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Friends or fences: relationships matter more than structures

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Parliamentary Librarian
Parliament of New Zealand
Wellington, New Zealand

Parliament

- 120 MPs
- Mixed Member Proportional Representation introduced in 1996
- Strong Select Committee structure
- National & local government
- Unicameral Parliament
- Westminster based

The Library

- Most beautiful library in NZ
- Collection established 1850's
- Over 50 staff
- Legal deposit Library
- Had National Library functions before NL was created in 1965
- Part of National Library from 1965-1987
- Heritage building that has been used continuously for the purpose for which it was built

The Librarian

- Moira Fraser, Parliamentary Librarian, New Zealand

- Appointed January 2000
- Background in leading information services in special libraries in public and private sectors for 15 years
- Previous position as National Director of Knowledge for Ernst & Young

Parliamentary Library, Jan 2000

- Very high levels of customer satisfaction
- Beloved by MPs and seen as a “good thing”
- Increasing emphasis on client services
- Just-in-case collection rather than just-in-time
- Developing desktop resources
- Fledgling research service
- Authoritative
- Impartial

Where are we heading

- Deeper understanding of client needs
- Stronger focus on targeted analytical information
- Expertise in wider range of subjects recognised by clients
- More staff in direct client delivery and fewer staff managing collections
- More desktop resources so that more document delivery is self-service
- A just-in-time approach to collection management

What did that mean

- Restructuring to increase client focus and deliver future capability
- Client liaison programme
- Projects focussed on desktop resources
- Strengthening research capability
- Strengthening subject expertise

Implications for restructuring

- Structures are theoretical
- And then you add people who don't always fit tidily
- But who are absolutely central to your success
- It's important to make a decision and give it a reasonable time to run before assessing it's usefulness

Tensions for Parliamentary Libraries

A one-stop shop where

- we focus on making it easy to do business with us
- all our services are integrated
- one service point which directs customers on
- like a call centre where every customer gets treated the same
- an anonymous group delivering services

A group of experts who

- are differentiated by our areas of expertise
- expect our customers to find out who knows most about which subject
- treat groups of customers differently
- are known individually to our customers

We can be.....

- Authoritative
- Impartial
- Reliable
- Credible
- Close to our customers
- Understanding of their needs
- Providers of personalised, targetted information

Client Liaison

- Understand client needs
- Training and promotion
- Maori liaison

Responsive Information Services

- Information Requests
- Specialist advice
- Retrieve & supply identified items
- Books/items
- TV/Radio programmes
- *Ongoing current awareness of issues
- *Ongoing supply of a particular resource

Pro-active Information Services

- Bills Digest
- Background Notes/papers
- Economics & Statistical publications
- Profile bulletins
- Desktop resources
- Electorate profiles
- *Links to connected Parliamentary information
- *Information packages
- *Expand videotape compilations

Information Resources

- Selection
- Acquisitions
- Cataloguing/indexing
- Physical organisation

More tensions

Aligned by outputs

- Split accountabilities for people between responsive and proactive outputs
- Different work environments and training needs for researchers from reference librarians

Aligned by teams

- Split accountabilities for output across reference and research
- Allocation of work
- Management of central enquiry point

Framework for structure decision

- When thinking about structures what are the most important criteria we use for making decisions?

Criteria

- Improving services to clients
- Administrative convenience
- Staff management

Client relationships

- Most important group of relationships
- How well do we understand their information needs
- How well do we understand how they use information in their work
- What are our clients information gaps
- How can we best fill those information gaps

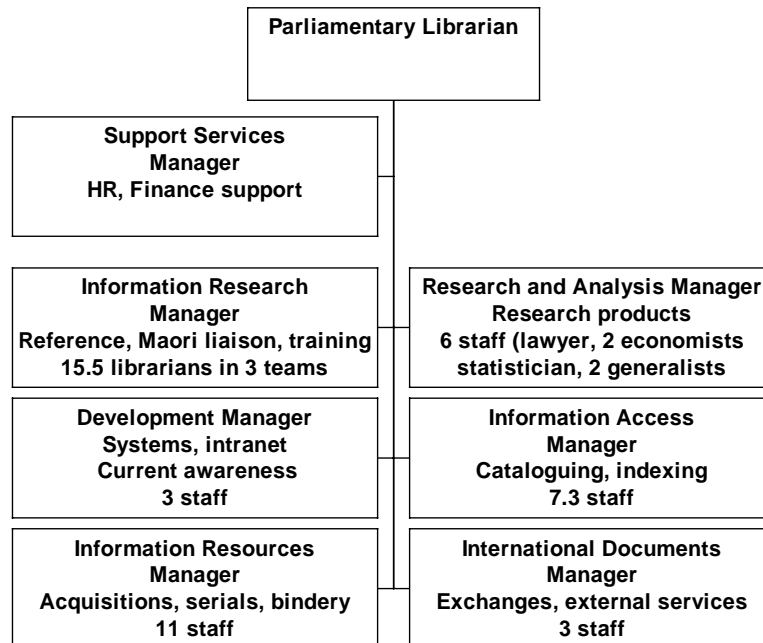
What affected reference/research structure

- Distribution of resources between reactive and proactive work
- What kind of specialists do we need
- Balance of human resources between research services and reference services
- What research products and services do we offer
- Size of the research team

My expectations about structure

- A structure that matched the output diagram
- Too simplistic
- Meant some individuals would report to 2 managers
- Too much change, too quickly
- Still too small for subject based structure

Our solution



What will happen in the future

- More subject specialisation
- More targetting requires more expertise from us
- More staff in reference & research
- Probably subject teams
- Continue to work on boundaries between reference & research

Structure vs relationships

- What matters most of all is the working relationship between reference and research
- There are mixed accountabilities between reference and research
- Researchers and reference librarians have different cultures and ways of working
- We must seek always to improve how they work together
- The decision we made to separate reference and research may change in the future