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## ABSTRACT

### Purpose

Libraries are situated in an ever-changing research, teaching, learning, and scholarly communications environment. Faculty and students have new and different expectations that are compelling libraries to expand their offerings. At the same time, their broader institutions are also facing changing times and academic libraries are being asked to demonstrate value and justify the use of limited and high-demand resources. In order to address the resulting challenge, the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) Library undertook a process to deliver relevant and responsive (and, therefore, reflective and adaptable) library services while working within its current librarian complement. Significant changes were necessary for this to be successful: the librarians would need to undertake new responsibilities, learn new skills, and engage with learners and researchers in new ways.

### Approach

The U of S Library chose to meet this challenge through a multi-part approach comprised of regular participative consultations with librarians and a grassroots-based planning process underpinned by change management methodology.

### Findings

This approach resulted in widespread employee engagement, from initially clarifying the necessary change and throughout the change implementation. This led to a sense of ownership, responsibility, and accountability.

### Value

Change is difficult and often met with resistance. The U of S Library presents a case of successfully engaging library employees throughout a change process, demonstrating the importance of bringing together participative consultation, grassroots planning, and change management as a combined change implementation approach.

### Keywords

Change management, academic libraries, strategic planning, consultation, employee engagement

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**Sustainable growth with sustainable resources:  
Using change management, participative consultation, and grassroots planning for a new future  
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**Introduction**

Changes in research, teaching, learning, and scholarly communications create opportunities for academic libraries and librarians to re-imagine themselves. Faculty and students have new and different expectations that are compelling libraries to expand their offerings. At the same time, their broader institutions are also facing changing times and academic libraries are being asked to demonstrate value and justify the use of limited and high-demand resources.

In order to address the resulting challenge, the University of Saskatchewan Library undertook a process to deliver relevant and responsive (and, therefore, reflective and adaptable) library services while working with its current librarian complement. Significant changes were necessary for this to be successful: the librarians would need to undertake new responsibilities, learn new skills, and engage with learners and researchers in new ways. The project leads recognized that a new approach was required in order to engage the librarians and effect real change. Therefore, following significant internal discussion, learning, and reflection, a multi-part approach was taken – a grassroots-based planning process, regular participative consultations, and the use of change management methodology.

**Changing Times**

Higher education institutions are operating in a time of significant change. Research is more interdisciplinary and international than ever before and there is greater expectation from institutions and funding agencies that researchers demonstrate their impact through a variety of traditional and alternative metrics. Access to and management of data has become a significant area of discussion. Teaching is more oriented toward learning and exploring than simply informing, technology has allowed for flipped classrooms and distributed students, and there is significant focus on experiential learning. Largely driven by the capabilities of technology, scholarly communication has moved toward on-demand, open access, and as-it-happens dissemination – and the tension between before-publication peer review, post-publication peer response, and public impact has risen to the surface.

Along with these broad changes in academia, higher education institutions face budgetary challenges due to international financial markets, reduced government revenue, and increased capital and operational costs. There is pressure to increase research output and to ensure that publicly funded research is freely available to the public. Both internally and from external stakeholders, there is a growing focus on program relevance, accessibility, and student retention and success.

The changes in academia and the financial and other stressors mean that universities and colleges must shift their strategic priorities in order to be accountable to their users and funders. This expectation of accountability in turn impact all units on campus (including the library), significantly increasing the need for each unit to highlight its role in helping achieve the institution's mission in order to demonstrate value and justify the use of limited and high-demand resources (Taylor and Heath, 2012).

At the same time, what it means to be an academic library is evolving. With the advent of new and rapidly changing technologies and a plethora of digital information in many formats, academic libraries have been reinventing themselves. Libraries are now hubs for learning and research and provide advanced research assistance, collaborate with faculty in teaching and research, provide access to a multitude of electronic resources, and teach users to access these resources (Franklin, 2012; Jaguszewski and Williams, 2013). The pace of change and demand for new services and levels of participation is not slowing down. ACRL's *Top Trends in Academic Libraries* (2014) identifies deeper collaboration as the unifying theme for the current trends, pointing to opportunities for libraries in the areas of data, device neutral digital services, evolving openness in higher education, student success initiatives, competency-based learning, altmetrics, and digital humanities.

The challenge is for libraries to respond in a proactive but manageable way, acknowledging the needs of learners and researchers in the fluid information, research, and teaching landscape as well as the fiscal environment. This challenge requires change in both professional practice and in ways of working.

The imperative for academic libraries to change becomes prevalent in the literature starting in the mid-1990s. A number of authors underline that the changing academic environment means that new activities and approaches are necessary in order for the library to remain relevant on campus (e.g. Dougherty and Dougherty, 1993; Farley *et al.*, 1998; Lewis, 2007; Stoffle *et al.*, 1996; University Leadership Council, 2011). It can, however, be difficult to change practices and work patterns, particularly when change is driven by external forces. The natural reaction to change is either resistance (Smith, 2006) or to simply bypass it (Argyris, 1992), but there are ways to manage change to help ensure a more successful outcome.

Academic libraries have been responding to challenges and effecting change using a variety of approaches. Horn (2008, pg. 6), writes about a major reorganization undertaken at Deakin university with the aim "to improve the library's capacity to respond to the university's teaching, learning, and research imperatives" and to achieve financial savings. The library developed a four-step approach to the change based on Kotter and Rathgeber's (2006) *Our Iceberg is Melting*. The steps Horn describes are: 1. Set the stage; 2. Decide what to do; 3. Make it happen; and 4. Make it stick. A different approach was undertaken at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Library where the new library leadership was seeking to examine "new horizons and directions" in a change-resistant organization (O'Connor and Au, 2009, pg. 59). In this case the library leadership used a process called "scenario planning" that involves examining the range of options for the future and developing stories of what might happen. Taylor and Heath (2012) provide a case study of how the University of Texas Libraries used assessment and continuous planning to transform itself and address budget reduction. They adopted the Balanced Scorecard approach and what started as strategic planning turned into continuous planning embedded throughout their organization.

While many libraries are attempting to address the changes in academia in a time of restricted budgets, the specific situations vary significantly, resulting in no single approach rising to the top. In fact, Farley *et al.* (1998, pg. 239) states that "there is no blueprint by which an organization may manage change". Recognizing the unique components of the University of Saskatchewan situation, the project leads chose to build on the experiences and approaches of other university libraries to create a multi-part approach that respected local organizational culture and employee complement.

## **The University of Saskatchewan Library Approach**

The University of Saskatchewan (U of S) is a research-intensive institution composed of 13 academic colleges and three interdisciplinary graduate schools with a student population of approximately 20,000. A college itself, the U of S Library is led by a Dean, and has both a research and service mandate. The library is made up of 150 employees, 38 of whom are librarians (including the Dean and Associate Deans). A member of the Association of Research Libraries, the U of S Library finds itself dealing with the same challenges brought on by the changing information landscape and institutional pressures familiar to academic libraries in North America and around the world.

Particular to the University of Saskatchewan context, the university has been working towards the implementation of responsibility centre management (RCM) since 2010. This funding model establishes units as either revenue centres (e.g. academic colleges) or support centres (e.g. IT, student services, library) with provincial funding and tuition allocated to revenue centres. Some of this allocation then gets distributed to the support centres that support the activities of the colleges.

The library was already taking steps to demonstrate accountability to the university, such as linking the library's strategic plan to the university's integrated plan. The project leads, however, recognized that the implementation of RCM would bring increased scrutiny of the library's activities (and therefore expenditures) by the academic colleges and university administration. In addition, while envelope funding would allow the Dean to distribute the library's budget internally as necessary to meet library priorities, increases to the overall library budget envelope would need to be requested, justified, and approved centrally. With these changes in the budget process, the project leads felt it was critical that the library overtly demonstrate its value to academic colleges by presenting library activities in such a way as to speak directly to what the academic colleges care about, and overtly align activities and outcomes to university priorities, speaking directly to what the university cares about.

In summary, the U of S Library needed to overtly align with the university's dual mission of teaching and research while responding to the changes in the information landscape. The challenge was to achieve this in a sustainable way: to establish a process to deliver relevant and responsive (and, therefore, reflective and adaptable) library services while working with the current librarian complement. This process must allow for continually reviewing, changing, and adapting library services while ensuring that those services are relevant and valuable and provided by knowledgeable employees who are enthusiastic, engaged, and willing to adapt.

The U of S Library chose to meet this challenge through a multi-part approach:

- Regular participative consultations with librarians to verify and validate decisions and to explore options,
- Use of change management methodology to help ensure the approach was successful, and
- A grassroots-based planning process to include various perspectives and because people support what they help to build.

### *Consultations*

From the beginning consultations were a critical and constant aspect of the approach. The project leads recognized that many librarians were comfortable with the status quo, at least when it came to their own work assignment and activities. In order to respond to the changing environment in a positive and

effective way, the project leads believed that the librarians needed to be fully involved not only in implementing the change, but in shaping it. The project leads, therefore, used a workshop approach for all of the sessions with the librarians.

In the fall of 2014 a series of discussions among library unit heads looked at how to deliver relevant and responsive library services while working with the current librarian complement. To achieve this, the group developed a possible new way of organizing librarian work structured around cross-unit teams focused on, for example, student success and the research enterprise. This new way of organizing work was brought to all librarians in December 2014 for their initial reaction and for guidance in moving forward.

At that first librarian session, after providing background and context for the project and emphasizing the need for change, the project leads shared an initial draft of the possible new structure and talked about how it might affect librarian work. The participants were then divided into small groups to discuss the following questions and report back to the larger group:

- What do you see as benefits of the new structure?
- What are your concerns?
- What has been missed?

At the end of the meeting, the project leads asked all participants the following 'checkout' question: "How are you feeling about all of this as you leave? As you are leaving, what is your final thought?" The answers helped the project leads gauge the mood of the group and surface underlying concerns. This method of closing the session proved so valuable that the practice was maintained for all of the workshop consultations.

Following the initial librarian session, the unit heads met again, revising and reshaping the cross-unit team structure in response to the feedback. The revised version was brought back to librarians for comment in January 2015. Through feedback at the second session and conversations with the unit heads, it started to become clear that simply changing the way librarian work was organized would not result in responsive and adaptable librarian job assignments.

There was a growing understanding among both the project leads and unit heads, of the need to fundamentally alter how the library established its strategic priorities before determining ensuing activities. Moving people around organizationally as a way to get them to do something different was not a long-term solution. The library first needed to overtly align its activities with the research and teaching priorities of the university. This clarity of purpose led to a move away from a focus on the way librarian work is organized to a focus on planning.

The shift to planning was a significant breakthrough that likely would not have occurred without the librarian consultations. While it may seem obvious in hindsight to undertake planning as a means of determining new roles, this was not the route taken at the beginning.

Building on their experience with the earlier participative consultations, and the belief that people are more likely to support what they help to build, the project leads decided that the planning needed to come from the ground up in order to effect successful change.

At a consultation session in May 2015, the project leads again used a workshop format. At this point, the shift of the project's purpose to overtly align the work of the library with the university's core mission through a grassroots-based planning process was shared with librarians. This new purpose and the mechanism for achieving it were not up for discussion. Instead the session's focus was on the conditions necessary for the project's success. The librarians were divided into small groups and asked to discuss the question – "What would it take for this to be successful?" After noting all the responses, the group looked at each to determine to what extent they were within the library's control. In the end, the vast majority of the responses were issues within the library's control, such as:

- Be thoughtful about what we retain (don't throw the baby out with the bathwater)
- Develop communication plans for both internal (library) and external (campus) audiences
- Provide more information about how the plans will unfold
- Keep the plans manageable and not overwhelming especially in the first year

The consultations served a dual purpose. They ensured that options were thoroughly explored and also played a role related to change management.

#### *Change management*

Recognizing that even the smallest change can be difficult to implement if people are comfortable with the status quo, the library invested in change management training<sup>1</sup> for the two project leads. This intensive training resulted in the introduction of formal change management methodology to the organization. Through a planned change management approach, the goal was to:

- Build an understanding of the reasons for change both among librarians and more broadly throughout the library
- Involve librarians in shaping the change
- Help all library employees understand the steps required for change to happen and how the change would impact them
- Ensure communication throughout the process and input and consultation wherever possible and appropriate

The utilization of change management methodology in the change process was critical in ensuring ongoing commitment to the project. The project leads had learned that the awareness of the need for change was the crucial foundation for successfully implementing any change. In order to lay this foundation and ensure that the 'why' behind the change was clear, all messaging (emails, documents, presentations) included consistent information about the reasons for the project including both the 'why' and the 'why now'.

Another key aspect of successful change is creating the desire for change. In order to help instil this desire, the project leads were deliberate in their attempts to ensure broad librarian involvement and to build momentum and excitement about the project. This included involving the librarians throughout the process so that they saw how their involvement was positively affecting the outcomes, keeping a steady pace of consultations and email updates so the project showed progress, and highlighting the benefits of the change.

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<sup>1</sup> The change management training was delivered through Prosci ([www.prosci.com](http://www.prosci.com)) and focused on the ADKAR change model.

The project leads also established a small change implementation team to assist with the project and communication about the change. The change implementation team members were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Excellent communication skills
- Knowledge of the business of the library
- Interpersonal skills
- A commitment to the change
- Credibility and authority within the library and considered trustworthy (Creasey and Taylor, 2014)

The team helped communicate the change throughout the library by developing communication principles and timelines and acting as a sounding board as the project leads developed the consultation sessions. The team was also instrumental in developing the mechanism and processes for implementing the change. For example, the team created the new planning template, assembled supporting documentation for planning teams, and discussed ways to operationalize the new planning process. Finally the team was responsible for helping maintain momentum throughout the change planning cycle and ensuring that the project did not get derailed.

Because of their influence throughout the library, the project leads recognized the important role of library unit heads in the project's success. In addition to having unit heads as members of the change implementation team, the project leads continued to keep all unit heads informed of the project's progress and engaged them in discussion and decision-making wherever possible.

A final critical component in the success of the project was the commitment and support of the Dean of the U of S Library. The Dean has overall responsibility for the library's strategic direction and is the only person with authority to formally assign librarian work. Through regular in-person updates, the project leads kept the Dean informed of the project's progress. While the Dean did not participate in the consultation sessions or smaller group meetings, the project leads could dependably affirm the Dean's support for the project. Without the Dean's clear support, the librarians would not have been interested in continuing to participate in consultation sessions and planning as they would have seen it as wasted effort.

#### *Grassroots-based planning*

Through the consultation process the project leads realized that it was through planning that the library could more overtly align its priorities with the university's core mission of teaching, learning, and research as well as respond to the changing information environment. The U of S Library has a well-established planning process with a strategic plan and cascading portfolio and unit plans. However, some change in the planning process was required to positively and effectively implement such significant change. The strategic plan had previously been developed by a small representative group across the library. For this project to be successful, much broader engagement in the development of the plan was necessary. This would lead to employee ownership in the plan's outcomes and responsibility for the plan's actions.

The library's planning process was turned completely around, moving from a method where a high-level strategic plan was developed first with unit plans to follow, to a system where the strategic plan was built upon more focused "thematic" plans. Three thematic plans – Teaching & Learning, Research Support, and Collections – were developed by working groups comprised of librarians and other key library employees who work directly with academic colleges, faculty, and students. The purpose of these thematic plans was to achieve a common understanding of the direction the library needed to take to ensure it continued to contribute to the success of learners, teachers, and researchers at the university. In shaping the thematic plans, the working groups used their knowledge of trends in academic libraries and the needs on campus, and also consulted internal reports and the published literature. Each plan had three outcomes intended to stretch the library but to be achievable within a three to five year window. The plans' outcomes were brought to librarians and library employees in a series of participative consultations for assistance in developing the actions, or stepping stones, necessary for their realization. This participative process allowed all employees to connect with the plans and have a sense of ownership for the actions.

Once the thematic plans were finalized, their outcomes were considered and incorporated into the library's overall strategic plan. In essence, the frontline, grassroots perspective garnered through the thematic plan development became fully reflected in the library's strategic plan. In addition, with the outcomes expressed in such a way that success can be assessed, the thematic plans provide a structure for reporting back to the university on library activities and demonstrating value through direct linkage to the university's core mission.

Through the grassroots planning process and the engagement of librarians throughout, the thematic plans and the ensuing strategic plan created an impetus for new or reshaped librarian roles to reflect changing client needs – an impetus driven by the librarians themselves.

## **Results**

The U of S Library is at the beginning stages of assessing the viability of its multi-part approach – a grassroots-based planning process and regular participative consultations underpinned by change management methodology – as a way to respond to both broad changes in academia and more local stressors. Whether the approach is sufficiently robust to support the continual review, change, and adaptation of library services to ensure that they are relevant and valuable is yet to be determined. Time will tell whether the approach is successful in building and sustaining a workforce that is enthusiastic, engaged, and willing to adapt and learn. The library's use of this approach is still in its infancy – but thus far results have been positive.

The U of S Library now has a strategic plan developed using the grassroots planning process and some new and reshaped librarian roles envisioned through the consultations and realized through the planning. In addition, the library has seen widespread engagement and support by librarians and other employees in the consultations, the planning process, and the ensuing results. Librarians across the library system at different stages in their careers have volunteered to be part of the working groups responsible for moving forward strategic actions generated out of the thematic plans.

The strategy to include librarians from the beginning, as the project transitioned from a focus on librarian roles to a broader focus on alignment with university priorities, meant that they were engaged



in shaping the change itself. Of the 35 librarians, 97% participated in one or more of the consultation sessions, leading to a sense of ownership in the initiative and a stake in ensuring its success. The workshop format was a key element in this engagement. Not only did more people have a chance to contribute within the small groups, the workshop format also demonstrated that aspects of the change were open to revision. In each session, librarians were provided with something to react to, with guiding questions to help frame the discussion. Sometimes they were asked questions that they had not been asked before, such as conditions for success, which helped to shift perspectives.

Grassroots-based planning provided employees with a deeper understanding of the source of the library's strategic directions. Sixteen librarians participated actively on thematic plan working groups or on the change implementation team. Particularly beneficial was the opportunity for all library employees to participate in sessions to confirm the relevance of thematic plan outcomes and to review and expand the actions needed to fulfill the outcomes. Creating a workshop setting and incorporating feedback into the final thematic plans helped build buy-in to the thematic and strategic plan priorities and actions. The source of the strategic plan actions is not a mystery, nor is the motivation behind the librarian assignments, because the steps leading to them have been transparent and methodical.

Throughout all stages, from the initial consultations to strategic planning and establishing librarian assignments, the reasons for change were reiterated. The purpose of the project was reviewed in consultation sessions, email communications, and presentations. The need for change was not simply a 'good idea' but something required due to the changing fiscal, political, teaching, research, and information environment. Library employees were reminded and continue to be reminded of the connection between library activities and support of university.

The issue of librarian workload was raised very early in the consultation process. Librarians were concerned that any new activities would simply be added to their current work assignments. The project leads acknowledged that there would be some need to either disinvest or do work differently, but that it was important to determine the end goal before talking about how to reach it. At this time, the library has not made a concerted effort to "make room" for the new activities in the strategic plan. While the library will support librarians as they learn new skills, there is also an expectation that librarians – on their own – find new approaches to their work. The project has raised awareness for the need to change, generated excitement around the strategic plan priorities, opened up some new communication methods, and created opportunities for collaborations, all of which can assist the librarians in moving forward.

### **Next steps**

The focus of this multi-part approach was internal and helped the library respond to changing times. Moving forward the U of S Library needs to be more externally focused, particularly on the campus community. The library must develop a mechanism for reporting out to the university on progress in meeting its strategic priorities in a way that is meaningful, intuitive, and accessible. It needs to allow the library to demonstrate that it is actively working to align itself with the teaching, learning, and research missions of the university. This would also provide an entry for campus-wide feedback on library activities and input into the future strategic directions of the library.

As this was the first time that the library brought together participative consultation, grassroots-based planning, and change management methodology to form one approach, the effectiveness of the approach must be assessed. The library needs to determine if the multi-part approach achieved what was desired. If the approach is deemed a success, the library must determine how to operationalize the approach, to incorporate it into the library's culture, and determine which changes need to be made organizationally to allow that to happen.

### **Conclusion**

Change is difficult and often met with resistance. The University of Saskatchewan Library presents a case of successfully engaging library employees throughout a change process, demonstrating the importance of bringing together participative consultation, grassroots planning, and change management as a combined change implementation approach. This approach allowed the library to meet its goal of establishing a process to deliver relevant and responsive library services and helped employees remain enthusiastic, positive, and willing to adapt as work assignments and library priorities evolved. Using this approach, the library has been able to respond to the changing information environment within its current librarian complement.

## Appendix A - Elements to consider if implementing this approach

### Participative Consultation

- Bring employees into the process as early as possible, even if you are not absolutely clear on the change.
- When you consult, make sure it is real consultation. Where decisions have been made, share the decisions but don't consult on them; consult only on those elements that are still open for discussion. People need to know that the consultation is not just for appearances.
- Consult throughout the process. This keeps employees engaged in the change and demonstrates that their input is important.
- Create a workshop atmosphere whenever you can. This will not only to provide variety at sessions but also to get as much information, feedback, and advice from employees as possible.
- Incorporate a 'checkout' question at the end of every session, such as "How are you feeling about all of this as you leave?" This is a great way to get a sense of the mood of employees, how they are feeling about the process, and the way the change is progressing.

### Grassroots-based Planning

- Create opportunities for employees to provide input into planning. It is important for them to have ownership of the process and the result so that it feels like their plan.
- Determine ways to get as broad a perspective and involvement as possible. The greater the number of employees involved in the process, the greater likelihood that they will understand and support the direction in which the organization is heading.

### Change Management

- Learn about how change affects people and techniques to increase the chance of successful change – and use them!
- Ensure all messaging includes consistent information about the reasons for the change. This should answer questions such as: Why is change necessary? What are the drivers of the change? What are the risks of not changing?
- Incorporate learning opportunities into the change process. The change will probably lead to new work or doing work differently and not everyone is confident in making those changes. Employees need to understand that they are not expected to be adept at the new or different work immediately.
- Ensure that your dean or director is supportive of the change and is kept fully informed as the project progresses. Lack of adequate support or involvement from the executive sponsor is one of the primary reasons why projects fail (Creasey and Taylor, 2014)

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