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Developing a Team Management Structure in a Public Library

Betsy A. Bernfeld

Abstract

While much of the development of learning organizations within libraries has taken place in large academic institutions, Peter Senge's theoretical concepts are just as valuable in public libraries, even comparatively small rural libraries. Utilizing the University of Arizona Library as a case study, a prototype of an organizational structure based on teams has been developed for the Teton County Library in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This article includes a blueprint for a nonhierarchical, circular team management structure and describes the function, relationship, authority, and accountability of the library's teams, as well as a vision for leadership. It also provides a model of teamwork incorporating Senge's five disciplines into a single process that facilitates organizational learning.

A Call for Models

> Prototypes are essential to discovering and solving the key problems that stand between an idea and its full and successful implementation.

These are the words of management expert Peter M. Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Senge, 1994, p. 271). This classic treatise, originally published in 1990, draws a blueprint for an innovative type of organization—the learning organization—that is "continually expanding in its capacity to create its own future" (Senge, 1994, p. 14). Senge is founder and director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management.

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In the evolution of the learning organization, Senge reported that U.S. companies and organizations are somewhere on the path between "invention" and "innovation." Engineers say a new idea is invented when it has been proven to work in a laboratory. When it can be replicated reliably at a practical cost, it becomes an innovation (Senge, 1994, pp. 5–6). Along the path between the two stages, Senge says prototypes are essential to discovering and solving the key problems between idea and implementation. He calls for more prototype learning organizations.

The movement toward a less hierarchical, team-based organizational structure began in the business community, and Senge suggests a number of successful companies as models, such as Royal Dutch/Shell Oil, Hanover Insurance, and Herman Miller. At least ten years ago, the University of Arizona (UA) Library took serious note of the success of this management style in business. When Carla Stoffle took the position of dean of the UA Library in 1991, she was faced with budget cuts that amounted to $619,000 in three years, collection costs—especially journals—that had inflated by nearly 150 percent over the previous ten years, and a desperate need for an online catalog (Stoffle, 1996). One of her first moves was to form a steering committee to study workflow in the changing environment. The committee's recommendation was to convert from a hierarchical management structure to a team-based organization. Stoffle said the "radical, fundamental change" focused on adopting a user focus, accepting the need for continual change, creating teams, and empowering frontline staff to make decisions (Stoffle, 1995, p. 6). She said the UA Library would not have been able to respond to the pressures without this structural change. Today, the UA Library is widely recognized as a prototype for organizational restructuring among academic libraries (Berry, 2002, pp. 41–42).

It is difficult to assess the progress of the team approach in public libraries, perhaps because public librarians are not as likely to publish works on this progress . The North Suburban Library System in Chicago is one organization that has been recognized in the professional literature (Hayes, Sullivan, & Baaske, 1999, p. 110) for development of a team-based organizational structure. Team terms such as "dialogue," "shared vision," and "systems thinking," however, have entered the jargon of public librarians throughout the country. Public libraries appear to be positioned somewhere in the zone between the invention and innovation of learning organizations.

Certainly the same reasons that pushed academic libraries into the new organizational structure are present in public libraries: budget cuts, technology, an environment of constant change. Budget cuts have hit public libraries so hard that the American Library Association launched the "Campaign to Save America's Libraries" in 2002. *American Libraries* magazine reported even more cutbacks and closures in 2003. "County, city, and community libraries are threatening to shut branches, shorten hours, freeze staff positions, and cut back on services at a time when circulation statistics

are up" (Eberhart, 2003, p. 20). The climate is right for public libraries to take a hard look at making changes in organizational structure as a means of surviving and thriving in a harsh environment. To do this, practical models are needed. While Senge cautions against one organization trying to emulate exactly another, he suggests that any organization has the potential to serve as an experimental laboratory where important questions can be addressed, new insights formed, and practical problems resolved (Senge, 1994, p. 272). It is time for public libraries to share experiences.

The Teton County Library Experience

Teton County, Wyoming, lies in the northwest corner of the state just south of Yellowstone National Park. It encompasses Grand Teton National Park and the high valley that is commonly known as Jackson Hole. There are a number of small towns within the valley; the largest is Jackson, with a population of 8,647 according to the 2000 Census. The year-round population of the entire county is reported to be 18,251, but that number easily triples with seasonal workers and summer residents between May and September. Because housing prices in Jackson Hole have climbed the same steep path as other resort areas, many year-round workers live in adjacent Wyoming counties or in Idaho. The Teton County Library thus serves a much larger population than 18,251.

Another factor related to library service in Teton County is the isolation of the community, especially in winter. The only university library in the state is in the southeast corner of the state, about a seven hour drive from Teton County. The closest major public library is in Salt Lake City, about five hours away in good weather. While Jackson Hole has an airport that is serviced by fair-sized jets and maintains primary two-lane highways leading out of the mountains in three directions, travel of any kind may turn hazardous during September through June. Telecommunications from the valley are like the highways—somewhat narrow; there is limited access to high-speed T1 or DSL lines. If people need access to a library or a fast Internet connection, they tend to count on the Teton County Library.

The backwaters of Wyoming have provided no sanctuary from the tempests currently hitting public libraries. The demand for ever-changing, sophisticated technology is definitely present, as are pressing requests for service that outstrip funding increases.

The people of Teton County tend to be highly educated (53.1 percent of people twenty-five and older hold college degrees according to the 2000 Census); many seasonal workers are college students, and many new residents have moved to the area from large urban centers, bringing with them a high level of technological savvy and expectations. In the space of six years, Teton County Library has gone from housing fifteen computers to more than ninety, to say nothing of the additional servers, the stack of

hubs, and the multitude of printers. Wireless access to the library's network is offered to patrons with laptops, and, to keep everything safe, a firewall has been installed and virus protection is updated several times per week.

In addition to the high-tech crowd, the general population of Jackson Hole is full of recreational readers, and there is a high demand for library programs. More and more distance students utilize the library each year, as does a growing group of migrant workers from Mexico who fill service jobs and speak little or no English. In its most recent strategic planning process, the library has been charged by county residents to be an entryway into the community for Latinos.

Teton County Library consists of a main library (about 24,000 sq. ft.) in the town of Jackson and a small branch in Alta, Wyoming. Annual circulation is about 325,000, collection size is about 100,000 volumes, public Internet use is about 97,000 sessions per year, staff is comprised of 34 full-time employees and another 25 or so part-time employees, and the annual budget is approximately $2.6 million. It is a good size for a laboratory: small enough to be able to experiment, large enough to accommodate the tests.

The first team at the Teton County Library sprang right out of the woodwork, actually log work, as the library was housed in a little log cabin at the time. It was May 1994, and the present-day 24,000 sq. ft. facility existed only in blueprints. The library was just launching a political campaign to get a special use tax on the ballot to fund construction of the new library. At the same time, a fundraising drive was underway to pay for the building site. While the planning for these major events was being conducted in the back room by the director, Library Board, and consultants, the regular staff sat around a table in the reading room trying to figure out how to help.

The consensus of the staff was that they could generate a story a week for the local papers to raise the library's profile in the community. The children's department was already sending in press releases about its programming, and there were plenty of adult services that could be publicized. Some spectacular, at least showy, events could be helpful as well. The conversation in the reading room went something like this:

"It's probably a dumb idea," Sidney began. "I have a couple of llamas and we could march with them in the Old West Days Parade with signs that say 'LLamas for LLibraries.'"

Cindy, an artist, quickly piped up, "I could make some banners." Jenny offered a bag of colorful ribbons, someone's boyfriend had a black powder rifle, the school librarian had more llamas, children from the summer reading program could join us, there was a fake handlebar mustache in the lost and found . . .

The once-dumb idea assumed lavish proportions, and, without even realizing it, the staff had launched the Parade Team.

In spite of the fact that the children got tired of leading the llamas, so

the adult services supervisor, whose fake mustache was falling off, was trying to control the reins of three llamas with one hand and hold the black powder rifle in the other, and the llamas all had to go to the bathroom at the same time in front of the judges' stand, the library made the papers and won a second place ribbon plus $200 for the building site fundraising campaign.

Spurred by this triumph, the Outreach Team was created to continue the publicity efforts, and then the Move It! (to the new library) Team was created when those efforts were successful. With the exception of a construction project coordinator, no new staff was added to accomplish this additional work.

In the new building, once again there was no additional staff, in spite of the fact that there was one more public service desk, an online catalog, and a long row of public Internet machines and word processors to tend. Also, the Library Board handed over $400,000 to build new collections and called for a new strategic plan, immediately if not sooner, please. As the newly appointed library director, I briefly consulted S. R. Ranganathan's classic five laws of library science ("Books are for use. Every book its reader. Every reader his book. . . ." [Gorman, 2000, p. 19]), and then went looking for a big sister.

The University of Arizona Model

What we found was a really big sister: the University of Arizona Library. I had noted Shelley Phipps's name (assistant dean for Team and Organization Development at UA Library) on a journal publication about team management, so I contacted her. She generously gave me several hours of her time plus the proceedings of a recent conference on organizational change at the University of Arizona Library (*Living the Future,* 1996), which documented the UA experiment as a learning organization. (A selected bibliography regarding the UA model, which includes a citation for those proceedings, appears at the end of this article.) It may seem odd to partner a small public library with such a large academic institution—at the time UA had a staff of about 200 to our 20. But the two libraries had at least two things in common: Both understood the power of teams, and neither appreciated hierarchy.

After that first encounter, four basic concepts garnered from the UA experience were incorporated into operations at the Teton County Library.

Cross-training

Every member of the Teton County Library staff, even the director, was assigned for up to four hours per week at a desk or function that was not a primary work assignment. In the new library building, a minimum of four staff people was required just to keep the building open, and five if anyone wanted to eat lunch. The old library could be operated with

two staff people during evening and Sunday hours. Now there were more spaces to cover and an extra public desk to monitor. Cross-training really complicated scheduling, but it allowed an enormous amount of flexibility in staffing public desks seven days a week, plus four evenings, as well as during staff absences. We estimated that, without cross-training, we would need at least a 30 percent increase in staff.

Instituting cross-training at a small public library was easy. We had just come from a tight work space where everybody pretty much did everything. Reference and circulation services had operated from a single desk, downstairs the children's services performed its own circulation, circulation staff helped out with technical services tasks, and a number of people worked on outreach. Moving to a bigger building was actually a narrowing of focus for our staff and did not require new training. Later, cross-training became more challenging when new hires had to master two functions while only spending four hours per week at their second assignment. At a large institution such as the UA Library, where the original organization structure was characterized by many specialized positions, this transition must have been harrowing indeed.

Team Leaders

Modeled after the UA Library's Cabinet, Teton County Library created a management team called "Team Leaders." These leaders represented each of the major functions of our library: administration, circulation, reference, youth services, technical services, information systems, and outreach. They met once a week and considered library-wide issues such as budget, policies, and planning. The thinking was that all basic functions of the library would be affected by such decisions, and thus they should have a voice in the process. Each function could lend a unique perspective to the discussion. We envisioned this group as a circle, with the library director representing administration and also serving as the team's leader. Previously, under a hierarchical model, decisions came from the top down and department head meetings were rare.

Modular Job Descriptions

The Team Leaders created job modules for each of the major library functions. These modules were incorporated into individual job descriptions. For example, circulation has a module that lists all of the tasks required of a person whose primary assignment is circulation. The same for youth services, etc. If a person is hired for circulation and assigned to cross-train in youth services, his job description will contain the entire circulation module and at least the basic tasks of the youth services module. It is easy to streamline a job for an individual's talents and goals and add and subtract tasks as the library's needs change. It also makes it clear to the employee exactly what his responsibilities are. A "leadership module" is included in the job descriptions of Team Leaders. "Customer service/

staff relations" and "personal objectives" modules are included in all job descriptions. While the modular job descriptions were not directly copied from the UA Library, it is our way of reflecting a valuable lesson inherent in that system: the importance of the individual.

Peer Review

Because of the significance of team member relationships in a team-based organizational structure, we broadened the scope of our traditional supervisor-employee performance evaluations to include a peer review. This broader approach to performance evaluation was especially important with people participating on more than one work team and, given the seven-day work week, not always under the direct eye of their primary supervisor. At first peer review was optional, but by now it has become an important, expected piece of our annual reviews. More recently, the review process has been further revised to incorporate a full 360–degree review (employees also review their supervisors) and one more important component—self-evaluation.

These tools served us well for the next five years, and I believe they were instrumental in our success in completing major projects, sustaining a tremendous growth in services, accommodating constant change, and gaining much more financial support from the county government. We completed our $400,000 collection development project; created and nearly fulfilled a five-year strategic plan; sustained a 15–20 percent increase in circulation each year; developed our reference and outreach departments; launched our computer center, young adult program, and Web site; vitalized our Library Foundation; and created an endowment fund. We doubled our staff and tripled our budget.

At that point (mid-2002), what Senge would call "balancing processes" began to impact our growth curve. We hit some limits. Service demands were still soaring, but the nationwide economic downturn was affecting our ability to increase funding. Office space in the new building was full, which imposed a physical limitation on staff size. All of the teams were larger, making meetings harder to manage and decisions more cumbersome. It was almost three years since the strategic plan had been created, and the shared vision on goals was blurring. Projects were encountering unexpected resistance. We were moving more slowly.

My diagnosis: We needed to improve our organizational structure. We needed a system that would work for a staff size of fifty, not twenty-five, and one that was in the midst of a budget and space crunch. Serendipitously, I noticed an article in *Library Journal* that mentioned Shelley Phipps and the continuing development of the UA Library as a learning organization. I looked up Shelley again.

Second Encounter with the University of Arizona Model

I should have called for an appointment, but it was two days after Christmas and I did not expect to find anybody at the UA Library. I had just dropped in to reacquaint myself with the facility. To my surprise, Shelley Phipps was in her office and just happened to be looking for a diversion from a paper she was writing. I reminded her of our past meeting and launched into my latest list of questions.

Before an hour was up, Shelley had offered to mentor me in an independent study through the UA School of Information Resources and Library Science. My project was to consist of a directed study of team management theory, on-site observation of UA Library teams, a literature review of articles related to organizational development at the UA Library, and a study of UA Library written policies, procedures, and training documents. It was to culminate in the articulation of a model of a team management structure for Teton County Library that might be transferable to other public libraries.

Organizational Structure Diagram

During our Christmastime meeting in December 2002, Shelley Phipps made a puzzling recommendation. "Draw up your organizational chart," she said. She promised it would be an eye-opening experience.

The UA Library organizational chart is upside down from the usual hierarchical structure of an academic library. The dean is at the bottom, not the top. Customers (students, faculty, and community) are on top. It emphasizes the library's focus on the customer and the staff support role played by administration. Dean Stoffle has claimed that the flipped organizational chart has been instrumental in her organization's success. "Because of the way we are restructured, we can change faster than we did in the past," Stoffle told *Library Journal*. "It has allowed us to put as many librarians as possible in direct, one-on-one work with faculty and students" (Berry, 2002, p. 42).

On the snowy 1,000 mile ride back to Wyoming, I drew many little squares looking for a way to represent the organizational structure of Teton County Library. We did have a published organizational chart, a typical hierarchical diagram with the director at the top, and there is an underlying hierarchy in our organization. All teams have leaders and every person has an assigned supervisor. The chart is helpful at new hire orientations and once a year when we are making a case to the county commissioners about the need for more staff in a particular area. However, the chart does not adequately reflect how we do our work. It does not depict cross-training, it does not show Team Leaders and how they make library-wide decisions, nor does it represent any of our work teams that accomplish special projects.

I copied the UA diagram and inserted what I thought were comparable titles and terms from Teton County Library. Several things still bothered me. The director, at the bottom, was isolated by several layers from the patrons at the top. I felt the director of a public library should have direct, close contact with the community. Also, while the placement of the director's position was meant to depict a supporting role for staff, it felt more like the full burden of the organization was weighing on my shoulders. I recognized the importance of being supportive; what was missing was the concept of empowerment.

I switched from drawing squares to drawing circles. Our original characterization of the Team Leaders was a circle, which represented our collaborative spirit and the important role Team Leaders played in decision-making. I felt it was empowering. I wanted to carry that theme throughout the entire structure.

By the time I reached Wyoming, I had completed a diagram (see Figure 1.) consisting of four concentric circles. The circles demonstrate the roles of each of the teams, their relationships with each other, and how they work together to accomplish the purposes of the library.

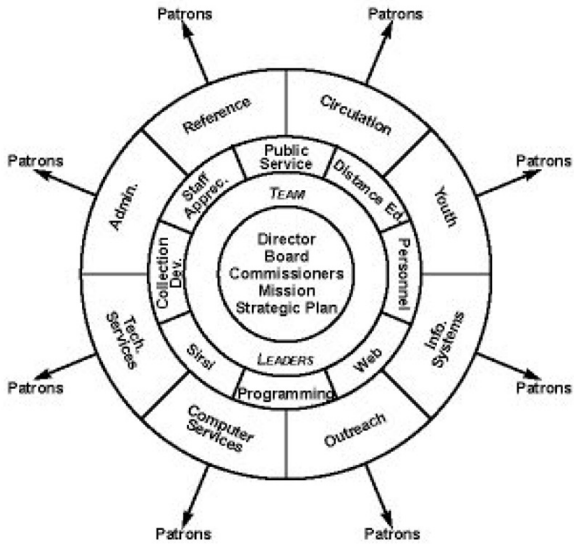
In the outermost circle are the basic work teams, formerly departments, at Teton County Library. They represent the eight basic functions of the library and are thus referred to as "functional teams." (An eighth team was recently added, our computer services team, after we opened a public computer center in the library.) Note that administration is considered a functional team immediately adjacent to the public, and it is also represented in the center of the chart. Functional teams create their own mission statements, goals and objectives, and guidelines and procedures under the broad umbrella of the library's overall mission statement and strategic plan. They distribute the team's work load, set the schedules of team members, and train members and cross-trainers.

The second circle shows special work teams, or "cross-functional teams." These teams are made up of staff members across various departments. Members are chosen because of their particular knowledge, interest, or abilities in the specific area. Teams sometimes have a limited tenure; other times they exist indefinitely. Generally, cross-functional teams work under the authority of the Team Leaders. They often perform tasks related to the library's strategic plan, and their objectives, and work plans are subject to the approval of Team Leaders. They sometimes work as think tanks or problem solvers, and they make recommendations to the Team Leaders based on their findings.

Collection Development is the largest cross-functional team, consisting of about twenty members. The group met frequently when the collection for the new library was being purchased, but now they gather only for periodic training sessions and to recommend the year's collection budget. At

Figure 1

Teton County Library
Team Organizational Structure



Four concentric circles represent the Teton County Library's team-based organization. In the outermost circle, in direct contact with the public, are the basic "functional" teams. A second circle of "cross-functional" work teams, comprised of members from across the library, accomplish special projects. "Team Leaders" form a management circle, and an inner core of administrators, Board members and community leaders provides energy, vision and direction.

this point, their work is mostly accomplished individually. The Sirsi team is responsible for implementing and troubleshooting the new circulation system. ("Sirsi" is the name of the circulation software company.) Now that the system has been up and running for a year with most problems resolved, that team will be disbanding soon. Programming was formerly done by Youth Services, Outreach, and Reference teams working independently, which resulted in schedule conflicts and production bottlenecks. Now the various team members coordinate efforts by meeting regularly on the Programming team. Distance Education and Web teams are working on new initiatives for the library. Public Services allows the staff of the public desks a forum for dialogue regarding their special concerns. Personnel and Staff Appreciation focus on creating a model work environment in the library.

Before this diagram was constructed, cross-functional work teams were not only not on the organizational chart, but they were not in individual

job descriptions. Basically, they were unofficial add-ons to people's work assignments, with little recognition and no compensation. If this chart accomplishes nothing else, it has at least uncovered that oversight.

Getting closer to the center is the circle of Team Leaders, the management team. This team now has ten members: all the functional team leaders (which includes the director), the assistant director, and the executive director of the Library Foundation, who sits in meetings as a nonvoting, ex-officio member. With the exception of personnel issues, policy-making, and budgeting, Team Leaders generally have final authority in decision-making.

In the center of the organizational chart are the sources of energy, the driving forces: the director's vision, the guidance of the Library Board, the funding authorized by the county commissioners, and the Mission and Strategic Plan formulated by the community.

To demonstrate this model to my staff, I cut some pieces of foam core into four circles of diminishing size. I was competent in cutting the shapes and coloring and lettering the circles, but when it came time to screw them together, I panicked and turned the job over to my husband. He returned with the completed model within five minutes. He said it was no problem to achieve the correct alignment because each circle supports the one adjacent to it in its proper position. The same can be said for our management structure. The supportive role is not left to the director but is shared by all through the organizational structure itself.

That was the first of many revelations my staff and I have had about our management structure because of the model, which, by the way, sits out in my office and is referred to frequently—as opposed to the old hierarchical model that was hauled out once a year. The model makes me feel empowered and empowering, not burdened. Staff feel a sense of recognition for the work they have been doing on cross-functional teams, and they now see this extra responsibility as a way to advance in the organization. The model visually supports our consistent preaching that customer service is our top priority. The model has made it easy to explain to the Library Board and county commissioners how we operate and what we are doing.

Team Learning

Shelley Phipps also assigned me to read Peter Senge. My copy of his book *The Fifth Discipline* is riddled with underlining and margin scribbles. I also have a spiral notebook full of notes and a three-ring binder packed with chapter summaries. I am convinced of the importance of each of the five disciplines Senge describes: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. What remained unclear to me after all that study was the relationship of the five disciplines.

Senge stresses the importance of developing the disciplines as an ensemble, with systems thinking the integrating force. He seems to say that if

an organization cultivates all of the disciplines, individuals will at a certain point experience a shift of mind or "metanoia" (Senge, 1994, p. 13), a learning experience. The organization learns.

Senge teaches that all of the disciplines need not be developed simultaneously:

> Though all are important, there are crucial questions concerning sequencing and interactions among the disciplines. What disciplines should be developed first? How can understanding in one area lead to mastery in another? How do we sustain movement along all critical dimensions and not become self-satisfied with our accomplishments in one area? These are the types of design questions that leaders must ponder. (Senge, 1994, p. 343)

This kind of design work called for a really big piece of foam core. I located a five-by-eight foot sheet at a local art and frame shop and trucked it to the library.

It does seem that there is a natural sequence to the five disciplines: An organization, through its personnel policies, training programs, and one-on-one mentoring efforts, develops the discipline of personal mastery among its employees. Individuals are then carefully selected for placement on teams. Teams are coached in the discipline of analyzing mental models; they study the systems archetypes, and they practice the techniques of dialogue and discussion. They use these skills to develop a shared vision of the issue or problem they are charged with resolving. From the shared vision emerges goals, objectives, and action plans. From this process and product the team has learned, and thus the organization has learned.

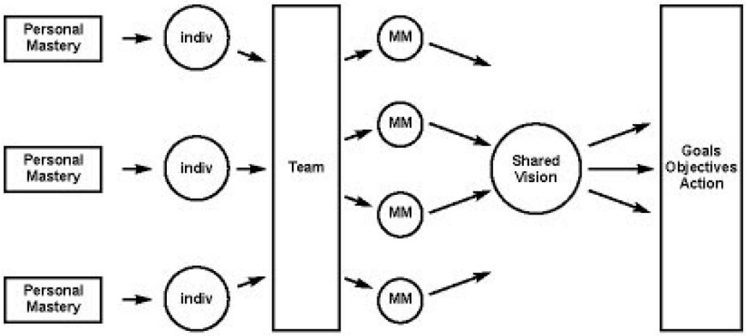
Figure 2 depicts the Teton County Library model of a process for team learning that incorporates and demonstrates the relationship of Senge's five disciplines. A full-color, five-by-eight foot foam core representation of this chart is housed in the director's office at the Teton County Library.

The value of providing this model, this ordered ensemble, is that it sets priorities and it poses a methodology for accomplishing tasks that incorporates all of the disciplines, thereby predisposing the organization to learning. This model communicates to staff that the personal mastery of employees is the first and foremost concern of the Teton County Library. "It is a pivotal moment in the evolution of an organization when leaders take this stand," Senge writes. "It means that the organization has absolutely, fully, intrinsically committed itself to the well-being of its people" (Senge, 1994, p. 144). The presence of the large foam core model in my office serves as a blatant reminder to me as a manager that I must fulfill this commitment. Many tasks come immediately to mind, such as diverting more funds to the training budget, reevaluating job descriptions and pay scales with respect to work on cross-functional teams, improving our performance evaluation process, exploring the possibility of larger merit raises, and allowing specific hours per week for training.

Figure 2

Teton County Library
Team Learning Model

By focusing on personal mastery first, an organization guarantees the best possible input to team thinking. Individuals are then grouped into teams in such a way that diverse knowledge and expertise is represented. Working together, the group creates and clarifies mental models by using systems thinking and practicing communication disciplines. The team arrives at shared vision, from which specific goals, objectives and action plans easily emerge.



MM = mental model

In starting to implement the model, my first action was related to my own personal mastery: I composed a statement of my personal vision or purpose story as director of the Teton County Library. Senge defines the vision or purpose story of leaders as "the overarching explanation of why they do what they do, how their organization needs to evolve and how that evolution is part of something larger" (Senge, 1994, p. 346). Just as individual mastery is the basis for organizational learning in the model, individual vision is the building block of organizational vision. The Teton County Library's vision is composed of the personal visions of the entire library staff, Library Board, county commissioners, and community. However, if the director's role is stewardship of the organization's vision, as Senge teaches, it becomes of utmost importance that the director have a strong personal vision of the organization and can articulate it. This task of composing a personal vision statement was more than a philosophical exercise or a physical grappling with foam core. It demanded a deeper sense of commitment to the library. I had to answer these questions: Was the library part of my life's purpose? Was my personal vision consistent with the library's direction?

In September 2003 I presented my vision to the Library Board and at a staff-wide meeting, and it will be incorporated into the employee handbook (see Appendix). The statement was quietly received; at least no one laughed. Whether it will encourage others to think about their own personal visions, foster a deeper commitment to the library, or have any impact on the progress of the library remains to be seen and may never be measured.

It was a turning point for me, however. I now recognize that my "job" is part of my "life's work." When frustrated, I go back and review the big picture of why what I am doing is worthwhile.

My second action was a proposal to re-create the Personnel Team as a combination of our existing Personnel Committee (which had dwindled to three members) and Management Structure Team (which met only once a year at budget time). The proposal was both a declaration of the importance of efforts regarding personnel and an acknowledgement of the inseparability of personal mastery from organizational structure. Team Leaders assumed responsibility for launching the refurbished team, a new role for them, and they greatly improved the haphazard method we used in the past for creating teams.

Team Leaders began by producing a written charge describing the team's purpose, authority, and desired characteristics. They envisioned the team as a think tank and advisory group to the Team Leaders, and the team would respond to specific assignments from the Team Leaders. The Personnel Team would generally make recommendations, not decisions. Team Leaders specifically called for members who could be open-minded and maintain confidentiality. In spite of pressing needs for the team's work, the Team Leaders set aside several weeks for the recruitment of new members. They sent e-mail notices and discussed the process at a staff meeting, calling for nominations and self-nominations. They carefully reviewed candidates before approving appointments in order to assure a broad and balanced representation of staff on the committee. The new team then underwent several team-building and training sessions on dialogue and discussion before they actually started work on specific assignments. Time has been carved from members' work schedules to allow for participation. A Personnel Team module has been added to their job descriptions and extra pay will be considered. This excellent input will not guarantee excellent output, but the two must certainly be correlated.

Meanwhile, Team Leaders have begun training on the skills and disciplines that will foster their ability to learn as a team and arrive at shared vision. The first lesson was in dialogue. An issue arose regarding whether to add a new member to the Team Leader group—the coordinator of Latino Services. This was a straightforward, though fairly heated issue. It was first determined that the decision should be made by the Team Leaders, not the director, as that group would be most affected. Rather than immediately launching into argumentative discussion, the group followed the rules of dialogue and began its decision-making with a clarification process. The clarification led to analysis based on agreed-upon criteria, which quickly ended in a strong consensus.

The library also hired a consultant to assist in a library-wide prioritization effort. All teams are facing a burgeoning workload with no ability to increase staff. Tasks of lesser importance may have to be cut in order to maintain the

most vital work. The consultant utilized the team learning process model with the Team Leaders. He facilitated their creation of a shared vision regarding technology in the library. This vision is the first step in assisting the Information Systems functional team in setting its work priorities. The experience gained by Team Leaders in this exercise will be transferred to their individual functional teams. Each team will develop a shared vision of its role, from which it will begin work on prioritizing tasks.

The Teton County Library is positioned somewhere along the continuum of invention to innovation of a public library that is a learning organization. Without a doubt, the organizational structure has enabled us to accomplish enormous amounts of work very efficiently by empowering every staff member. People enthusiastically volunteer for cross-functional teams even without any system in place for additional compensation, which speaks to a high level of commitment.

We are still very much in the developmental stages, however. We spend more time on process (meetings, communication training, etc.) than any of us enjoy. We are far from masterful in the arts of dialogue, systems thinking, and analyzing mental models. We are profoundly grateful to the leaders at the UA Library for their continuing mentorship, and we are constantly seeking ideas from other libraries to assist our climb from a productive past to a successful future. It is our hope that the Teton County Library models can provide a handhold for more experiments in the public library field.

Appendix

A Director's Vision

As Director of the Teton County Library, I see one of my chief roles as being steward of the organization's vision and sense of purpose. That is, the Director must embody and articulate the Library's vision. This requires the development of a personal vision of the organization's purpose and direction, and it should be perceived as a part of her own life's work.

However, an organization's vision is not just the Director's vision. It is composed of the personal visions of all those involved; in our case that necessarily includes the Teton County Commissioners, Library Board, Library staff and the entire community. The more closely aligned these personal visions, the stronger the organization is in accomplishing its purpose. On the other hand, it is impossible to lead if the leader's vision is out of line with the rest of the organization.

Here is my personal vision. Can I be your leader?

1. The *foundation* upon which my commitment to the library rests is a respect for the community and a respect for the individuals who staff the Teton County Library. No, respect is not the right word. What is it that makes me always so happy to come home to Jackson Hole every

single time I leave? Why is it so hard for me to pass by any staff member's desk while you're working and not interrupt you to say hello? Why during my personal time am I drawn back over and over to manipulating my mental models of library structures and events? Nope, this is love. My commitment to the Teton County Library is not based on elevated philosophy but personal love.

2. I have learned to believe in the power of teamwork. My first lessons came from the library staff as we tackled challenge after challenge. Any good idea I had was made grand by your input. I hope I have contributed to your ideas as well. The library has accomplished so much because of many people working together.
3. What I seek to create at the Teton County Library is a *learning organization*. I believe in people's innate desire to learn. I see that continual learning is a necessity for the success of the organization and the community. Learning is very important to me personally.
4. I believe in the vision of *democracy* set forth by the Constitution of the United States. Education is the key; the public library is the cornerstone of adult education and the access point for uncensored information. I often mistype "library" as "liberty." Teton County Liberty. Perhaps the two are interchangeable in my mind.
5. *Growth* is a scary concept as we look around us and witness its impact on the environment and our quality of life. After experiencing so much growth in service demands at the library, we probably all often wish we could just level off for a while. However, I support and encourage growth at the library. Who can challenge the value of more learning, of more people reading, studying, knowing, thinking? There should be more access to information; we should reach more community members. We should do this in the most efficient possible way.
6. I have come to accept *change* as a fact of life for the library because it is a fact of life for our society. And, given the current nature of that change—growth of technology, transition to an information society—an organization that traffics in information can expect to change more than most organizations. A library must espouse change, develop its own flexibility to adapt quickly, and keep a watchful eye focused on the future.
7. A library is not just a storehouse of information. It is not a reflection of a librarian's interests. It should be a vibrant participant in the life of the *community* and be constantly looking to the community for its mission and direction.

I envision Teton County Library as a public library recognized for *innovation* and *excellence*.

Betsy Bernfeld, September 1, 2003

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