

BE A CHAMPION OF INFORMAL LEARNING



Natalia Fibrich

Some invaluable information can be imparted outside formal learning contexts, as NATALIA FIBRICH writes.

Professional development is really lifelong learning in a professional context. Lifelong learning is one of the principles and foundational values of library and information services, and it's now more relevant than ever. While there is often – and justifiably so – a focus on the lifelong learning needs of the customer, how much time do library leaders focus on the lifelong learning needs of staff?

There are several key pillars that will support a library's transition, in this era of mass disruption, to becoming a high-performing provider of services for the 21st century, but one of these is critical: the partnership and commitment made by both library leaders and library staff to create a learning culture. Change is taking place so rapidly that our modus operandi must be one of never-ending growth and change. We might as well get used to it and include change management and professional development as a continuous improvement process in our libraries.

The survival of libraries depends on the skills, knowledge and passion of leaders and their staff. American motivational speaker and author Zig Ziglar once said, 'The only thing worse than training employees and losing them is to not train them and keep them.'

We must continuously reinvent not only the library but also ourselves. The skills required to create a high-performing library that achieves outstanding community outcomes are different from those required three, five or

ten years ago. The context has changed, and we must change along with it.

There is, however, a dual responsibility to facilitate professional development in the workplace. It's as much a responsibility of the library staff to commit to their own professional development journey (which can include reading, attending webinars, attending professional networking events and upskilling in key deficit areas) as it is the responsibility of library leaders to implement a framework that facilitates professional development in the workplace. And no, it doesn't require large financial investment.

One framework that could be extremely useful to implement is the 70:20:10 model for learning in the workplace. Created by the Center for Creative Leadership in the 1980s, the 70:20:10 model asserts that adult learning is achieved through three broad types of learning, in the following approximate proportions:

70 PER CENT – informal learning (such as on the job, experienced-based, stretch projects and stretch tasks, meetings)

20 PER CENT – social learning (such as feedback, role models, relationships, collaborative work, networks, peer support, coaching and mentoring)

10 PER CENT – formal learning (such as structured courses, formal education, development programs, training and reading)

An enormous amount of learning falls into the category of informal learning that occurs in the workplace. The proportions of the types of learning are different, but it is critical that each of them is included in the overall learning strategy for the organisation.

Consider the implications of providing all informal learning but no social learning or formal learning. This

sets people up to learn and perpetuate bad habits and poor practices – and miss out on the latest best-practice skills, knowledge and ideas to further growth and development. Formal learning amplifies on-the-job learning. Likewise, an organisation that provides only formal learning but no informal learning is missing a key opportunity to upskill staff through practical experience and to share that knowledge with others in the team. It would also be expensive.

The workplace environment has traditionally been overlooked as a major source of individual development and learning. The workplace provides opportunities for sustained, immersive learning where immediate feedback can be obtained. This 90 per cent of informal learning increases the effectiveness of the 10 per cent of formal learning.

Library leaders and managers play a critical role in facilitating this informal learning environment, both in modelling learning in the workplace and in facilitating activities or providing opportunities for staff to learn and further develop.

Here are some ideas on how you could implement the informal aspect of the 70:20:10 framework in your library:

ACTIVITY Expand scope of work

- Rotate staff through novel tasks
- Stretch assignments: assign challenges and responsibilities
- Celebrate when staff learn from their mistakes (we've all been there!)
- Increase decision-making authority (if appropriate)
- Participate in group activities to solve a real issue or problem
- Fill in for someone else
- Take on managerial responsibilities (if appropriate)

ACTIVITY Change and adversity

- Work in a situation with rapidly changing circumstances
- Empower staff to handle a crisis
- Work in a situation where something goes wrong or 'fails'
- Work on new initiatives
- Champion a new product or service
- Turn around a troubled project

ACTIVITY Enter challenging relationships

- Work with people from other business units or functions
- Work with multiple people with contradictory and competing views
- Work with customers or a customer service group
- Interact with senior management (for example, in meetings, presentations)
- Lead a cross-functional team

ACTIVITY Persuade, teach and observe

- Persuade senior managers to take a specific action
- Teach co-workers how to do a component of your job
- Volunteer as a mentor for new volunteers
- Reverse-mentor a senior person on social networking or technology
- Introduce new productivity or organisation techniques to the team
- Shadow a co-worker to see how they work
- Work with a recognised expert

ACTIVITY Make work visible and discuss it with others

- Narrate your work and share what you're doing with colleagues
- Write a process-oriented blog or document
- Be active in social networks in the workplace and in the industry
- Curate information and share it with others
- Do a frontline job for a while
- Provide practical demonstrations

ACTIVITY Interpersonal

- Be coached or mentored by someone internal or external to the organisation
- Have feedback sessions
- Provide effective role modelling (either through you, other managers or through peers)
- Create a buddy system, pairing a staff member with a more experienced peer
- Include collaborative work and assignments as part of job tasks
- Encourage employees to take part in social activities with people of similar interests

ACTIVITY Others

- Encourage staff to stay up to date via industry information curation and keeping up to date with social media
- Implement professional development expectations in KPIs and other performance metrics
- Create a learning component at every staff meeting – empower someone to teach staff about a trend, piece of technology or something else that is relevant and rotate that responsibility at each meeting.
- Facilitate sharing of knowledge and information; how else can staff share what they are learning?

Implementing some of these suggestions on how to integrate informal learning into the day-to-day operations of the library will help to create a learning culture that supports professional development on an ongoing basis. 🌟

NATALIA FIBRICH

General Manager

Library Training Services Australia