The value of the crowd: individual initiatives in social media as a starting point of organizational reading promotions - Examples for children and young adults

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Abstract:

This paper examines how libraries and their staff can learn and evolve using agile development methods and principles, focusing on user experience and the knowledge of users (and non-users). Agility in library evaluation, management and development means being proactive and reactive to external world input, and adapting and responding to changes to improve library services. The practical example used here, describes how an individual initiative can be a starting point for a nationwide campaign. The paper explores how a Finnish blogger's initiative #Pojatkinlukee (#Boysreadtoo) is currently evolving and being used in libraries, book stores, schools and other organizations.

Keywords: literacy, reading, social media, agile libraries

Introduction - Agility in library evaluation, management and development

The term *agile libraries* was introduced in early 2000s and refers to agility in developing, evaluating and managing organizations. To the library/organizational world the term agile was borrowed from software development. The Agile Manifesto (2001) states the principles of agility as follows:

- individuals and interactions over processes and tools;
- customer collaboration over contract negotiation;
- responding to change over following a plan; and
- working software over comprehensive documentation.
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The first three bullet points are valid in library environment too. Embracing change and welcoming innovation are the key points of an agile library management and development.

Following an agile strategy on developing client services presents the library with new possibilities, as well as room for trials and errors! Agile libraries keep up with changes and developments in society and meet users' needs instead of participating in *death by committee*. Responding quickly doesn't mean aimless wandering. Following an agile development strategy with eyes and ears open, makes library development and activities both re- and pro-active, rather than speculative. My perspective is on the development aspect and hands-on at the practical level. I am encouraging and challenging libraries to be agile enough to grab influences, methods and ideas from local and global initiatives to meet user needs.

The first step in creating an agile library is to include library users and make true use of user experience (UX). The next stepping stone is to look even further, for the experiences and voices of outsiders and non-users. On an operational level, actively following social media outside library circles, attending non-library related conferences and engaging with MOOCs are ways to access the outside voices.

On an organizational level it is most important to accept that the library works in tight cooperation together with the outside world and its actors. Cooperation and collaboration, as well as user-oriented actions are vital, not just desirable. 'Libraries can continue to bang their heads to a wall as we try to enlighten our users about the benefits of our services or we can learn more about group behaviour and design services that fit that behaviour' (Forsman and Hansson 2014).

#Pojatkinlukee, #Boysreadtoo

A practical example of how to use an outside voice is the Finnish viral phenomenon #pojatkinlukee (#boysreadtoo), initiated by blogger Mikko Toiviainen. Toiviainen wanted to express his concern about decreasing PISA results and boys' literacy levels. In March 2016, he posted an Instagram pic using the hashtag #pojatkinlukee. He received very positive feedback and established a Facebook page for #pojatkinlukee. During the first 48 hours the page went viral and attracted over 1000 followers. At the moment (in early June) there are way over 3300. Interest in #Pojatkinlukee came from the book bloggers as well as from publishers, books stores, reading organizations, schools and libraries.

#Pojatkinlukee doesn't provide any ready tools for promoting literacy, but instead Toiviainen's aim is to raise awareness and encourage discussions and campaigns about literacy. There are no rules on who can participate or how. Toiviainen aims to provide positive reading role models for boys, as well as to bring reading, books and literacy into young people's everyday lives using social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, blog, Snapchat, and Periscope. Libraries joined in to share book tips, promote different genres, organize events and reading campaigns, and invite guest speakers. Reading dogs, mobile libraries and reading organizations have also been involved.

#Pojatkinlukee initiative from a library perspective

No matter what we think about a gender-specific reading promotion using social media, we have to admire the power of the crowd! Would the same campaign have been as successful if run along traditional lines by a library or even libraries? I seriously doubt that the numbers of other libraries, people (parents, teachers, bloggers, celebrities) and organizations would have become involved in such a short time. The loose framework of the idea also makes this format easy to adopt for a range of other areas, not just boys' literacy and reading.

#Pojatkinlukee is a good example of an agile library activity: you find something interesting, acute and up-to-date out there and you adjust your present activities in order to participate. As the campaign shares the exact same visions and values as all public libraries, taking part has been simple and meaningful. One more benefit for libraries is the extensive use of social media to promote literacy and books. An agile library goes where people are, uses the same platforms and the same language as the people.

#Pojatkinlukee may continue to develop and evolve or it may disappear in time as people move onto new things. However, this not the main point. The point is to make a noise about reading, to appear in different arenas promoting literacy and to have fun doing it whenever the opportunity arises. Libraries need to be agile and a part of a living, evolving and developing society. They need to be among the people.

References

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