The BMA Library. 21ˢᵗ Century Makeover. Getting the Library you Need

Abstract: The British Medical Association Library (BMA) has been through some significant changes over the past two years. As part of an organisation-wide refurbishment, Jacky Berry, now its permanent Librarian, has project managed one of these changes, the relocation of the BMA library within the existing building. Her article covers many aspects of a library move, including the design phase and working with architects and internal estates teams; the budgeting phase including negotiating finance; planning for the move and motivating staff through the change period.

Keywords: Library design

Introduction

This article is based on the paper delivered at the BIALL Winter Study Conference in Edinburgh in December 2007 where the author delivered an interactive session and learning was achieved through discussion and storytelling.

The BMA Library has recently been through a change management programme that involved many groups of people in delivering project plans to future proof the services of the Library to their members. As part of this future proofing the Library needed to be relocated within the existing building and brought into the 21ˢᵗ century.

Overview of the BMA Library

The BMA Library has been in existence in different forms since 1887 and continues to be a unique collection of books, journals and videos/DVDs to support the clinical practice, research and professional development of members and institutional members. It also supports the educational needs of medical students and the research activities of staff within the BMA and BMJ. It achieves this

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through an expert enquiry service and helpdesk, access to e-journals and e-books via the website, offering customised research and has recently relocated to a new modern Library with high speed internet access and WiFi. There are 13 members of staff, including seven professionally qualified librarians, five library assistants and one administrator. The team has nine years medical library experience and eight MA/MSc degrees and two MBAs amongst them.

The change management project commenced in March 2006 and I was appointed as the project manager to complete the relocation within 11 months. The idea of change had been looked at over a period of three years but no real action had been taken prior to me commencing the role. The BMA was keen to future proof the Library for its members by deciding if:

- The service was still required by members

- Was it value for money?

- What were the real costs of operation?

- Can the spend on services be more effectively utilised?

If the decision was to keep the Library service I had to identify:

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Figure 1: Reading area within the Library

- What would the service look like?

- What resources would be needed?

- How many staff would be required?

My first task was to analyse the options on offer to the BMA and the decisions were to:

- Keep the library but relocate it to a different area within the BMA.

- Integrate the main clinical library for doctors and the staff library of the BMA.

- Relocate the archive store to be closer to the main library.

- Install a new library management system.

- Restructure the library team.

This was certainly no 60 minute makeover and I was quickly aware that, if the deadlines were to be met, then the key aspect of the project was to get the relevant people involved and lead and manage them very carefully.

So, the project in hand involved lots of change and I stressed that change can be a very messy process which can be unstructured but continuous. Once the change has occurred it's more than likely going to continue in

Figure 2: The Library bookstacks

another format. I also stressed that change can be very scary for all those involved!

Having presented the relocation task to the group, I then asked them to identify what they would do in the first six months. From this work the following ideas were generated:

• Outline your stakeholders.

• Quickly identify champions within this group.

• Analyse the services and target both internal and external stakeholders.

• Prepare and select an acceptable, feasible and achievable strategy linked with the BMA's corporate strategy.

• Design an action plan.

• Implement and deliver the action plan.

• Evaluate through KPI's success or otherwise of the change.

• Maintain and develop the service but make further changes if necessary.

I was allocated a greenfield site within the BMA which was an office space already decorated in the BMA style. But there were many issues to be faced:

• Planning permission for the larger refurbishment project had not been confirmed by the local Council. Until this was agreed the move could not take place.

• The area allocated had a very low ceiling, was much smaller in floor space and hence the existing stock would not fit.

• The entrance to the new area was at the wrong end of the space and so major building work to create an entrance had to be carried out.

• The traditional culture of the BMA and the decision makers meant that new ideas for the Library layout, colour and equipment would prove to be difficult to gain acceptance.

• No budget had been allocated.

• Decision makers not really understanding the present and potential service the library could offer to members.

• The team would be moving from a disparate area of office space to an open plan office space.

To help the process of the relocation operate efficiently and smoothly some action plans were put in place to help manage the project successfully. A relocation board was set up comprising me and some of the key decision makers. These included the Director of Finance, Estates Manager, her Head of Function, Manager of IM&T and the Contract Project Manager. The initial actions were to prepare a project plan with timelines, hire an architect/interior designer, and prepare a brief of requirements by interviewing library staff and users. Financing of the project had to be negotiated. One tip I highlighted

when presenting a design plan for approval was to always offer three options. One option should be a Rolls Royce design that is expensive; another should be a "beige" option which is normally bland and inexpensive; and then the preferred option, which hopefully your decision makers will choose, as it fits the design criteria and is a reasonable cost. Getting to know your Finance Director is extremely important at this point. At all stages of the project the relocation board were kept informed of progress and any changes with the plans that were required. It was also very important to keep the library team informed of progress and plans as the new library space would be their new working area. Communication throughout the whole of the project was crucial for its success, as well as motivating the team to be involved.

My role was crucial and central to the success of the project. It was necessary to recognise the importance of the project to the organisation to convince others of that importance. I had to identify the people I needed to help plan and implement the work. This involved quickly building relationships and understanding the importance of people management. It was necessary to gain commitment from the team to enable them to achieve performance against objectives. There was also a fair amount of stress and panic, not only of others but within myself, which I had to manage. It was also vital to be an excellent organiser of plans and people. To be able to carry this out I identified the skills required of a project manager:

• Leadership, management skills.

• Empathy for others with emotional intelligence.

• Communication – you must be able not only to hear but listen.

• Ability to understand the needs of different stakeholders and cultures both internally and externally.

• Manage conflict.

• Excellent interpersonal skills to build relationships.

• Buckets of enthusiasm.

• A belief and positive attitude for change and the project outlined.

• A great can do attitude, flexible and multi tasker.

• Influencing and negotiating skills, a decision maker.

• Understand and deliver to time frames.

• Understand all of that people stuff so important for a project to succeed.

During this project it was also necessary to understand the roles of architects, space planners, health and safety officers, IT experts, cablers, network professionals, electricians, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, carpet layers, DDA experts, and removal men. I also became a mind reader, negotiator, peacekeeper and diplomat. At

the end of the project I became involved in choosing artwork for the Library and organising a launch party. Art critic and party planner was thus added to the list of skills.

The following learning points from completing the project were vital to its success:

- Communicate, communicate and communicate some more.

- Motivate the project team by getting them involved as much as possible.

- Use your own team's experience of moving libraries.

- Have regular update meetings.

- Be open and honest about change as much as you can.

- Listen to concerns and worries of the team.

- Don't run too quickly – keep looking back to see if everyone is with you.

- Plan, plan and plan some more.

- Always double the amount of plug sockets you need.

- Know your limitations, if you don't know something ask somebody who does.

- Keep asking dumb questions.

- Keep smiling and have a positive outlook at all times.

- But most importantly, have contingency plans in case you hit brick walls.

Conclusion

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted". When involved with any project, especially when working with an organisation that has indicated they may wish to abandon their library service, then this quote is important. It's definitely not all about money. The 21st Century makeover of the BMA Library is an example of the determination of a group of professional librarians to keep their service and change it to be a more efficient, and valuable service for its users.

Biography

Jacky Berry has been an information professional for over 30 years and has moved 26 libraries in that time.

Please contact Jacky Berry at jberry@bma.org.uk or call 020 7383 6036 if you would like to visit the new BMA Library.