LEARNING THROUGH SHARING AND DOING

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) is planning a new library. Buildings, collections and technology are vital for their future but the most critical component of all is people. UTS want staff with imagination, flexibility and expertise to meet the demands of the dynamic environment in which we work and live.

Creativity and innovative thinking are highly valued but organisations often fail to support people while they develop and practice these skills. Although we still see a place for traditional training programs, we now focus on encouraging staff to develop themselves through experimentation, collaboration and play. We expect them to explore, take risks and learn by doing.

This approach has led to innovations like Play Day, a light-hearted welcome to the library for new students. The idea came from staff, whose enthusiasm generated support from colleagues and managers. We tried it out and now it is a popular part of the university's orientation program. Staff members from all over the library get together to have fun with the students and to experiment with different activities. Some work well and we keep them, others don't and we abandon them. Treasure hunts, for example, were so successful that they were incorporated into information literacy programs introducing students to the physical and digital library. Other fruitful staff initiatives include Research Week, Read@UTS blog, Shut Up and Write club, Answers, author talks, Food for Fines, UTS Knit Wits and Save me Time, Make me Famous training programs.

Opportunities to learn from colleagues abound – Mobile Mondays for tips on mobile devices, RAW reading and writing group discussions on stimulating professional issues, working beside Student Services staff at the reference desk, team teaching in classes, and Library Conversations where departments share information, individuals give conference reports and guest speakers from the university and profession talk with staff. Exchanges and secondments are encouraged. One of our research data experts has moved to the Information Services Department to develop training programs and spread expertise around the library, for example. Planning days are lively and productive with staff at all levels actively and creatively involved. Some have gone further and joined students, academics, designers and entrepreneurs at u.lab, the UTS innovation space for collective creativity.

Although managers meet regularly, supervisors and team leaders, despite many common interests, were segregated in separate departments. So we got the SuTLs group together and asked them to collaborate on sustainability projects, a major focus for the university. Initiatives like Keep ya Krap (reducing rubbish) and Lug a Mug (re-using keep cups) enthused staff and boosted the library's profile.
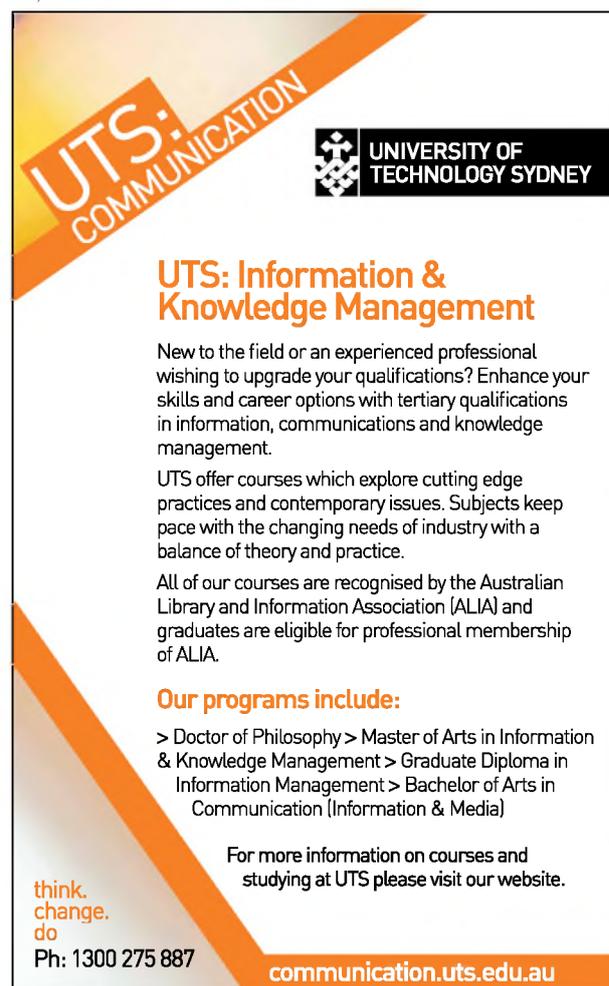
We use social media to engage with clients but the real benefits have been internal. Playing with FaceBook, Twitter and blogs has encouraged staff to explore new technologies, create content and gain confidence in their writing, presentation and networking abilities.

As we foster this culture of openness, experimentation and collaboration, we see our staff developing the attitudes, skills and innovative ideas that will take us forward into an exciting future.

> "SOME IDEAS WORK WELL AND WE KEEP THEM, OTHERS DON'T AND WE ABANDON THEM."

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