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People Profile: John Cox

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are evident. Such tribalism becomes a problem when staff in each department identify with their departmental colleagues so closely and exclusively that they begin to see other departments as threats or obstacles or in some way in competition.

What has all this to do with the scholarly information environment? How do organisations work at all if different departments appear to be fighting each other? The first thing to note is that most organisations exhibit similar behaviour patterns, whether they are commercial publishing companies, non-profit societies or universities. It is a phenomenon that occurs wherever we look in the scholarly communications chain.

So how do we deal with it? The answer lies in good, visible, management. All of the tribes that I have described have to be managed. Managing tribalism within organisations is not about training or educating staff out of it, because it is too deep-rooted in our natures. Management is concerned with leadership, communication and organisation. It is about planning, influencing and directing behavior constructively, and ensuring that all that talent and tribal aggression is harnessed to the benefit of the organisation as a whole. It is concerned with balancing the need for processes in the organisation with the individual’s need for a reasonable level of autonomy. It is also concerned with viewing problems as opportunities that can be solved by collective, creative, multi-disciplinary effort. In a sense it is about keeping chaos at bay!

Creative results are achieved by teams that have faith in each other. Such faith has to be nurtured if tribalism is to be mitigated. Creating and maintaining faith depends on communication, on creating mutual understanding between departments or teams, and on ensuring that each individual, and each team or department, is accountable — to customers (in the broadest sense of the word, including internal “customers”), to colleagues and to the organisation. Communication means that members of different tribes within the organisation discuss matters, solve problems and plan to exploit opportunities together. Consequently, understanding is increased, particularly across departmental boundaries. Communication and understanding leads to joint planning, with each unit agreeing specific targets that are interdependent; if they have been part of the planning process, they are accountable to each other for meeting their responsibilities.

So, how do we spot tribalism? It occurs where staff appear to be separated into competing groups as a result of organisational procedures, or even by perceptions that have not been challenged or corrected, that manifests itself as gossip and speculation. And, when we spot it, how do we combat the threat? Here are a few ideas:

• **Provide leadership.** Everyone needs objectives to meet and boundaries to operate within. We all need rules. So clarify and articulate the objectives and be receptive to any input from colleagues that will improve or clarify them. Ensure that there is clear leadership of any changes that are necessary. Staff behaviour echoes the culture and actions of their managers. If you don’t put their day-to-day activities in context, they will not understand the bigger picture.

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