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Innovation in the Publishing Space

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What does innovation look like in academic publishing, and how does it come about? This panel session at the CSE 2019 Annual Meeting explored the theme of innovation with presentations from two experts in production and publishing strategy.

Lettie Conrad, Senior Product R&D Associate at Maverick Publishing Specialists, opened the session by talking about the questions we need to ask in order to establish a culture of innovation. If innovation means bringing about new thinking and new methods to help us manage a changing landscape, then the most important question is: "How can I best support future research practices and future expectations for research communications?"

Conrad went on to talk about "design thinking." This term describes a range of human-centred approaches to solving problems and managing change. Innovation fundamentally requires us to go beyond our comfort zones, and design thinking can be a useful tool to help us do this.

Another useful framework for thinking about innovation is the build-measure-learn cycle. Rather than taking one big, transformative step, try making a series of smaller changes informed by data and evidence. Gather data from a range of sources to support your decision-making, from customer service records and web analytics, to white papers and competitor marketing materials.

Conrad then shared two case studies from Maverick Publishing Specialists as examples of well-informed innovation being put into practice.

The first case study looked at a technology service provider who wanted to move from their existing enterprise-model to a consumer-model. Maverick Publishing Specialists advocated for a contextualized approach by creating a dozen different profiles for their users. These profiles varied by role, geography, age, and background, and honed in on the information tasks they were looking to achieve on the technology platform. Through this approach, they were able to identify a new product opportunity for the company.

The second case study looked at using a range of audits and tests to assess the visibility of a journal's content, encompassing analysis of search engine optimization, heuristic user experience testing, evaluation of metadata, and a CrossRef audit, to name a few. This holistic approach built up a clear picture of the journal's content visibility. This, in turn, informed a set of new business practice recommendations, from developing new key performance indicators and building a cross-functional task force, to

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revising vendor relationships and establishing new indexing partnerships.

Conrad ended her presentation by sharing three top tips for innovating:

1. **Start small, fail fast.** This means beginning with short-term experiments in innovation. Get to the heart of your goals by addressing the key pain points, but don't invest a lot of resource at this stage.
2. **Put the user at the center and keep them there.** A user-centred approach will serve you best in responding to changing practices. Use data and evidence about your users to build up accurate personas and profiles for them so that you understand your community better.
3. **Innovate at all levels.** Question your fundamental assumptions and use design thinking and the build-measure-learn framework to innovate and solve problems creatively.

Theresa Schwoppe discussed how to foster innovation within a publishing production environment. In addition to her position as Associate Technical Editor at the American Chemical Society (ACS), she is also their Innovation Funnel Leader. In this role, she inspires staff to produce innovative ideas and then works to implement the best ideas in the department.

The production department at ACS is naturally efficiency-focused and metrics-driven, which lends well to fostering a culture of continual improvement through innovation. To help encourage innovation from everyone within the department, the Innovation Incubator Group was established.

This Group is an employee-led committee of free thinkers who meet once a month to brainstorm ideas and build on them collectively. Anyone within the department is free to join this group, which has a collaborative and supportive atmosphere. Ideas are discussed initially within

this setting, and then more structured ideas are submitted to the Innovation Funnel.

The Funnel is a more structured committee that investigates and develops all suggestions which are brought to them (for example, doing a cost analysis or discussing possible implications on other teams) and then takes the final proposal to a management committee for a final decision on implementation.

The Innovation Funnel initiative has been very successful within the ACS production department, with 45% of staff members submitting at least one idea to the Funnel. The team also runs workshops and events to encourage innovative thinking and generate Funnel submissions; these are very well attended and have had a strong positive response from staff.

Following the two presentations, moderator Leslie Walker opened up the floor for questions. Audience members asked how to get buy-in for the innovation program. Schwoppe indicated you only need a few passionate individuals who are natural advocates for the topic, and then it snowballs from there. It's also worth advertising any events or workshops, and proactively reaching out to people for their ideas.

Another audience member asked about how much of a challenge office hierarchy is, when it comes to innovation in the workplace. How can we break down barriers of who is "allowed" to innovate? Schwoppe said their office culture is open enough that all staff are encouraged to bring ideas to the Innovation Incubator Group or directly to the Innovation Funnel. They deliberately designed the process of developing ideas to be collaborative so that staff at all levels feel free to get involved.

Overall, this session at the CSE Annual Meeting was inspiring and useful. The speakers shared lots of excellent ideas and initiatives on how to introduce innovation within a publishing context, but many of these suggestions could easily translate to any workplace setting.