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Innovation the Google Way: Implementing Google's 80/20 Program in Your Library (Program Review)

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D1 Innovation the Google Way: Implementing Google's 80/20 Program in Your Library
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The theme of this year's AALL Conference was "Beyond Boundaries," so perhaps it was fitting that presenters Julian Aiken and Maureen Sullivan looked outside the confines of our profession for inspiration in this thought-provoking program. In a nutshell, Google's 80/20 Program allows participants to spend 80% of their time at work on their normal day-to-day duties and 20% of their time, or the equivalent of one day per week, on innovative company-related projects they feel passionate about. The Program is entirely voluntary and led to the creation of Google News, Google Talk, and Gmail—which makes one wonder how such an initiative might translate to a library setting.

At Yale, the Program allowed employees to cross-train in different areas of the Law Library, fostering professional development and interdepartmental cooperation. The initiative was also an engine for innovation, leading to what Julian described as his "brilliant, but rummy idea" to catalog and circulate his dog Monty to help students manage stress. Other librarians focused on projects like green initiatives, digitizing rare books and working on the law school's institutional repository. Participants only had to submit their project for initial approval and meet with Julian every six months to provide an update on their activities.

Julian acknowledged some potential drawbacks of the 80/20 Program, including lost hours in more traditional roles and the potential for financial objections from skeptical administrators, but he provided several tips for achieving institutional buy-in. For instance, Julian addressed financial concerns by pointing out how the Program rewards staff without a corresponding increase in spending. Additionally, the loss of time

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spent on conventional tasks forced the Law Library to increase efficiency by restructuring their Access Services Department.

Dovetailing with Julian's experiences at Yale, Maureen followed up by providing an overview of the Program from her perspective as an organizational development consultant in the library field. Maureen sees this initiative as an opportunity to improve our organizations by creating positive work environments that will help develop and retain talent. She also shared some suggestions for successfully implementing the Program, from the initial proposal—where we should state our goals, establish a timeline and determine how to achieve success—to ensuring the organization is positioned to learn from potential failures.

Maureen believes that our profession is essentially "knowledge work" and that the 80/20 Program allows us to capitalize on our naturally introspective and innovative qualities as librarians. She also sees this initiative as a means to create the pioneering, high-performing libraries that will continue to thrive in today's "knowledge society."

After attending Julian and Maureen's program, I would have to agree. As our profession grapples with constant change and finds new ways to flourish when some question our continued relevance, we can undoubtedly learn a thing or two from one of the world's most cutting-edge companies.