But Where is the Library? Reframing the Library at the University of Melbourne in a Shared Services Environment

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BUT WHERE IS THE LIBRARY…?: REFRAMING THE LIBRARY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE IN A SHARED SERVICES ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Commencing in late 2013 and continuing through 2014, the University of Melbourne, a research-intensive and highly ranked Australian university, undertook an extensive review of all services, business processes and the required resourcing profile to deliver them. This review, known as the Business Improvement Program, ultimately led to a complete reconceptualization of the University’s operating model, the most significant in its 160 year history. The scale of the change was sweeping and the speed was audacious, resulting in the implementation of a new shared-services model across the University known as the Melbourne Operating Model. The entire University has been reorganized according to the principles of this operating model.

The model has three core elements – Chancellery (responsible for leadership of overarching University strategy, policy, brand and capital); Academic Divisions (or Faculties and Schools), and University Services where the operational activities of the University are grouped together as shared services to support Academic Divisions (Faculties) to deliver on their teaching, research and engagement agendas.

How did the Library fare? As a formal, visible organisational unit, the University Library ceased to exist. The University Librarian took on the mantle of University Librarian & Executive Director, Collections and was placed in Chancellery to provide strategic direction and policy oversight to the Library as well as to the University’s other cultural collections located in Faculties. However Library services, delivered by the two directorates of Scholarly Information and Research and Collections, were positioned as discrete operational units within the Academic Services division of University Services, so that both Directors (who formerly reported to the University Librarian), now report to the Executive Director for Academic Services.

In this presentation the authors outline the background and rationale of the Business Improvement Program at the University of Melbourne and describe the current organisational structure under the Melbourne Operating Model. They present their personal views on how the Model has impacted the Library’s operational activities and priorities within the wider Academic Services context and describe how operational separation from the strategic leadership of the University Librarian position has been managed.

Keywords

Shared services; organisational change; academic library structures; higher education service models

1 The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors only, and do not represent the views of the University.
**Background**

The University of Melbourne is a research-intensive, comprehensive university, established in 1853. The main campus is close to the central business district of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. There are also three other campuses within the Melbourne metropolitan area and two regional campuses in the State of Victoria. There are 47,000 enrolled students and 6,500 academic and professional staff (University of Melbourne, n.d.a).

The University of Melbourne aspires to be a public-spirited and internationally-engaged institution, highly regarded for making distinctive contributions to society in research, learning and teaching, engagement and sustainability. Aspirations in these four areas are articulated in the University’s strategy document *Growing Esteem 2015-2020; shared journey, shared vision.* (University of Melbourne, 2015) The University of Melbourne is a member of Australia’s *Group of 8* research universities and enjoys an outstanding reputation with world rankings consistently placing it as Australia’s leading comprehensive research-intensive university, and one of the world’s top 50 (University of Melbourne, n.d.b)

To maintain this ranking presents considerable challenges as higher education becomes increasingly competitive globally and as relative levels of public funding decline within Australia. Such large-scale shifts require a significant strategic impact response from the University.

The University is not a stranger to sweeping reform. In 2008, the University engaged in major curriculum reform, introducing a model that is loosely aligned with the Bologna Model as part of a deliberate effort to internationalise degrees in line with European and North American counterparts. The new curriculum was accompanied by a shift in student expectations regarding quality of student experience, support services, academic enrichment programs and campus experience, including libraries.

With such high expectations for research and learning and teaching, it is clear that achievement of the University’s strategic vision can only occur if the focus on excellence in teaching and research is supported by the best possible operating systems and high quality support services. Yet, at the same time, the highly competitive education market and relatively uncertain economic environment – internationally and nationally – gives urgency to calls for increased fiscal caution.

**The Business Improvement Program (BIP)**

In response to these tensions, the University embarked on the Business Improvement Program (BIP) that extended from late 2013 until 2014. BIP ushered in the most significant change to the University’s operating model in its 160-year history. According to the *Project Management Plan*, the aim of BIP was to build a “flexible and nimble operational structure and to make the best use of available ideas and technologies to support innovation. By enhancing the organisation’s effectiveness, the University would be better placed to generate value for students, researchers and external communities.

This would be done through a focus on four key goals:
1. enabling academic performance,
2. improving student experience,
3. enabling professional excellence, and
4. increasing efficiency” (University of Melbourne, 2014).

BIP resulted in the establishment of the Melbourne Operating Model (MOM), shown in Figures 1 & 2 below:
The Melbourne Operating Model has the following key elements:

- a Chancellery composed of a relatively small number of senior academic and professional staff focused on strategy, policy, governance and oversight of major programs, organisationally and physically co-located together away from related operational units
- a shared services division known as University Services, responsible for delivering transactional services as well as expert professional services across the whole University
- Faculties (called Academic Divisions in the new model) that are able to focus on delivery of the core business of research, learning and teaching since they are supported by enhanced and clearly specified operational support from University Services
- a new Business Framework which provides alignment of revenue, costs, service and performance requirements (University of Melbourne, 2014).

The BIP change was indeed transformative; it was executed with great rapidity, taking only about 18 months from start to finish. The Program was led by a Steering Group drawn from the most senior levels of the University with representation from each element of the model – the Provost (Chancellery), the Senior Vice-Principal (Administration) and the Dean of Arts (Academic Divisions). The primary objective, often reiterated, was to reduce costs and streamline services so that savings could be reallocated back to the faculties to support research, learning and teaching. This was not to be viewed as simply a cost-cutting exercise. Rather it was a transformative change designed to radically re-balance funding in favour of the University’s core business, that of learning & teaching and particularly, research.

To achieve these ends, the change strategy was driven by a headcount target that was imposed upon each organisational unit of support staff. (Headcounts have been strictly
controlled ever since). For example, during BIP, the Library workforce was reduced by approximately 27 FTE. Further, the structure was to be flattened so that ideally there would be no more than seven layers within the University. To reinforce this principle, supervisors were in turn expected to manage about seven staff as part of a drive to reduce the cost of supervision.

The speed and scale of implementation meant that BIP became a highly-charged and disruptive process. Inevitably there were problems with communication, action and response. The process was not linear, and often managers were ill-informed about process and unable to communicate sufficiently to staff. The process was made more difficult for the Library in particular as it was originally considered to be “out of scope” for BIP. The decision to include the Library in BIP at a later stage further compromised already short and demanding timelines.

As part of the BIP process, over 80% of Library staff had to apply for their jobs; a competitive process seemed to be the only fair option when positions were being cut at every level. Recruitment and interviews took place over a period of one month with both Directors chairing upwards of 20 interview panels each over that period.

There was massive resistance to some of the BIP proposals in some pockets especially where cuts to the Library were concerned. Academic staff, students and members of the public became very vocal in their protests to cuts in the Library. For example, the relocation of the Music Library stirred the passions of some academic staff in the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Music students also expressed outrage, as did eminent alumni and members of the public. Complaints were made to senior staff and two petitions were conducted on Change.Org (‘Petitioning..’ 2014)

**Shared Services**

As is evident in the diagrams, the MOM incorporates the concept of a shared service model, defined by Schulman (as cited in Dove, 2004, p.62) as ‘the concentration of company resources, typically spread across the organisation, in order to service multiple internal partners at lower cost and at higher service levels.’ It is viewed as an effective way for a complex organisation with multiple parts to reduce costs, without materially damaging the core activities of the business or organisation (Dove, 2004, p.48). An extensive literature exists regarding the implementation of such models in the public service and in business. Significantly, many universities have also implemented versions of shared service models to provide quality common services to ‘multiple internal partners’ in order to manage the costs of administration (University of California, Berkeley, n.d.).

In the University context, the adoption of shared services has been described in these terms:

**Yale Shared Services:**
“Yale Shared Services (YSS) is a best-in-class business service center that provides financial management and transactional processing services to schools and departments. We deliver superior business support so that faculty and staff can focus more of their efforts on their core mission and goals.” (Yale University, n.d.).

**University of Michigan Administrative Services Transformation:**
“Shared Services is a way of organising administrative functions to optimize the delivery of cost effective, flexible, reliable services to all customers” (University of Michigan, n.d.).

**UC Berkeley Campus Shared Services:**
“provides reliable, high-quality administrative support to faculty, academics, staff, student employees, and retirees in support of the UC Berkeley mission of teaching, research, and public service” (University of California, Berkeley, n.d.).

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia (2012):
“Analysis of the cost structure of Victoria University relative to other universities revealed that an unduly large proportion of funding is devoted to administration. Analysis also suggests that too high a proportion of academic staff time is spent on administration. This resulted in a decision to reduce the proportion of costs going to administration and increase the focus on the core mission of learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange.”

While the rationale is similar, the University of Melbourne implementation appears to be distinctive in several ways. The Chancellery element of the model (that functions in addition to University Executive) is not a common element. In the MOM, Chancellery manages the strategic direction of the University, effectively keeping the diverse interests of the University travelling in the same direction.

Another less common feature is the scope of the implementation at the University of Melbourne. Typically, shared service models at other universities encompass limited functions related to finance and HR and possibly IT. However at the University of Melbourne, the shared service model, under the general umbrella of University Services, includes Finance and Employment Services, Procurement, Project Services and Infrastructure (including property and IT), Legal & Risk, External Relations, institutional reporting and business intelligence and research services. Importantly it also includes student services and the Library within Academic Services. The breadth of the shared service model is apparent in the University Services organisational chart reproduced in Figure 3.
The mission of University Services is to:

*Enable the University scholarly and learning community to thrive*

With an avowed aim to ‘become the world benchmark for University Shared Services’, University Services enables the University’s scholarly and learning community to focus on their core activities free from the responsibility and financial drain of a full range of non-academic and administrative services.

The vision is underpinned by three core values that have been impressed upon University Services staff in workshops and team activities. In keeping with the general tenor of shared services, there is a strong emphasis on serving the University’s interests. The focus of this cultural shift is on the University Services team as a whole and the values, noted below, have generally been welcomed by staff:

- We always put the **University’s** interests **first**
- We strive for **service excellence**
- We will work as **one team**

Figure 4 University Services Values

In keeping with many shared service models, services are ‘purchased’ by Academic Divisions from University Services using a commercial business framework. In the Melbourne business framework, services are negotiated through Buyers Committees (one for each division of University Services) that are responsible for monitoring operations and service portfolios, and reviewing service agreements and charges. The membership of Buyers’ Committees is shown in Figure 5.

An important item of business for the Buyers’ Committees was the approval of Service Catalogues. The Academic Services Service Catalogue includes Library services among its 94 services articulated in broad service categories so that users can more easily identify related and inter-dependent services, and to facilitate cross-referencing between service activities and resourcing levels. The catalogue includes high-level information about the service and its component parts and key performance indicators that are reported against twice a year.

Service categories are aligned with the survey categories used by the Uniforum survey that benchmarks resourcing of support services provided by non-academic staff. This enables professional staff services to be benchmarked against other universities for efficiency (Uniforum, n.d.). A number of functions commonly undertaken in the Library have now been centralised, such as marketing, communications and service management.
But where is the Library?

To return to the central theme of this paper, the enactment of the MOM resulted in significant changes to the place of the University Library in the organisational structure of the University. Prior to BIP, the University Library primarily consisted of two major departments, Scholarly Information and Research & Collections.

Research & Collections is a group of diverse yet interconnected groups and functions responsible for the acquisition and care of scholarly collections in both physical and digital formats, using technology solutions and descriptive metadata to maximise discoverability of and access to the resources within these collections.

Scholarly Information is responsible for library spaces and facilities and for front-of-house library services extending to engagement and liaison with students and academics on research and teaching and learning needs through a discipline based staffing model. The University Copyright Office is also part of Scholarly Information.

In the former structure, the Directors of these departments both reported to the University Librarian who also managed a small Office of the University Librarian that coordinated central roles such as marketing and communication and service management. The University Librarian and the Directors formed the Library Executive. In turn, the University Librarian reported to the Provost, and the Library was located within a division known as Melbourne Students and Learning. Hence organisationally, the Library had strong senior academic connections and advocacy.

Post-BIP the University Library ceased to exist as an organisational unit. The University Librarian took on the mantle of University Librarian & Executive Director, Collections and was placed in Chancellery, in the Engagement portfolio, to provide strategic direction and policy oversight to the Library as well as to the University’s other 30 plus cultural collections located in Faculties. However Library services, as delivered by the two directorates of Scholarly Information and Research & Collections, were positioned as operational units within the Academic Services division of University Services. Both Directors now report to the Deputy Head, University Services alongside other Directors in Academic Services, which provides shared services to academic staff and students including student administration, wellbeing, educational technology, careers and academic skills. Academic Services is by far the largest of all divisions with a staffing cohort that makes up almost half of all University Services.
The “Library” Directors no longer have any formal reporting lines to the University Librarian who is not expected to be involved in operational matters, does not manage Library staff or budgets and is physically co-located with other Chancellery staff in a separate building on campus.

Although the two directorates remained, with their broad remits unchanged, both had undergone significant structural change in order to accommodate a reduced workforce, flattened structure and relocation into Academic Services. As noted earlier, as part of BIP, the Library lost the equivalent of 27 FTE positions.

Challenges and Opportunities: managing in a complex matrix

The revised operating model commenced in January 2015 and the first iteration of University Services “stood up”. As previously discussed, implementation of the new model was a substantive undertaking, designed to clarify accountabilities, reduce duplication, remove complexity, streamline organisational structures by reducing layers, increase the scale of service delivery, build professional excellence and strengthen strategic capability. It was an ambitious and far-reaching project, and it required a massive collective effort. Every aspect of the University was affected in one way or another, staff were reorganised and relocated (physically and organisationally) across the University, and there were wholesale changes to services and modes of delivery. The change has been transformative, temporarily drawing much of the Library Directors’ energy and attention away from professional information management matters.

While the overall purpose of Academic Services is to facilitate scholarly success for both academic staff and students there is more emphasis on provision of services to students. This is entirely appropriate since students are key stakeholders, but Library services are also strongly engaged in supporting research. Care is needed to ensure that connections remain strong with areas dedicated to research support.

Libraries have long recognised the value of excellent service and the Library at the University of Melbourne has had a mature service framework for many years but this has not excluded value placed on innovation, partnering and collaborating with academic colleagues. However, under MOM, where Chancellery is responsible for the development of strategy, the role of expert librarians and other professionals could be constrained to an operational and service-focused role.

There have certainly been many other challenges and the structure itself gives some clues to these challenges. For example, there is no standalone University Library in the structure but our customers remain strongly committed to the notion of The Library. Stakeholders continue to refer to the ‘University Library’, seeing it as one coherent organization, this seemed necessary to avoid confusion for both internal and external stakeholders. The conceptual continuation of the ‘University Library’ for pragmatic purposes has been accepted by management.

The reporting relationships in the new structure have also posed some challenges. The University Librarian, as part of Chancellery, does not have operational responsibility, but is now responsible for determination of strategy for the Library. But there is often a fine line between strategy and operation at a senior level, and maintaining the appropriate distinction might easily be unwittingly traversed. To gain the most from this relationship and to avoid a situation where competing interests could become problematic requires respect for both roles, but also constant communication and flexibility. Regular meetings and informal catch-ups...
have been put into place to ensure open communication between the University Librarian and the Library Directors.

Establishing the relationship between the Academic Divisions (or Faculties) and University Services has also been challenging. The Library has always had very close and unmediated connections with academics, in fact these are fundamental to providing liaison services to learning and teaching and research. This relationship was reinforced at all levels, as the Library previously reported to the Provost. However, patterns of influence have shifted with the MOM so that faculty administrators (Faculty Executive Directors or FEDs) mediate many areas of communication with University Services. Issues that once might have been reviewed directly are now often escalated to the FEDs and solved at a higher administrative level.

The operating model itself is not always as clear as it seems – not surprisingly there are varying levels of understanding and adherence. Although University Services commenced with a service agreement and an agreed staffing profile, this has not always been applied consistently. For example, an extension to branch library opening hours occurred following a faculty request that was outside the agreement, without compensatory resourcing.

In short, the structure is heavily reliant upon managing in a very complex matrix, negotiating a very complex web of relationships is part of the job description. This has always been necessary for academic libraries where managers commonly work across the University structure, but the complexity is more pronounced in this structure.

However every cloud has a silver lining and despite the disruption and stress, BIP and the MOM has presented us with some opportunities as well:

- Being part of Academic Services has facilitated growing relationships and collaborations with other teams and activities in the division such as academic skills, educational technology, careers, wellbeing, international students, enrolment, and the like.
- The integration of library services into a broader shared services model extends coherence for students. There is talk of providing a range of student services from libraries and a new online learning development module for Library staff has been developed by colleagues supporting online learning.
- The Library has always been deeply engaged in, and committed to, the student experience. Positioning within Academic Services provides a broader framework for building partnerships, exploring opportunities and implementing new activities in this area.
- The change was so rapid that it accelerated initiatives that had been planned for some time. While some changes occurred in response to the staffing challenges posed by BIP, others were brought forward to avoid further disruption at a later date. Examples include the establishment of liaison librarian roles specialising in learning and teaching or research; increasing staff capability and capacity in emerging areas of information management such as research data management, digital preservation and online pedagogy; refocusing collection development practices on evidence-based decision making; extending existing capability in MARC cataloguing to the broader practice of metadata creation across a range of schema.
- Understanding of, and adherence to, the principles of the new model has facilitated some exciting innovation and development in services and research partnerships. An example of this is the establishment of a new digital humanities facility, initiated and funded by the Faculty of Arts but with extensive consultation with the Library in the design of the space and development of the services and support to be provided.

**Staying Connected**

The two ‘Library’ departments, Scholarly Information and Research & Collections, are merely two of eight departments making up Academic Services with no specific organisational linkage between them. There is no longer a Library Executive group responsible for Library direction and management. Yet there are critical dependencies between the two departments that are key to providing good service to the University community. Active attention has been needed to prevent silos from forming within the former Library departments and to reinforce the need to stay connected. This is yet another aspect of operating in a challenging and
complex matrix. To manage this issue, the Directors have endorsed a structured approach as well as informal connections.

**Library Committees**

Immediately prior to the enactment of BIP the Library had undertaken a review of its governance structure focusing on reducing the number of committees, working groups, communities of practice and such-like that had proliferated in recent years. This review was somewhat overtaken by BIP but the four committees that were eventually established at the same time as the new model “stood up” and provided an invaluable operational link between Scholarly Information and Research & Collections.

Each committee has a specific functional focus and, within that domain, is the primary forum for discussion about the Library's planning, policy, stakeholder engagement and services. The four domains are research, learning & teaching, collections, and people & place. The Research Committee and the Collections Committees are both chaired by the Director, Research & Collections. The Director, Scholarly Information chairs the Teaching & Learning and People & Place Committees.

Each committee oversees the Library's contribution to implementing the University's Growing Esteem strategy, relevant parts of the Library's scholarly information strategy and the Academic Services Plan, in alignment with the Academic Services service catalogue.

Terms of reference for the committees are the same within each domain of interest:

- Ensure priorities, projects and operational activities are in alignment with the wider planning framework of Academic Services, University Services and Growing Esteem.
- Identify new and emerging opportunities, technologies and issues that may affect Library operations
- Monitor and analyse the performance of Library services (demand, delivery, quality, cost)
- Keep committee members informed on relevant strategic and operational matters
- Identify priorities for capability-building, recruitment and talent management
- Periodically review the Library's progress towards strategic and operational goals
- Propose specific projects or convene working groups to address issues, foster innovation, or undertake research and benchmarking activities
- Make recommendations about policies, standards, guidelines and frameworks that underpin the Library's activities.

**Library Forums**

For several years the Library has run Library Learning and Research Forums, primarily for staff to share ideas and experiences in their research and teaching activities. The intention is to revamp these forums into more general Library Forums to bring the two Library directorates together to promote connection between the departments as well as engagement with professional and sectorial issues.

**Conclusion**

The BIP project was designed to reduce the costs of doing business for the University so that funds could be redistributed to core business, namely research. The resulting Melbourne Operating Model incorporating a shared service model has been particularly successful in achieving this target. In its first year of operation, the MOM has saved many millions of dollars and re-investment of these savings in the Academic Divisions has now started through the creation of research appointments.
The Library at the University of Melbourne has always operated as a shared service to the University so operationally this change is less significant than it has been in other areas; we continue to do what we always have in terms of providing services, supporting and partnering with staff and students in their research, teaching and learning. The change has been more organisational in terms of leadership and direction brought about by convergence with the wider Academic Services area, and bringing with it closer working relationships with other departments in University Services who have not previously operated in this way, and for whom it is a new way of doing business.

With the caveat of “it is still early days,” the short answer to the question of whether or not the MOM is working is essentially “yes”. Following the initial set-up and loss of staff, the Library has not been subsequently disadvantaged in terms of funding. In fact there has been significant commitment to Library projects such as the three refurbishments currently in progress. The long answer is that people make it work because of the value and importance placed on the Library in the university context, however it is described in an organisational structure, and because of professional integrity and pre-existing relationships that have been maintained through regular contact and communication. What will happen when there is a change in staff at the Director and/or University Librarian level remains to be seen.

It is also worth noting that this change process is not over. Divisions of University Services are required to deliver year-on-year efficiency dividends that will likely require further reductions in staff numbers. Another feature of the model as implemented at the University of Melbourne is that although Academic Divisions must “buy” their services from University Services for the first three years, after 2017 they will be free to source services from outsourced external providers. We may be in the “eye of the storm” just now but the response of library staff at the University of Melbourne to the bold and swift nature of BIP assures us we can trust to the intellectual agility and integrity inherent in our profession to seek out the opportunities presented by any future changes that come our way.
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