of innovator swept everything before them, especially anyone who dared to question. Heads might not have been lopped off, but life could be cold for dissenters young or old.

The Mad Hatter innovator was endearingly frustrating. Their concept of planning was idiosyncratic

– perhaps even clueless – but they could usually be manipulated to take a more logical approach. While difficult and self-willed, the Duchess innovators prized innovations irrespective of their value to the organisation. In any case, the real work was done by the cook, irrespective of how much pepper the Duchess ordered!

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There were, of course, managers who approached change and innovation as a collaborative and reiterative process. They were able to identify the problem, suggest remedial action, accept constructive criticism and guide implementation. A feature of many presentations at the forums was the initiation and implementation of innovation by staff who were not senior managers.

This is encouraging and suggests that there is recognition that innovation is not the prerogative of senior management. Encouraging and trusting staff at all levels to identify, develop and implement innovation leads to stronger and more effective services.

To survive and thrive in the future, library and information services will need to encourage staff at all levels to become engaged in identifying and implementing innovative approaches to improving services. Innovation has to be owned by staff as well as the community served if it is to be effective. ✱

JOHN SHIPP, FALIA
ALIA President

