The Embedded Records Manager: A case study emphasizing the importance of community as a key to success

Abstract: While embedded librarianship has become increasingly common, this concept has not been widely applied to other information professions. This case study describes a pilot project to embed a records manager within the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Ottawa. The paper begins with a brief institutional context, including a summary of the main information management challenges facing the team. This is followed by a brief analysis of potential solutions that were explored, and the rationale for embedding a records manager. Next, relevant literature is reviewed and seven key criteria for successfully embedding an information professional are identified. The paper explains how these criteria were addressed in a pilot project. Finally, the pilot project is evaluated, identifying the added benefits that came as a result of embedding a records manager within the team.

Résumé: Bien que la notion de bibliothéconomie intégrée soit de plus en plus connue, cette pratique n'a pas été si bien intégrée dans d'autres métiers de l'information. Cette étude de cas décrit un projet pilote qui vise à intégrer un gestionnaire de documents électroniques au sein de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales de l'Université d'Ottawa. On présent d'abord le contexte institutionnel, y compris un résumé des principaux défis auxquels doit faire face l'équipe. Ensuite, les solutions potentielles sont analysées et les raisons pour lesquelles on a choisi un modèle intégré sont présentées. À la suite d'une revue de la littérature pertinente, on identifie sept critères essentiels pour intégrer avec succès un professionnel de l'information, et l'on explique comment les critères ont été abordés dans le projet pilote. Finalement, on évalue le projet pilote afin de déterminer les valeurs ajoutées qui ont découlé de l'intégration d'un gestionnaire de documents électroniques au sein de l'équipe.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the concept of "embedded librarianship" has become increasingly common (Schulte 2012; Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou 2015). As pointed out by Myers and Warner (2013), among others, this concept was inspired by the so-called "embedding" of journalists into U.S. military activity during the Iraq war which began in 2003, and it implies that the embedded group experiences, as much as possible, the day-to-day activities of the group to which it becomes attached. Drewes and Hoffman (2010, 75) observe that while embedded librarianship is most commonly linked with academic librarianship, and particularly with undergraduate instruction and distance education, the concept can extend to other areas, such as corporate and special librarianship. Kesselman and Watstein (2010, 384) go so far as to state "Indeed, explorations of new, embedded roles for librarians in all types of organizations abound as seen in the increase of articles on this topic." However, a search of the literature reveals that in the information professions, this concept does not yet seem to have been explored in any great detail beyond librarianship proper.

Inspired by some of the of success stories reported with regard to embedded librarianship (e.g. Riccio 2012; Wu et al. 2013; Rowlands and Knapp 2015), and having a serious need for improved information management, the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Ottawa elected to experiment with an *embedded records manager*. This case study presents the results of this experience, with a particular focus on the importance of community-building as a key to success.

2. Institutional context

The University of Ottawa is a large, research-intensive university. As of January 2015, there were 1262 regular professors and 42,672 students, which included 6,604 graduate students. Currently, the university's Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies has 36 full-time employees and it operates as a centralized body that oversees both the strategic and operational aspects related to graduate studies. However, as part of an administrative reorganization at the University, the administration of graduate studies is currently being restructured. Strategic tasks will remain in a streamlined central office of graduate studies. However, over the course of the year 2016, the majority of the operations-related tasks will be decentralized and transferred to the individual disciplinary Faculties (i.e., Arts, Education, Engineering, Law, Science, etc.) where the graduate students are pursuing their programs of study. In addition, as part of the restructuration, the task of managing the cyclical program reviews will also be migrated out of the FGPS and into a centralized office. Currently, cyclical reviews for undergraduate and graduate programs are handled separately by different teams in different offices; however, the plan is to consolidate these teams and to create a single centralized office of quality assurance by the end of 2016.

The principal repository for storing information at the FGPS is a shared network drive, and the information stored there is typically accessed and managed using Windows Explorer. In advance of transferring responsibilities to other units, FGPS employees began to try to identify documents and other information objects that would also need to be transferred. It quickly became clear, however, that the information management practices being employed at the FGPS are far from being best practices. The classification system in use is "homegrown" and had evolved in an ad hoc way over a 15-year period based on the preferences and practices of individual users.

For example, as of September 2015, the shared drive contained over 180,000 files, which were (loosely) organized into eleven different levels of folders. Additionally, no naming conventions had been established or applied. Not only did individuals use their own cryptic naming systems, the fact that the University of Ottawa operates in both of Canada's official languages meant that some employees named files and folders in French, while others used English. Searching for information therefore often required two separate searches – one using English terms and one using French terms. Coupled with the lack of naming conventions was the lack of a system for version control. This resulted in absurdly named files such as," Volume1-FinalFinalFinal.doc", or a series of files where subsequent readers simply appended their initials to the filename after making modifications to produce documents with names such as "Volume1-MU-JJ-LB.doc". A further challenge was that, instead of storing personal information in their own folders on a separate drive provided for this purpose, some employees stored this information on the shared

drive. Therefore, when searching for information, it was necessary to navigate past folders with names such as "Helping Emilie from Downstairs" or "New stuff".

3. Seeking expert help

While the FGPS does have a small information technology team, its members are not information management (IM) specialists, and they are not responsible for IM-related tasks overall. Similarly, the University's central Information Technology unit, which includes the Office of the Chief Information Officer, comprises mainly computer specialists, rather than IM specialists. Their principal mandate is to leverage information technologies to provide solutions. While technology may contribute to improving information management practices at the FGPS, it cannot provide a comprehensive solution. Rather, additional elements, such as a well-thought out classification system, naming conventions, version control, a retention schedule, and training in best practices, are also required.

The University Archives has a mandate to promote and support sound information management practices; however, it employs only two archivists and a single records analyst to serve the entire university community, including assisting with the management of both physical and electronic documents. While the records analyst was able to provide some very general information, such as a very high-level document classification scheme and records retention schedule used at the university, he was not able to provide personalized service—such as a needs analysis, design of a customized classification scheme and naming conventions, or training in best practices for document management—for the FGPS. He did, however, indicate that the University did sometimes employ consultants to provide IM support.

The responsibility for identifying an appropriate solution was assigned to the Vice-Dean of the FGPS. The Vice-Dean is also a professor of translation whose area of research is natural language processing. Although she is not an expert in IM or records management, she has nonetheless had a general exposure to the literature in the field of Library and Information Science, and consequently, she was familiar with the general concept of "embedded librarianship". Accordingly, when exploring the options available for acquiring expert help to address the IM needs of the FGPS, she did some further reading and also engaged in conversation with colleagues in the field.

The initial and most obvious choice was to hire a consultant. The consulting model is a well-known one that offers many advantages. Shumaker (2012, 16) provides an excellent description of consultant librarians, noting that they typically offer mobility, proactivity, energy, and focus. They come to the client's location and engage with the team. They function as specialized role players with a unique expertise—in this case, information analysis and management—that the client needs in order to achieve certain objectives. They focus their energy on a team and are able to spot information problems that others on the team may not recognize. Consultants are in a position to come up with solutions crafted to the special needs of the team, and they establish relationships that last for the duration of the engagement. The consulting model certainly has many positive aspects, but one of its most significant drawbacks is that consultants are typically viewed as specialized role players, not as full members of the team. The consultant contributes advice—and sometimes solutions—but in a limited sphere bounded by preconceived ideas of the

consultant's expertise. The consultant may not develop a strong knowledge of the team's work and may not feel a responsibility for overall team outcomes. Not viewed as a true member of the team, the consultant is only asked for advice in situations in which the team members feel they need specialized expertise.

In contrast, Shumaker (2012, 16-17), suggests that some of these drawbacks could be overcome by engaging an embedded librarian, rather than a consultant. The embedded librarian contributes to a team or an organization through customized, specialized, value-added information management and analysis. Embedded librarianship, when fully developed, embraces a strong, ongoing working relationship between the librarian, team leaders, and other team members, along with a sense of shared responsibility among all for outcomes and achievements. The embedded librarian develops a sophisticated understanding of the team's domain. While the embedded librarian does not acquire the same level of expertise in a domain that other members have, the sophisticated understanding enables the librarian to become much more effective at customizing information solutions and adding value. The embedded librarian often contributes novel and useful insights and solutions to team problems that go beyond the expected bounds of the librarian's role. The embedded librarian combines proactivity and energy with strong working relationships, close alignment with team goals and objectives, shared responsibility for outcomes, and full membership in the team. Kesselman and Watstein (2009, 387) similarly describe embeddedness as intensive integration into the client group, where team members have multiple opportunities to interact with the librarian. They go on to note that integration and collaboration, which are central to the role and function of embedded librarians, also represent values advanced by embedded librarianship (Kesselman and Watstein 2009, 395). In short, what these authors are essentially describing is the creation of a *community*, which the online *Oxford Dictionary* defines as "A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals" (www.oxforddictionaries.com).

After doing additional reading and speaking with some librarians at the university who had experience working in an embedded situation, the Vice-Dean determined that the concept of embedded librarianship could most likely be adapted to other information professions—in this case records management—and that an embedded records manager might be better able to meet the needs of the FPGS better than would a consultant. Accordingly, the Vice-Dean prepared a business case and pitched the idea of engaging an embedded records manager to the senior management team at the FGPS, which in addition to the Vice-Dean, comprises the Dean, the Associate Dean, the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Assistant Registrar (Graduate Studies).

The senior management team approved the idea in principle, and in particular, they agreed to a test in the form of a four-month pilot project where the records manager would be embedded within the quality assurance (QA) team, which is supervised by the Vice-Dean. As noted above, as part of the restructuration of the FGPS, the responsibilities of the QA team would be among the first to be transferred out of the FGPS and to a new central office of quality assurance. In addition to the Vice-Dean, the QA team has two full-time employees: a director and a coordinator. Together, the QA team is responsible for managing the cyclical reviews of each of the 185 graduate programs offered by the university. These reviews are required by the province of Ontario, and each program is reviewed on a seven-year cycle. Overall, the work of the QA

team is essentially one of project management, and as part of this work, a wide range of documents are produced and gathered, including agendas and minutes for the Graduate Program Evaluation Committee meetings, schedules for the cyclical evaluation, self-evaluation documents, statistics about applications, admissions and registrations, research funding received by professors, information about co-op work placements, a summary of the library's collection relevant to the discipline, post-graduation employment information, reviewers' reports, unit responses, final assessment reports, executive summaries, correspondence, itineraries for on-site visits, templates, guides, workshop presentations, governance and policy documents, to name just a few. Moreover, the work of QA team is subject to a periodic audit by the province, so it is essential that relevant documents be retained and organized.

4. From embedded librarian to embedded records manager: Modelling success

In 2007, David Shumaker and Mary Talley received funding from the Special Library Association (SLA) for a project entitled "Models of Embedded Librarianship". The goal of the study was to develop an evidence-based model for the successful initiation, implementation, and evaluation of embedded library services. It included objectives such as defining criteria of "embeddedness" for library programs, defining indicators of success for embedded library services, and identifying model programs. The results were presented in a final report (Shumaker and Talley 2009), which has become a seminal work in this area. Other scholars and practitioners have continued to experiment with and refine the suggestions contained in the report to develop models for successfully embedding librarians. Based on our reading of the literature (see list of references at the end of this paper) and our conversations with librarians, we identified seven criteria that appear relevant for successfully embedding an information professional. We then attempted to put these into practice as part of our pilot project to embed a records manager with the QA team at the FGPS. These seven criteria, along with an explanation of our efforts to address them, are summarized in Table 1. In particular, the last two criteria focus directly on the importance of community-building. Several others help to lay a foundation that facilitates or supports community-building.

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5. Evaluation of the pilot project

From the point of view of addressing the information management needs of the QA team, the pilot project can certainly be considered a success. The number of active files stored on the shared drive has been reduced by approximately 50%, with duplicates and early versions of documents being deleted, and inactive files being archived. In addition, the number of levels of folders has been reduced from eleven to five. A naming convention, which includes a method of indicating versions, has been developed and applied. Moreover, the project was completed on time and on budget. Undoubtedly, however, similar results could have been achieved by hiring a consultant. What is more interesting, therefore, is to evaluate whether there were any added benefits as a result of embedding a records manager within the QA team.

In general, the literature on embedded services documents an evolution in the level and nature of services provided by professionals in these roles. As pointed out by Shumaker (2012, 12),

"Embedded librarians transcend service because they become partners." As a partner, the information professional is fully engaged and is a member of a team whose members are mutually responsible for the overall outcome. It is different from a service relationship, and it is what happens when embedded relationships are fully developed. By being a fully-integrated team member, the embedded records manager was in a position to truly understand the work carried out by the team. The team as a whole had a shared series of goals, and all members, including the embedded records manager, contributed to their achievement. For example, as part of the process of learning about the cyclical review process managed by the QA team, the records manager helped them to analyze and map the process more clearly. This highlighted a number of inefficiencies, which the team could then work to correct (e.g. doing some tasks in a different order, streamlining overlapping tasks, reallocating responsibilities among team members). The insights and expertise in process mapping provided by the records manager greatly assisted the team with their overall goal of managing the cyclical review process more efficiently.

As another example, as the embedded records manager worked with the team to develop file naming conventions, he was able to alert the other team members to terminological inconsistencies that appeared in their documentation. As a result, the entire QA team—including the records manager—examined their terminology more closely and worked to develop a glossary and style guide. Now, the documents produced by the team are more consistent and communications with the team's stakeholders (e.g. the academic units under review, the provincial government) are clearer and thus generate fewer questions for the team to answer or clarify.

The provision of training—both formal and informal—was another benefit of having the records manager embedded within the team. Not only did he provide formal workshops to teach team members how to use the new classification system or to apply the new naming conventions, he was also available to answer questions on-the-fly as they came up. This was helpful because often, questions arose not during the workshops but later as the team members tried to put the new systems into practice. In some cases, the questions that team members raised led to refinements in the system as part of an on-going and iterative process, which would not likely have happened if a consultant had been hired.

Another benefit that grew out of the close and trusted relationship between the embedded records manager and the rest of the QA team was that neither the records manager himself, nor the other team members, saw his role as being limited to the formal IM job description. In other words, he was considered "not just a records manager" and, as a result, he was willing and able to bring other information professional skills to bear for the overall greater good of the team. For instance, he was able to help other team members become more proficient users of some of their office software (e.g. Excel, Windows file manager). In addition, he used his knowledge of databases and filters to help a team member conduct research more effectively. Finally, he was able to share his knowledge of data visualization techniques and products, which allowed other team members to learn about these and to integrate them into some of their documents and products. While a consultant may have possessed these skills, it is unlikely that either the consultant or the QA team would have thought to work together in these ways. Rather, it was

only as a result of the relationship that these opportunities presented themselves, and that all team members felt comfortable pursuing them.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the success of this four-month pilot project is the fact that, at its completion, the contract of the records manager was extended for an additional nine months (with an option for further renewal) so that he can continue his work with other sectors within the FGPS. Several factors—all with their roots in community-building—were instrumental in achieving this outcome. Firstly, the fact that the records manager had already participated in FGPS-wide activities—both professional and social—meant that he had already begun laying the foundations for relationships with these other sectors. Secondly, the positive experiences of the QA team that were spread by worth-of-mouth helped to allay any uncertainties that might have existed among those employees who did not fully understand information management and who had expressed some concerns about having their files reorganized or renamed. The positive relationship that had been forged with the senior management, and the Vice-Dean's work as project champion, also helped to garner buy-in from the wider community. Finally, of course, the fact that the embedded records manager had delivered a quality service in a professional manner cemented the deal.

6. Concluding remarks

To the best of our knowledge, no other unit on campus has an embedded records manager. However, the literature outlining various libraries' experiences with embedded librarianship was both inspiring and instructive, and it afforded us an opportunity to consider how we might adapt this model in order to successfully embed a records manager within the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. We fully support the following notion that is prevalent throughout the literature: building strong relationships is the key to a successful experience both for the information professional and for the team into which they are embedded. Based on our experience, we see the embedded service model as one that promotes high trust, close collaboration, and shared responsibility for outcomes. It produces a community where the information professional is considered to be a partner and where he or she can make a variety of sophisticated, value-added contributions over and above standard professional information services. Moreover, we agree with Shumaker and Talley's (2009, 45) observation that the embedded service model has a strong foundation and potential staying power.

Kesselman and Watstein (2009, 398) end their article with a call to action: "our intent is to encourage readers to explore new embedded roles for all types of libraries and for librarians in these various settings. Successfully embedded libraries and librarians demonstrate the many ways it is possible to transcend traditional roles and underscore the unique value we add as institutions and individuals." We consider our own pilot project with an embedded records manager to have been highly successful, and we hope this discussion has contributed to a broader understanding of embedded information professionals.

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Table 1. Criteria for successfully embedding information professionals and examples of actions taken to address these criteria in the pilot project.

Criteria	**Summary of observations from the literature and conversations with practitioners**	**Steps taken to set up the embedded records manager pilot project**
Support from the organization's leadership	In many of the reported success stories, embedding information professionals was seen as a strategy for strengthening the organization and offering an improved level of service. A greater level of success was seen in instances where a manager/leader of the client group facilitated the integration of the librarian into the group. Another practice noted in our analysis of successful programs is the engagement of client management in activities such as integrating the new embedded librarian into the group and providing input to the librarian's performance review. We see these activities as tangible signs of the client manager's buy-in to the embedded service.	• The FGPS senior management team supported the concept of embedding a records manager in the QA team. • The Vice-Dean acted as champion for the IM project and helped to integrate the embedded records manager (e.g. by making introductions, securing resources). • The embedded records manager meets bi-monthly with the FGPS senior management team to provide updates on the project.
Location	Though it was not considered absolutely essential for the embedded librarian to be physically located within their client group, many of the success stories did use this model, noting that it facilitated interactions and community-building.	• The embedded records manager has a desk in the same pod as the other three members of the QA team.
Funding	In many of the reported success stories, the salary of the embedded librarian was paid partially or wholly by the client group, rather than by a central service.	• The embedded records manager position is fully funded by the FGPS and not by a central service.
Management and supervision	Supervision by a member of the client group, rather than by a library manager, was a factor that was noted in many of the successful embedded positions.	• The hiring was done by the FGPS. • The embedded records manager reports to the Vice-Dean of the FGPS, who is also responsible for performance reviews.
Understanding the work	Successful embedded librarians are reported to have developed a good understanding of the work of the client group. In some cases they also have additional qualifications in the	• The embedded records manager began his task by conducting a series of information-gathering interviews with members of the FGPS to learn about their jobs and

	discipline that is of primary concern to their client group. Some success stories report that embedded librarians engage in formal or informal continuing education activities to learn more about their client's core business.	IM needs. • The embedded records manager meets regularly with the QA team and has demonstrated an increased understanding of their work by helping them with tasks such as process mapping. • Much of the work carried out by the QA team is essentially project management, and the embedded records manager has a graduate qualification in management in addition to a Master of Information Studies degree. • The embedded records manager has participated in workshops on different aspects of university business offered by the University's Centre for Organizational Development and Learning.
Participation in the community within the client group, including developing shared goals and participating in their achievement	Building a strong community that fully includes the embedded librarian as a partner member is consistently considered to be among the most important factors for success. In success stories, this relationship- and community-building took various forms, including conventional professional encounters (e.g. meeting with members of the client group, as well as with senior managers), but also social bonding opportunities (e.g. having lunch with team members, participating in team social events).	• The embedded records manager attends a weekly QA team meeting. • The embedded records manager also attends other meetings, such as the general FGPS staff meetings, where he receives a broader exposure to the overall business of the FGPS. • The embedded records manager meets bi-monthly with the senior management team to provide project updates. • The embedded records manager participates regularly in informal and formal social events (e.g. coffee breaks and lunches with team members, holiday party).
Maintaining ties with the LIS community	A challenge that was observed in the literature was that, in cases where an embedded librarian is focusing on the client group, there is a risk that as ties to clients strengthen, ties to other information professionals will weaken. It was noted that such an	• At the suggestion of the embedded records manager, several information professionals were included as external stakeholders in the project, including the records analyst from the University Archives, a

	outcome is not desirable, but nor is it inevitable if the embedded librarian takes care to retain a strong connection with the LIS community, even while building close relationships with the client group.	representative from the Office of the CIO and two professors from the School of Information Studies who specialize in IM and knowledge organization. • The FGPS supported professional development opportunities for the embedded records manager that were linked to the information profession (e.g. participation in the annual IM Days conference organized by the local ARMA chapter)