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CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES: AN ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY FOR LEADERSHIP

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Abstract
In this era of shrinking budgets and advancing technology, libraries inevitably need to change to keep up with the times. This is especially true in regards to changes in the Information Technology (IT) services provided by libraries. Some traditional services are no longer used and others must be rearranged so that the library remains a vital component of the campus. Reorganization of personnel often takes place to accommodate these changes. Organizational change may initially appear overwhelming, especially if it involves many people with strongly held opinions and beliefs about maintaining traditional library services. However, a structured process, transparency, and effective communication can assist in making the change easier and the implementation smoother. A process pulled from established literature on change management was used in a reorganization of IT personnel at the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah, which provided all three ingredients with great success. A review of successes and suggested improvements are explored.

Keywords: Change Management; Leadership; Information Technology

Background
The Marriott Library employs approximately 150 full time staff with an annual budget of approximately $13 million. The University of Utah is a public institution located in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a student population of approximately 32,000.

In September 2012, the Library was at a pivotal point in its evolution. The Associate Dean (AD) for Library IT left for a new position as dean of a library at another institution. As a result, the Library Administration had an opportunity to review its current IT personnel, services, and equipment, which led to the recognition of current inefficiencies in its organizational structure. For example, over the years IT personnel in the Library were placed in two different organizational departments. One department was labeled “Library IT,” which focused on University services such as the library catalog, website, and digital library. The other department was titled “Computing and Media Services” (CMS), which focused on internal desktop support for library employees and desktop support for four different student computing labs throughout the campus. “Library IT” personnel reported to the AD for Library IT, which was now vacant, and “CMS” personnel reported to the AD for Research and Learning Services.

As can be expected, duplicate processes and services emerged. For example, each department had separate processes and servers for backing up valuable library data. Both departments began to develop a different version of a mobile view of the Library website without knowing it. Each department had a series of servers used to host a variety of services rather than an overarching and coordinated server effort. While an associate dean with IT experience supervised the Library IT department the CMS department was supervised by an associate dean with little understanding of IT systems and potential alternatives. This lack of IT knowledge meant there was limited high level, critical review of decisions made regarding the implementation of desktop support services.

As Library Administration discussed the future, it was agreed that a focus on digitizing, archiving, and providing access to unique and rare collections would be a significant objective for the library; and that this would be the main way to demonstrate the Library’s significance, contributions, and impact on the research and teaching activities of the University and beyond. This vision only became possible with new advances in technology and the recognition that digital libraries were more than an add-on service. Rather, digital libraries were becoming the main way libraries contribute to research efforts worldwide. In addition, the current server and software setup at the

Marriott Library was close to full capacity and would be unable to handle an increase in content while still providing access to the many digitized items.

These inefficiencies, namely duplicate efforts, processes, and equipment, along with the urgent need for more IT personnel to address new library directions and services moved the Library Administration to begin the process of organizational change that would bring the two IT departments – Library IT and CMS – together.

Implementation

In November and December 2012, Library Administration invited all library employees to participate in two open feedback sessions to talk about what was working well in the current IT organizational structure and what was not. Next, small group sessions were held with employees in the Library IT department. Small group sessions were also held with employees in the CMS department along with employees within Research and Learning Services and Special Collections. It was expected that these latter employees would experience the most impact from the change. A list of all comments was compiled into a SWOT analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT Analysis, 2014). After reviewing the SWOT analysis, Library Administration decided there was an urgent need to combine the Library IT and CMS departments. The SWOT analysis and this decision to merge the departments were shared with all library employees. At this point, Library Administration invited a known change leader on campus to help map out the necessary steps to implement the merger of the Library IT and CMS departments.

The Library was autonomous in making internal organizational changes because approval from higher levels in the University organization was not necessary. That left top Library Administration and managers in both departments to be convinced of the urgent need for the merger. A sense of urgency among the highest level of Library Administration was already established, however, only 60% of the department managers were convinced of the need to combine the two departments.

To get started, the change leader recommended that Library Administration request a report from each of the Library IT and CMS departments describing their current work. The purpose of these reports was to obtain a baseline understanding of the current work completed by these departments, their vision for the future, and possible changes they could support, including a merger of the two departments. In addition to the many thoughtful and insightful comments these reports contained, one of the departments made a consensus statement that read, “The general feeling is that Senior Administration is not listening to the concerns of those on the front lines.” Considering the number of group meetings that took place and the careful collection of feedback from those meetings, the statement of not being heard seemed incongruent. Therefore, another expert in change management, this time a library employee, was invited to meet with this department without Library Administration present to obtain clarification regarding this inconsistency. This meeting resulted in a better understanding between the department and the AD to whom they reported and a change in the merger process was made: A task force of IT managers was created to play a pivotal role in assisting Library Administration with the merger. These managers consisted of an equal number of managers from both the Library IT and CMS departments. This combined group of managers was called “IT Managers.”

Next, a Planning Committee was formed consisting of the AD for Research and Learning Services, the Interim AD for Library IT, the previously mentioned campus change agent, and the previously mentioned internal library expert in change management. The Planning Committee invited a manager from both Library IT and CMS to provide feedback at pivotal points in the process. Both of these managers were amenable to the merger of the two departments and were respected colleagues in their departments. It was hoped that these managers would provide the Planning Committee with immediate feedback regarding their departments’ acceptance of the changes and any issues the Planning Committee may have missed.

The task for the Planning Committee was to create an organizational chart of the newly merged departments that reflected a shared vision. While the department reports were helpful in educating the Committee about the current work of IT personnel, the Committee wanted to get a better sense of which people were interested in doing something different or taking on a new role. With this information the Committee could more easily move people into different positions in a new organizational chart. Therefore, the Planning Committee resurrected an old Self Assessment document, which they adjusted to reflect IT tasks throughout the Library. When eventually distributed the Self Assessment document would ask IT personnel to indicate their strengths, weakness, and list the top five areas in which they would like to work.

The Planning Committee then arranged for four important meetings. The first of these was a meeting with the "IT Managers." These managers became the guiding coalition for assisting with creating the details of the merger of the Library IT and CMS departments and the resulting organizational chart. The meeting with the "IT Managers" had two objectives: 1) to establish the need and urgency for change; and 2) to create a vision for a newly merged IT department. The meeting began with the Interim Dean giving a presentation about the need and urgency for change and the role the "IT Managers" would play. Then, the "IT Managers" were asked to edit the aforementioned Self Assessment document by providing better descriptions of tasks and listing additional tasks not yet included on the Self Assessment. The Planning Committee used these suggestions to adjust the Self Assessment. Additionally, as the "IT Managers" edited the Self Assessment, there was a discussion of norms and values of a newly merged IT department, which began the creation of a shared vision.

The second meeting brought together all 43 IT personnel in the Library from both Library IT and CMS departments. The objectives of this meeting were: 1) establish the need and urgency for change; 2) review actions taken to date; 3) obtain suggestions for naming the merged IT department; 4) introduce the Self Assessment; and 5) set the calendar for the rest of the change process. The meeting began like the first meeting with a presentation by the Interim Dean about the need and urgency for change and concluded with all IT personnel being asked to fill out the Self Assessment.

After these first two meetings the Planning Committee created a draft organizational chart. They intended for this first draft, along with shared goals and values, to be the guiding vision for the newly merged IT department. The Planning Committee decided to get input from the "IT Managers" regarding this first draft because the "IT Managers" were to serve as the guiding coalition for change and their buy-in and assistance with adjusting the first draft would be pivotal in implementing the proposed changes. Therefore, a third meeting was held in which the Planning Committee showed the first draft to the "IT Managers" and solicited their feedback.

There was consensus among the "IT Managers" regarding the top level of the draft organizational chart but much less agreement about the bottom half of the chart that dealt with rearrangement of IT personnel. Since there was no consensus on the entire draft organizational chart, the Planning Committee decided to adjourn the meeting without making immediate changes to allow time to reflect on and incorporate changes to the organizational chart. The "IT Managers" left the meeting taking copies of the first draft with them to show to their personnel and discuss the changes further. Even though the Planning Committee had made it clear that the organizational chart was only a first draft and fully intended to make revisions, it was later discovered that some IT personnel came to believe that the draft was the final version. This led to increased anxiety among IT personnel that spread throughout their units. In order to address this misunderstanding and resulting anxiety, individual meetings were encouraged between IT personnel and the AD for Research and Learning Services or the Interim AD for Library IT. Of the individuals who came to speak with these Associate Deans, a majority left with smiles, with expressions of gratitude, and a sense of being heard.

Next, the Planning Committee reviewed the various suggestions and made adjustments to the first draft of the organizational chart based on these suggestions. The Planning Committee created a second draft organizational chart, which was presented to the "IT Managers" at a fourth and final meeting. Despite every effort to incorporate some aspect of each suggested change and a firm belief that the second draft organizational chart was a fair compromise that met most "IT Managers" concerns half way, the meeting ended with about 40% of the "IT Managers" still unhappy with the second draft, preferring instead that the merger not take place at all.

The Planning Committee carefully reviewed the concerns raised and debated adjusting the organizational chart further. They then presented the organizational chart and the concerns voiced by "IT Managers" to Library Administration. After further debate by Library Administration a unanimous decision was made to keep the second draft as the final version. Once the organizational chart was finalized, the Interim AD for Library IT and the AD for Research and Learning Services held individual meetings with each member of the "IT Managers" group to present the final organizational chart, explain the decisions of Library Administration, and set the date to implement the merger.

The two ADs felt it was important to communicate the initial successes of the merger. For example, some individuals were asked to report to different supervisors. One month after these moves, a majority of these individuals were newly energized and productive in their assignments. One person needed additional clarity regarding their assignment. Once that clarification of duties was made, this individual made significant contributions to their new unit.

All of the foregoing occurred between November 2012 and August 2013. The whole merger process took 10 months and the Library now works with a single merged "IT Services" department. Three outstanding items remain: hire a new Associate Dean for IT Services; relocate employees' work spaces to more efficiently align with their new assignments; and list and prioritize IT projects. On the positive side, there was no reduction in personnel and there has been an increase in communication among IT personnel. Additionally, personnel who were originally against the merger have started to come around. While the merger is "complete," change is ongoing as individuals learn to work within the new structure.

Discussion

After reviewing articles on organizational change (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2008; Kinlaw, 1989; Hawks, 2013; Helphand, 1997) and consulting with a number of campus experts in this area, one article seemed most useful for the Library's needs: John P. Kotter, "Leading organizational change: Why transformational efforts fail" (2007). Library Administration attempted to follow the paradigm for organizational change outlined in Kotter's article. In it, he discusses eight stages of change, the first three of which are: Establish a sense of urgency; Form a powerful guiding coalition; and Create a vision (2007, p. 1).

As to the first stage, establishing a sense of urgency, Kotter suggests that this stage is accomplished "when about 75% of a company's management is honestly convinced that business as usual is totally unacceptable (2007, p. 4)." Kotter provides a variety of examples of how to meet the 75% goal, ranging from being fortunate enough to have a superb change agent in a leadership position to having a frank discussion of potential bad news facing the organization's future (2007, p. 3). What is not clear in his article is what is meant by 75% of the organization's management because not all management is created equal. Kotter suggests a CEO or a division manager may be key, but one person is not 75%. In addition, in a library setting some managers are more important than others. For the Marriott Library it was soon evident that 100% of upper management was not nearly as important as getting 75% of departmental managers in agreement.

As to the second stage, creating a powerful guiding coalition, Kotter recommends "assembl[ing] a group with a shared commitment and enough power to lead the change effort," and "encourag[ing] this group to work as a team outside the normal hierarchy" (2007, p. 1). As to the third stage, creating a vision, Kotter encourages companies to "create a vision to direct the change effort," and "develop strategies for realizing that vision" (2007, p. 1).

It was clear that the Library would need to adjust this process to implement the proposed change. Library Administration already realized that Kotter's first stage was not designed for academia because in academia generally it is expected that people working in units involved in the change will have the opportunity to give input at every stage. Libraries differ from for-profit companies in that they act more as a cooperative.

In light of this academic cultural norm Library Administration held the open feedback sessions as discussed in the Implementation section above to assess what was working well and what was not. The resulting SWOT analysis was used to create the urgency for change, Kotter's first stage. In particular, the SWOT analysis helped identify weaknesses and threats in the current organizational structure. By highlighting the weaknesses and threats, the Library was hoping to get 75% of middle management to agree that change was needed.

Discussions of the SWOT analysis in various Library meetings and the request for departmental reports brought on even more discussion which led to the creation of a guiding coalition for change, which was called "IT Managers." This was Kotter's second stage. As the "IT Managers" met to design the Self Assessment, additional concerns were raised about how the newly merged IT department would function. These concerns were turned into a positive vision for the future. This was Kotter's third stage. In addition, comments from the open feedback sessions yielded a series of values that was also incorporated into a vision for the future.

Observations

Four observations can be made about the process used to merge the two departments. First, some individuals resisted the merger every step of the way. Therefore, it was sometimes necessary to have very frank and candid conversations with those individuals. For example, several managers insisted that members of their staff would quit if the two departments were merged. The AD for Research and Learning Services responded by suggesting that quitting a job was a personal decision and, while these staff members would be missed, the merger would continue. Another example was a manager who continued to bring up concerns about the ability of his remaining staff to address the workload assigned. To this the same AD responded by stating, "I understand that you have concerns about workload and there are mechanisms put in place in the new organization that will address this. I hear that you still have concerns. I just disagree that those concerns will be devastating. And, unfortunately for you I'm in charge." This may seem harsh but these are the kinds of difficult conversations a manager may need to have when implementing organizational change. Kotter does not describe how to deal with those who remain resistant to the proposed change. The need to have frank conversations with people who are resistant to change is even more important in libraries where librarians by nature are often introverts and adverse to conflict. Obtaining skills to have difficult conversations is a necessary component to finalizing a change, especially when there are still individuals who are resistant (Soehner, 2013).

Second, some managers were not ready to act as leaders during this process. Kotter states, "A paralyzed senior management often comes from having too many managers and not enough leaders. Management's mandate is to minimize risk and to keep the current system operating. Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership" (2007, p. 1). The "IT Managers" brought together managers from both departments and asked them to take on a leadership role. All members of "IT Managers" attended a two-hour leadership seminar to introduce them to this new role of leadership. The seminar emphasized how to communicate to others about the change in a positive manner, even if the managers themselves disagreed with the new direction. Later in the process, it was clear that more of this kind of training was needed and that a 2-hour seminar was not enough to turn some individuals who were dedicated managers into true leaders. Others benefitted a great deal from the seminar and their leadership skills were obvious throughout the rest of the process.

The third, and most surprising, observation was that some IT employees did not believe Library Administration listened to them during the change process leading to the merger. As stated previously, considering the number of group meetings that took place and the careful collection of feedback from those meetings, the statement of not being heard seemed incongruent. The disconnect between their belief of not being heard and the fact that Library Administration made efforts to listen to them leads one to speculate that the IT employees were confusing "being listened to" with "being agreed with." In other words, some IT employees believed that if Library Administration did not *agree* with them, Library Administration was not *listening* to them. The truth of the matter was that Library Administration *had heard* their concerns, but simply disagreed that the concerns were enough to stop the merger. It seems there will always be employees that feel they are not being heard. This is especially true if those employees are not getting their way. Even though Kotter does not present this situation precisely, it seems the best solution is to continue to keep lines of communication open and a neutral party can help facilitate this open communication.

Finally, more communication might have made the process less contentious. For example, once a sense of urgency was established each member of Library Administration should have made a point of stating the sense of urgency in all meetings they attended when library staff was present. This would have increased the number of times all library staff, including IT employees, heard the message of urgency for change and provided additional opportunities to discuss it. As Kotter states, "Without credible communication, *and a lot of it*, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured" (2007, p. 6, italics added).

Conclusion

In creating organizational change, it is important to be flexible. Following the stages of organizational change that Kotter outlines and applying these stages to academic libraries was very useful. While Library Administration adjusted the stages based on cultural norms of academia in general, the stages were a helpful way to organize the process and move forward. Adjustments were also made as the result of strong reactions from groups or individuals. Trust between employees and Library Administration was improved when Library Administration remained open to employees' concerns and adjusted the process based on those concerns. Additionally, communicating to employees the need for change, the process to be used, and the vision for the new department was crucial in resolving concerns and encouraging employees to come into agreement with the new direction. Finally, frank and direct communication may be necessary to bring along employees remaining resistant to the very end. These conversations may be difficult but are essential to the change process and are an essential competency for leadership.

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