

Analysis

Reorganization

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Libraries

Miami University (Miami)

UCLA

University of Texas Arlington (UTA)

Western Michigan University (WMU)

Introduction

The libraries selected for the reorganization section all serve mid-size to large campuses ranging in size of student population from approximately 20,000 to nearly 54,000. Two of the four institutions primarily focus on undergraduate education. The scope of the reorganization efforts at each of these institutions was holistic and spanned several libraries in multi-library systems. UCLA's story was the only one to focus on the reorganization of a particular library function—that of public services. Each change story in this category was written or co-written by the library leader responsible for the change.

I. Warm-up Phase

STAGE 1: ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF URGENCY

Several themes emerged across these change stories that point to the urgent need to reorganize. Chief among the reasons for change was the issue of silos within the library organization due to staff attrition. This was frequently cited as the reason institutions did not feel agile enough to respond to changes in the profession and why some felt that they did not have a seat at the table for important change initiatives or collaborative opportunities taking place on their campuses. There was consistent concern expressed over the pressures to maintain traditional services while having a staff structure agile enough to respond to rapid change in user expectations. This raises the question of how much attrition is too much for an organization to handle before a reorganization is necessary, especially if the intent of the organization is to position itself for continuous change. Keeping the doors open and maintaining business as usual may be more forgiving of a patchwork staff structure, but when it comes to transformational change, our change stories suggest that organizations need to have a clearly defined structure based on current needs, not historical functions.

It is particularly noteworthy that at all of these institutions, there were new hires at the senior level of library leadership. In fact, the hiring committee for the new dean at UTA intentionally sought out a change agent. A strategic plan mandate for reorganization was a driving factor for UCLA and WMU. The need to examine duplicative and inconsistent service models as the result of decentralization was an additional reason for change at UCLA.

Two institutions used specific nationally normed data to help establish their sense of urgency. Miami used data from LibQUAL and ClimateQUAL. UTA conducted ethnographic research to help staff understand user needs. At least two institutions used specific tools in their work with library employees. Miami used a design-thinking approach, while UTA relied on strategies outlined in the monograph *Good to Great* by Jim Collins.

STAGE 2: CREATING THE GUIDING COALITION

Readers will find few similarities across all four change stories in terms of the composition of the guiding coalition. Miami used a consultant who worked with three committees. One was a steering committee that included three top library leaders, with the majority of members external to the library. Their primary purpose was to guide the process and make decisions. Select staff represented the library through service on the other two committees. One committee focused on reorganization, while the other focused on reinventing the service model.

At UCLA, the associate university librarian was a part of the guiding coalition, which included almost half of the staff in the public services group being reorganized along with several representatives from other units. He set a vision for the group and provided objectives to help focus them. Though the new dean at UTA involved nearly 85 percent of the staff in doing their homework to establish the urgency to reorganize, her guiding coalition consisted of the senior library leadership and middle managers. Although the dean was new to this group and to the organization, her team had a history of working together. The dean at WMU was new to her position, but she took a different approach from the others. She met with each staff member individually and held a library-wide retreat so that everyone was involved in the feedback process out of which the need to develop two committees emerged, one to work on a strategic plan and one to reorganize the organization. The composition of the latter committee included the dean and others from the library administrative office as well as faculty and staff who represented all units except the special collections.

STAGE 3: DEVELOPING A VISION AND STRATEGY

At this stage in the change process, the guiding coalitions at Miami, UCLA, and WMU had developed an organizational framework that supported a similar shared vision to improve the user experience, to break down silos among the staff, and to position the library for innovation at their respective institutions. In contrast to the other institutions, the UTA guiding coalition worked only on the establishment of a singularly focused vision to ground the rest of their work. They defined their new vision as CXI—Creation, eXploration and Innovation.

STAGE 4: COMMUNICATING THE CHANGE VISION

Most of these institutions used the typical strategies to communicate change to staff, which included written communications such as newsletter updates, posting materials on an intranet, and emails, as well as face-to-face meetings, either one-on-one with individuals or through presentations at all-staff and departmental meetings. Miami had a unique approach to communicating the change vision because of the timely hiring of a communications and marketing person to help with this step. Most of these institutions leveraged the members of the guiding coalition to help communicate their vision and strategy to the staff. As UCLA points out, this can often present uneven messaging. To remedy this, it created written documents for the guiding coalition to help standardize at least some of the messaging. UTA had only a vision to communicate at this point, but it used this as an opportunity to gather feedback from the staff on what skills, functions, and roles should be present in the new organization. In the end, the dean used this information to construct the new organizational structure that changed the jobs of 94 percent of the staff. This last example was the most widespread, systemic revamping of an organizational structure among the change stories in this category. The dean at UTA, as well as the dean at WMU, was heavily involved with communicating with staff impacted by the reorganization, and to their credit, both took the time to meet individually with staff to ensure alignment between organizational needs and employee interests. It is no surprise that employee anxiety was a prevalent theme among these stories about reorganization. It wasn't so much that the employees disagreed with the new direction for the organization as they were afraid of what it meant for them on a personal level.

II. Introducing New Practices Phase

STAGE 5: EMPOWERING BROAD-BASED ACTION

Miami and UCLA had strategic planning documents that guided staff through this stage and helped them establish rituals and norms in their newly formed units, from writing department charges to establishing new meeting and communication structures. At WMU, each unit was asked to identify training needs to help the staff adjust to the new structure and new roles. WMU mentioned the importance of working with human resources to adjust position descriptions, especially to ensure compliance with union contracts and to make sure employees were fairly compensated for changed job duties. Another noticeable trend at this stage in the change process for reorganizations was the tendency for staff to raise many questions when presented with a new organizational structure. Such was the case at UCLA, particularly in relation to the rotation of leadership opportunities in the new model. UTA was faced with the challenge of resolving the question of how to staff library instruction when not enough people were interested in doing this. UTA underestimated the amount of time and training needed to transition employees into new roles. It, of course, had the added dilemma of how to address the emotional response to such an extreme overhaul of its organizational structure.

STAGE 6: GENERATING SHORT-TERM WINS

Miami was working toward switching to its new structure while developing a hiring plan. WMU was actively hiring twelve new positions as one of its short-term wins while renovating staff spaces to collocate employees in newly formed units. UCLA and UTA were working on team-building exercises among their employees. UTA brought in a consultant specifically to build trust among the new leadership team, while UCLA employees took it upon themselves to develop fun ways to share ideas about ways they could work toward the new vision for the library. With a newly energized leadership team in place at UTA, it generated forty-nine initiatives to support its CXI vision. It set the agenda for the year and provided a framework for the organizational structure. Other short-term wins at UTA included mergers and elimination of functions.

STAGE 7: CONSOLIDATING GAINS AND PRODUCING MORE CHANGE

Miami continued to keep the plan fresh in the minds of the staff by continuing to communicate progress. It rewarded early adopters. WMU mentioned taking the time to celebrate success with staff. The WMU dean put a new leadership council in place and provided leadership development. Change at UCLA began to shift the overall culture as communication between units continued to flourish and break down silos. Forward momentum at UTA came in the form of new initiatives such as the FabLab, an innovative learning space designed to support experiential learning, and a new administrative position in support of the new structure.

III. Grounding Phase

STAGE 8: ANCHORING NEW APPROACHES IN THE CULTURE

Momentum continued at all four institutions that signaled to staff that the reorganization was well rooted and on its way to fruition. Miami launched its hiring plan and began the screening process to fill positions for approximately 20 percent of its organization. It offered professional development to the leadership team. UTA offered staff awards to encourage innovation and adjusted its merit system to better align with its shared vision. UCLA still needs to iron out the rotation of its leadership structure and to define the role of its leadership team in general, but the communication culture was progressing in a positive direction. Perhaps WMU was further along in the reorganization process when compared to the others, but its approach of assessing the change process was unique.

Analysis and Conclusions

Patterns evolved in these change stories that hint at some common trends to consider when embarking upon a reorganization. Interestingly, these themes did not emerge at a predictable and consistent stage in Kotter's change model, which suggests that every change story is unique and nuanced. For example, the stage in the Kotter model at which each institution arrived at a new reorganizational model for their institution differed.

TIPS FOR REORGANIZATION

- Library administration needs to be involved in a library-wide reorganization. Library employees seem to value a leader who has credibility and who can single-handedly or alongside a consultant establish and communicate a clear vision and strategy for the change.
- Middle management is critical in this type of change. They help communicate and spread the shared vision among staff and are essential to setting the strategy and change into motion.
- The use of data and credible information sources with staff is helpful, but staff involvement in the change process is necessary.
- Anxiety and fear among staff may be born out of concern individuals have for themselves. It does not necessarily mean they don't buy into the change vision. Cynicism and complacency may signal that the leadership has more work to do with staff to establish a shared vision. Addressing both of these emotional responses to change takes different approaches and time.
- Two trends may signal the need for a reorganization: changes in library leadership and a disjointed organization structure that has been patched together due to staff turnover and changes in library work.
- An important step in the change process when it comes to reorganizations is to adjust position descriptions and to provide staff training at all levels where needed so that employees are empowered to contribute meaningfully.

