

The Maker/Leader: Leading From The Middle Through Innovation

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John M. Jackson

Reference & Instruction Librarian

Whittier College

Young Lee

Reference and Electronic Resources Librarian

University of La Verne College of Law

Cynthia Mari Orozco

Languages and Linguistics Librarian

California State University, Long Beach

Abstract

Start-up culture is changing the way we contextualize the future of libraries. It asks us to reconsider what we traditionally understand to be best practices for organizational structure, innovative work, marketing, and communication. Most importantly, it has redefined the role of the leader who, rather than being the person at the top of the org chart, is a person who can lead through what he or she builds. We call this person the *Maker/Leader*. In this four-part session, we answered the questions: “What is a Maker/Leader?” and “How can we lead from all levels within our organization but especially through what we make?” Additionally, we explored ways to inspire innovative thinking among colleagues, how to create spaces and communication channels for innovative work, and how to bring projects to life.

Part I: Defining the Maker/Leader

This workshop introduced the concept of the *maker/leader*, which we define as someone who strategically uses project development for organizational change and professional growth. This concepts combines current thinking surrounding the maker movement and established leadership characteristics (tenacity, gumption, strategy). However, whereas traditional leadership guides focus on the acquisition of certain skill sets (e.g. learning how to delegate, manage, prioritize, etc.), the maker/leader is a leadership philosophy that focuses on specific methods of operating. In particular, the maker/leader possesses five characteristics, he/she: (1) prototypes as a state of mind and habit of work; (2) is observant and sees connections between people; (3) is a constant tinkerer; (4) “troubles the water to catch the fish”; and (5) helps to guide, nurture, and

inspire creativity in others. We concluded this theoretical introduction to the maker/leader by highlighting examples of maker/leaders within the academic library community.

The first part of the workshop also asked participants to consider current research on motivation, will-power, and creativity. We discussed willpower depletion and its link to creativity, which is neither exclusive to a certain class or type of persons nor a limited resource, but rather limited by context and motivation. Participants were tasked with using a variety of provided tools and conceptual contexts in order to develop an innovative product or service for their library, the prototype of which was used throughout the workshops as a touchstone for reflection, planning, and development.

Part II: Innovation

We used Steven Johnson's *Where Good Ideas Come From* as a model for creating innovative organizational culture, demonstrating library examples of the seven patterns of innovation that Johnson describes.

1. Adjacent possible: Ideas are seldom sparks of genius but rather depend on connections to other ideas. Thus, ideas should be open, not isolated.
2. Liquid Networks: Ideas also depend on environments where connections can occur in the right way. Elements are worthless without the proper connections.
3. Slow Hunch: Ideas take time to form and need to be nurtured, allowing them to make connections and grow. Johnson suggests writing these hunches down as not to forget them and let them grow from there, e.g. hunch database. For example, while seed libraries were originally conceived in the 1980s by environmental scientists, it was not until recently that seed libraries became popular in public libraries and community programs.
4. Serendipity: Innovation can't be planned. Sometimes ideas come from chance encounters. On-the-spot brainstorming sessions are not ideal for innovative thinking. Instead, create an environment that is constantly brainstorming, e.g. write down and contribute to hunches.
5. Error: Mistakes are inevitable, critical steps that one must go through to create something valuable. Learn to fail fast and move on. John Seely Brown also advocates for tinkering and not being afraid to fail.
6. Exaptation: Explore more uses of already existing ideas. For example, while library lending has traditionally involved lending books, libraries are now circulating new types of materials, such as tools, seeds, Arduino robot kits, etc.
7. Platforms: Creativity should not be monopolized. Open platforms allow for others to build and adapt on our ideas.

Part III: Creating Spaces for Innovation

In the third part of the workshop, our discussion turned to the need for environments and spaces that foster and support innovation and exploring ways to create them. An analogy was drawn comparing such spaces to enzymes, which as biological catalysts reduce the energy necessary for a reaction to occur by bring materials together in optimal arrangements through increasing (1) proximity, (2) receptivity, and (3) interactivity. Additionally, the analogy of cocktail parties was used to provide another, more relatable example.

The role of proximity is in bringing people together. (Cocktail parties need a place for people to gather.) Such spaces can either be located in an organizational, physical, or virtual context, and they can be permanent, temporary, or opportunistic in nature. The first of three worksheets given to participants, asked them to identify or propose spaces for collaboration at their places of work according to these characteristics; they were then asked to choose three of the spaces for further exploration.

The next requirement, receptivity, focuses on setting the right mood for encouraging innovation. (Cocktail parties need more than just a place for gathering; they also need ambience-lighting, decorations, music, etc.) Three objectives were mentioned as helpful in bringing people together mentally and emotionally: (1) establishing common cause by creating an organizational identity (through UX/user experience storytelling); (2) getting buy-in through participative goal setting (via the Drucker approach to management by objectives); and (3) banishing fear of failure to encourage participation (by adopting the incremental, iterative mindset of Lean Startup). The second worksheet had participants identify their organization's identity and goals, then analyze how these related to the three implementations chosen in the first worksheet.

Finally, interactivity seeks to promote communication and interaction. (For cocktail parties to succeed, beyond merely gathering people together and setting the right mood, they must interact.) Some of the tools and techniques mentioned for improving human relations and interactions included Myers-Briggs types, Dale Carnegie's methods, legal mediation/alternative dispute resolution techniques, and subliminal body language cues. The last of the three worksheets asked participants to reflect on the impact their choice in spaces had on enabling opportunities and interactions, as well as on themselves, and then to choose one space for implementation and the first steps necessary to bring it about.

Part IV: Building Liquid Networks

The final part of the workshop again highlighted the importance of liquid networks by discussing the places that make such networks possible. We discussed Oldenburg's (1999) research into "third places" and examined examples of liquid networks made possible through physical space: i.e. MIT's Building 20 and the offices of Chiat/Day in Los Angeles. We also discussed the types of people who make liquid networks successful by examining IDEO research (Kelly & Litman, 2001) into "hot groups." Participants were asked to identify both the places and people within their own institutions that could make both third places and hot groups possible.

With this in mind, we concluded the workshop by examining Eric Ries's *Lean Startup Method* (2011) to determine how at each stage of project development (i.e. Build, Measure, and Learn) we can lead within our organizations via a development process centered around the innovations created in Part 1.

Maker/Leader 2014 Bibliography

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