**Passion and persistence: some workouts and game plans
for library change**

Rebecca Davies
Aberystwyth University
Aberystwyth, Wales, United Kingdom

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Abstract:

Working in Universities we have one certainty - which is that we work in uncertain times. We know that our environment and working practices will change – but we can't fully predict or map these changes. As we construct business plans and strategies for the future we are seeking to deliver services for students and academics we don't yet know (so can't understand) who will want to use technologies that have not yet been developed, and we will work under policies and governments not yet formed. Decisions we make today have an impact decades from now; the library buildings cherished (or despised) on our campus may have been built before we were born, yet influence the league table ratings we receive in 2012. The decision today to cease a particular discipline or to introduce a new one will affect the choices available to a child born tomorrow when choosing to apply or not to our institution.

This paper focuses on the workouts and game plans for individuals during these times of significant and turbulent change.

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We're not just playing against other librarians anymore...

In the games ahead we're up against a different kind of opposition, from anywhere across the globe and in almost any sector. Changes in our external environment mean that as Bradwell (2009) defined, Universities are experiencing an era of edgeless sprawl; "*The function they perform is no longer contained within the campus, nor within the physically defined space of a particular institution, nor, sometimes, even in higher education institutions at all. This is driven by people finding new ways to access and use ideas and knowledge, by new networks of learning and innovation, and by collaborative research networks that span institutions and businesses. It is an increasingly international phenomenon. Across the globe, countries are pushing for greater advantages in education and innovation. There is an ever-growing environment of learning, research and knowledge exchange of which universities are one part.*" Our pace of change is as rapid and unpredictable as new technologies are adopted almost daily by our academic colleagues and students for learning and sharing, and they are collaborating across the globe, with individuals in all kinds of sectors.

A specific aspect of this emerging edgeless era is that we are facing an increasingly competitive market, which as Rossa and Sennyeyb (2008) stated is the most significant change we face... "*until the advent of the Internet, academic libraries had no competition and their patrons were a captive audience. Students and faculty either learned the protocols and organizational principles of the library, no matter how esoteric or complex, or did without. In today's environment simplicity, efficiency and transparency, combined with savvy marketing, have become critical factors in patrons' decisions in selecting information resources. Ease of access is often considered more important than quality. Thus users eschew authoritative print reference sources for*

Internet ones of lower quality. The new market also means that competition is not a one-time phenomenon, but rather a present and future reality. Librarians must now confront disruptive innovation as a matter of routine." So as librarians we are "playing against" multinational corporations, social media and other Universities, anywhere in the world. We no longer hold the monopoly on access to information – but the people we're up against have marketing and advertising in their core business skill set.

Changing times, changing students

Of course we can fully predict that the student of tomorrow will be different to the student of today and one of the most significant shifts is from the student experience to student expectation. Once students were grateful to be allowed into our libraries, now they expect 24/7 access - and if they don't get it they will make this know in feedback and complaints forms. In the 2011 Annual HEPI Lecture Dr JamilSalmi described an encounter, for illustration purposes, where he asked a passer-by about the future of higher education and the kinds of expectations that we could (shortly) be trying to meet; *"In the future, it will be compulsory to go to university. Universities will recruit their new students on Myspace and Facebook, and in countries where it's difficult to attract engineering students to study Engineering, they will go straight to kindergarten to start motivating them. When they enter university, new students will get a free laptop, a Blackberry, an iPad and a Kindle with all their text books. If you need financial aid, you will participate in an auction on eBay to get your scholarship. In the future students will commonly be enrolled in two or three universities at the same time studying towards a common degree. No more emails in the future because it's too slow. We'll be commonly using only Myspace, Buzz, Twitter, Facebook, Hi-5, Blogger, Lifespace, etc. Students will take open internet exams and the validity of their degree will be only five years. And bad news for those of you who are still lecturers – you will have to re-do your courses every three years. But don't worry, it will be much easier in the future because you'll be giving only five minute lectures. Most courses will be online and if a student needs some help, he or she will call an 0800 number to Bangalore for online tutoring. In the future it will be cheaper to build universities because we will have no more physical libraries or labs; it will be all i-labs and e-libraries. Universities will not recruit any professor who has not studied overseas. And once your graduates leave*

university, if they don't find a proper job within six months, you will have to reimburse them the costs of their studies." So we're working in an edgeless era which is increasingly competitive with students who expect us to adopt technologies they heard of moments ago! As an international community we are facing the same problems – economic challenges, furious technological changes, increasing student expectations combined with revolutionary changes in scholarly communication... so what are the game plans and workouts we need?

What's our current state of fitness?

Working in a changing environment which rapidly delivers new challenges, requires new skills and agility to deal with them. However as librarians we work within a specific context – we remain mindful of avoiding making mistakes, as decisions and strategy direction have influence far beyond our career spans. Myberg (2003) saw the most "*dangerous threat to the profession is what I call the 'librarian mindset'*" which is focussed firstly on information as an artefact and then on attempts to introduce the mythical "user" to our wondrous resources. I am not confident, yet, that we have developed a new mindset. Our first reaction to the internet was to catalogue it! Hundreds of thousands (sometimes all by the same person) of "helpful links pages" were constructed in a Sisyphean task to push the internet into our card catalogue draws. The "helpful links" page is the clearest example of attempting to use unchanged "librarian mindset" muscles in our edgeless world where we compete with multinational marketing, and we lost.

We are also part of a wider, academic community where there is a complementary but differently nuanced mindset. In David Watson's (2009) book "*The Question of Morale: Managing Happiness and Unhappiness in University Life*" he cites a strategic discussion he had with senior academic leaders of one of the world "top universities" and provides the following edited statements:

- "*We don't have enough money to do our jobs properly, but we are really good at them.*
- *We are severely oppressed, but we are also happy in our work*
- *The government should support higher education better, and it should do this by giving us (our university) more than them (that other university)*
- *We can't give students what they really need, but it is our duty to attract the very best to come to study with us.*

- *In attracting these highly qualified students, what counts is the quality of our research, not of our teaching.*
- *The league tables are terrible, but we must climb them, and the higher we climb the less publically we shall criticise them."*

I'm certain that we all empathise and recognise these statements and the apparent contractions that expressed by senior leaders – but how, bearing in mind the librarian mindset and the contradictions of the academic community mindset, do we develop the passion and persistence that we need to thrive and innovate in this time of change? We work within an environment of conflicting values and priorities, and this can generate anxiety. As individuals one of the crucial skills sets we need is to develop a sense of comfort and "business as usual" within our edgeless, fast changing world. So what are the workouts that can aid this? How do we ensure that we are not wedded to doing tomorrow what they have done today?

Consequently in this Olympic year I thought that we should consider the workouts and game plans we need to help us be fully fit. In my view it's not just about getting "ready" it's about a new kind of fitness – building new muscles and playing new sports. As David Lanles stated when considering "World Domination Through Librarianship" (2012) "*In an era of battling walled content gardens, disruptive change, social media-enabled revolutions… there has never been a greater need for librarians… However, this is not a simple matter of declaring ourselves prepared, it will take new skills and a new librarianship not focused on buildings and artifacts.".* So what makes an Olympic chchampioned what can we, as library and information professionals learn from them? Gould, Diffenbach& Moffett (2002) studied Olympic champions and found a set of psychological characteristics which set these athletes apart:

(a) the ability to cope with and control anxiety;
(b) confidence;
(c) mental toughness/resiliency;
(d) sport intelligence;
(e) the ability to focus and block out distractions;
(f) competitiveness;
(g) a hard-work ethic;
(h) the ability to set and achieve goals;
(i) coachability;
(j) high levels of dispositional hope;
(k) optimism; and

(l) adaptive perfectionism.

I'm sure you'll agree that if an individual demonstrated these characteristics in their work as a librarian then I'm confident that they would have the qualities needed to thrive and be able to reach Olympian status in the University library! These psychological characteristics are impressive, and few come as a surprise, but the importance placed on; optimism, confidence, coping with anxiety and mental toughness/resilience are the characteristics which resonate significantly with me. I recognise that in our community the optimist can be a lonely professional. I would now like to share with you some of the workouts to help develop our game:

Workout 1 – Share experiences (do this at least once a month)

To achieve optimum fitness for the games ahead I would recommend working out with peers from other libraries to share experiences. Controlling anxiety, expressing confidence and demonstrating mental toughness are attributes developed through experience, and having the opportunity to share and compare experience with others, helps fast track development and learn lessons from others. We need to support one another tl rapidly develop a new "librarian mindset" together.

One simple workout activity, which helps ensure that a sharing opportunity is not just a chance for everyone to complain and sympathise is to use a process like action learning sets. Reginald Revans (1983) defined learning to be a manager as the "*Aristotelian manifestation of all managers' jobs: they learn as they manage, and they manage because they have learned - and go on learning*". Revans developed a method, called action learning, where individuals get together at regular intervals to discuss problems/challenges; one individual raises their issue and the other individuals challenge via questions to probe the issue. This process is repeated to follow up on progress. Solutions are found by sharing and having a safe environment to challenge and be challenged.

I believe that we are starting to see an action learning set process developing in the use by library professionals of social media resources like twitter. Groups of, often international, peers follow each other and post their issues, receive feedback support and ideas. I've seen collaborations for research develop as well as support and solutions for dealing with a

difficult situation - it's going to be interesting to see how we, as a community, further exploit technology to share.

The busier our days, the easy, and tempting thing, is to cancel an opportunity to actively focus on sharing experiences. The Olympian characteristic of being able to focus and block out distractions is the tough one we need to test and fight our way through to ensure that we make the time to share. With my 24/7 access to information through my range of mobile devices I recognise that at conferences or even smaller sessions like action learning sets I am now almost angry for the first few moments. I am being kept away from replying to yet another email or drafting another report. I also feel sorry for myself – if only I was able to use my mobile device then all would be well and I could keep on top of my workload – forgetting that the *only* way that I can ever hope to keep on top of my workload is by learning from colleagues and sharing my experience. If anyone is in that space right now, and attempting to send a quick reply to colleagues back at work – stop, breathe and notice the people around you, who you can make the effort to talk to after these talks today are over. Who knows they might know the cleaver solution to fix that problem that's been troubling you. On the other hand they might actually be able to share when they tried to fix it and it went terribly wrong. Both are valid, both are vital for our fitness. The temptation not to share because we're busy looms at every event or opportunity to share that we take part in. Making time to share requires persistence, and stamina. Do this deliberately at least monthly.

Workout 2 – Continually develop as a professional (do this daily)

Faced with a fast changing world we need to update our skill set and knowledge, and attending an event such as IFLA is a clear demonstration of our shared commitment to continually develop our professional skills. However it is too easy to tick off our annual continual professional development as a "bootcamp" experience and to return to our workplaces refreshed, but back to our old habits.

Have a daily CPD (continual professional development) regime - you may already have one that you've not realised is part of your workout, but make sure that you do recognise it as it would be all to simple to stop doing it if you don't cherish its value.

The kinds of activities in this daily workout include; reading the email alert from your professional association, looking at the twitter feed of your professional peers and following up the alert that one of your favourite blogs has been updated. We work in an edgeless, global environment, if we don't actively learn we cannot keep our knowledge set fresh we won't be able to compete and collaborate. As previously mentioned students and academic colleagues expect the technology they heard of moments ago to be fully functioning and usable through our services, and if it isn't, they will ignore us.

Each of the daily CPD activities would be easy to see as a distraction from our daily chores – they aren't – they are part of our daily chores. Be proud of each day when you manage to take part in your continuing professional development, and each day you don't, grit your teeth and make time the next day to remain an active learner.

Workout 3 - borrow from other professions (one short sharp session a year, which you then use at least weekly)

We know that we are now competing against multinationals who will market directly to our users, we have to negotiate prices with large corporations, innovate with new technologies, we have to set and monitor budgets internally and as we are promoted we have to manage large numbers of people.

I want to suggest a workout that is outside of some of our comfort zones. There are hundreds of "technology for librarians' courses" – but do you want to develop technology tools like a librarian? I want to develop technologies like a multinational. We need to step out of our sector each year so I suggest that we all choose to attend or take part in something with another profession or professions outside of librarianship. At this stage some of you might feel slightly contented as you are already attending a leadership course within your organisation with staff from across many departments – but that doesn't really count. In that situation you are actively playing your part as librarian and I am sure that you will be "selling the library" every chance you get.

As stated in our edgeless environment we aren't just playing against librarians anymore – we're playing against individuals and organisations who specialise in; negotiation, marketing, human resources or budget setting. How confident are you of your fitness levels

in these areas? Look out for courses or conferences that span many sectors, or focus on a particular skill set for Universities (e.g. the student experience) and get to know some Human Resources Managers, Finance Managers and Marketing Executives outside of your University. Aim to do this workout at least once a year, and use the new skills at least weekly. You'll know that you've achived Olympian status when you are invited to present at a different professions conference or, and I'm uncertain whether I am proud of this or not like me you're mistaken for another profession, in my case a lawyer.

Workout 4 – Demonstrate vision and leadership & optimism (do this daily)

During difficult economic times we're in danger of making small slicing cuts to all areas of our services and resources, trimming funding year on year to help stay within budget. The other option, prioritising service areas to cull or invest in, is problematic; it's political, personal and painful. It requires moving our staff away from services they have worked on for their whole careers and ceasing some well loved functions. Small slices of budget cuts do not work, they slowly erode motivation and decrease service relevance, the other option of making bolder changes and stopping doing some aspects of work can only work if, as librarians we demonstrate vision, leadership and optimism.

A recent World Bank study (2011) "The Road to Academic Excellence: the Making of World Class Universities" explored the experience of 11 leading public and private research universities from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The study concluded that there are common characteristics for the top performers, without which 21st-century universities cannot hope to survive, let alone excel:

- a high concentration of talented academics and students;
- significant budgets; and
- strategic vision and leadership.

The final characteristic in this list that our University needs to survive and excel is partly down to us – as librarians we must contribute to our Universities strategy and we are part of its leadership team. If we think that we are all doomed, and we have no vision for the future then we cannot make sensible choices about how to invest in some areas, introduce new services and cut others. Having a workout regime for vision, leadership and optimism is very personal – but comes down to one simple thing – have you got the passion for

librarianship? You cannot have strategic vision, leadership and optimism without loving librarianship – so here's a few workouts to reignite that passion which will help demonstrate vision and leadership:

Asses your fitness;

1. Are you dragging your feet on your walk to work?
2. When an enthusiastic colleague bounces up to you with another bright, but misguided idea, do you groan inwardly (if you groan out loud the only immediate cure is a short vacation!)?
3. When a senior manager leaves a message for you to call them back are you delaying making that call?

If the answers to the above questions is as below then I diagnose the following workouts;

Never = Then you've got the right muscle tone to focus on the strategy and to contribute to your Universities leadership team. It could always be better – look outside to what you could be! Your workout is to identify the University (or Universities) that you are jealous of, keep a close eye on what they are doing, try to visit (virtually if you can't get there physically) and use them as the challenge that keeps your passion alive.

Demonstrate leadership by spending time supporting colleagues who are not in the same positive mindset as you – respect the value they add to your (perhaps furious and frustrating to others) optimism. Your enthusiasm will be infectious.

Sometimes = My suspicion is that we are all, mostly, in this category. We cannot be continual optimists, particularly in our current challenging times. I diagnose a range of sessions; particularly to think of how you can connect with your users. If you have daily contact with users across the library counter, think of some ways in which you can get involved with a project or activity that means that you can become part of their world. The more we infiltrate their world the easier it is to develop strategies and plans that means we can ensure that we are providing a relevant service. Seeing the positive (or indeed negative) impact that your library has is an amazing motivator, and will help reignite passion. If, like me, you spend less and less time with users, clear the diary and get on the service desk. The reasons we go to all those meetings are the students and academics.

A further workout is to spend time with some early career staff. If we've been in post for a while we can find it hard to tackle the perennial problem (reading lists anyone?) and think "we tried that 9 years ago & it didn't work". If you successfully work with the fresh talent within then they view these problems from a new perspective, and by working alongside them you can hone your leadership skills.

I'd also recommend for those of us who would "sometimes" to these questions is to develop leadership skills within our organisations. Look for opportunities to contribute, perhaps by mentoring/coaching others. To become a mentor or coach requires training, which is valuable in itself, but also coaching and mentoring can be as valuable to the coach or mentor during a time of change, as it is to the individual you are supporting.

Always = You need to connect to the grand challenges that are out there – but it might be as simple as starting to look at other opportunities to work elsewhere. Do not underestimate the need for new challenge to help push us forward, we all need eustress (healthy stress, so taking a challenge as a positive opportunity rather than a negative threat) to even get us out of bed! However, often the opportunity to reignite the passion through a grand challenge is there within library research. Every day exciting and interesting articles are published, and conferences like ifla can ignite our passion.

But don't read a paper; my workout for you is to *write one*. If you are stuck in a rut and want to apply for another job, a paper will do wonders for your application form and you will also get some recognition and respect back in your workplace. Most importantly if you write your paper after undertaking some research on your library, you will have reignited your passion and have an evidence base for your strategy so that you can demonstrate library leadership.

In conclusion – our game plan is one of passion and persistence

I'm relieved to note that Gould, Diffenbach & Moffett (2002) found that "No one Olympian was characterized by all the factors identified", so we can still be champions without hitting all of the characteristics they defined. I believe that we have the capability to reach Olympian heights, we only need to work on our game plans so that we demonstrate passion and persistence.

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