

INNOVATION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES - IS IT HAPPENING?

Case study on leadership perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Academic or research libraries are located at universities or research institutions. Most academic libraries are not young institutions, and their staff tends to be constant for years.

Libraries are similar to well-established businesses with systematized routines and habits that are difficult to alter and hinder their innovating capacity. (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004; Jantz, 2017) Since innovation, in general, requires openness and flexibility, it could be assumed that academic libraries are not really built for innovation.

Organizational innovation is often connected to leadership, yet, academic library directors tend to be more cautious when promoting innovation and change. (Jantz, 2012; Martin, 2017; Ward, 2013) All presumptions suggest that academic libraries are not built for innovation.



AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to illustrate the leadership perspective on innovation activities and management in European academic libraries.

Research questions:

- RQ1 – How do library leaders see innovation?
- RQ2 – What kind of innovation are libraries involved in?
- RQ3 – How is innovation managed in libraries?

DATA AND METHODS

To find if and how academic library directors define and manage innovation in their libraries, a case study was held in 2020. Semi-structured interviews were held with eight academic library directors in Europe. Data were analyzed and coded to create common themes.

Respondents were asked to define innovation in their own words, describe any innovation they have implemented in their library, and in general, how they identify opportunities for innovation and whom they involve in the implementation of these innovations.

MAIN RESULTS

The case study shows that library directors' concept of innovation is closely related to previous literature, and answers support the general definition of library innovation (Chart 1).

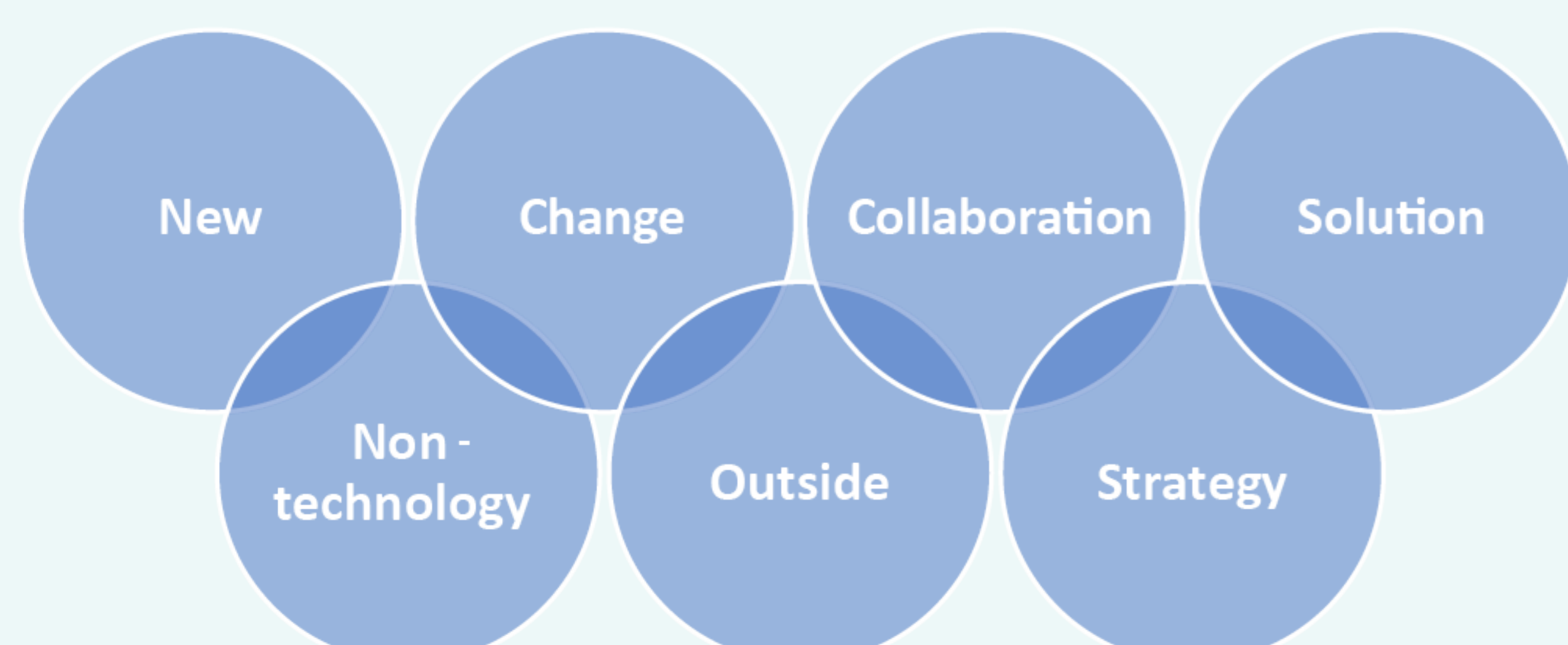


Chart 1: library leaders' approach to innovation - keywords

- Participating academic libraries are all involved to some extent in innovation activities.
- They define innovation through the following keywords: newness, problem-solving, openness to outside, out-of-the-box thinking, part of the strategy, and other keywords.
- Library directors see innovation as part of the strategy implemented in a team to bring something new into the library.
- Libraries are primarily innovating by providing new services or re-organizing existing structures and operations.
- Leaders look for inspiration from other libraries as well as from outside the library community.
- In library innovation, collaboration with stakeholders plays an important role.
- Innovation in libraries is often non-technological.
- Library directors see innovation as a way to solve some problems.
- Innovation is encouraged through empowering staff in libraries.
- Innovation is not a goal but a mean.



Wordcloud: innovation encouragement in libraries

CONCLUSION

Academic libraries are considered static organizations that are not eager to innovate because of the lack of innovative culture or specific teams focusing on innovation. However, the current case study showed that innovation in academic libraries is not as rare as expected. In conclusion, this case study's participants promote an innovative culture in their libraries through encouraging collaboration and problem-solving. Their approach towards innovation is strategic, where innovation is a way towards strategic goals rather than a target itself.

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