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The University of Kentucky Libraries are undergoing a change from a traditional hierarchical organizational structure to a flattened team-based organization. The impetus for this change revolves around the Library becoming a more user-centered organization and by the technological opportunities afforded with a new central library and improved campus network infrastructure. This change in focus has radically changed the way in which decisions are made within the library. The Library has experienced a culture change that cuts to the heart of everyday work experiences across the organization. This presentation will include the successes and challenges realized by this change in focus since the transition began in the Fall of 1995.
Changing Our Focus: Creating a User-Centered Organization

Background

The William T. Young Library at the University of Kentucky is scheduled to open during the early part of the Spring semester 1998. The opening of this new facility will provide our library faculty and staff new opportunities to meet the needs of our users. For years we have been struggling with inadequate network connectivity and a lack of sufficient electrical outlets in the library.

The new Young Library will have OC12 ATM backbone and over 3200 switched ethernet ports and/or fiber connections, a high-speed wireless network, hands free roving telephone reference capability, laptops for loan to our users, and more than enough electrical connections.

Several years ago as the planning began for this new facility’s program, Paul Willis, the Director of Libraries, realized that the University Libraries were operating with essentially the same organizational structure that had been in place since the 1950s. The structure was hierarchical with traditional units of public services, technical services, and branch libraries. These units were headed by several Associate Directors that reported to the Director of Libraries. Decision-making rested primarily with the Director. As planning went forward for the new building, he realized that to be better positioned to meet user needs and expectations organizational changes would be needed.

Where to begin?

Initially library administration thought that the Libraries should get a consultant to assist in working through the process of reorganization. Upon investigation it was decided that having a paid consultant would be too expensive to be a viable option and that idea was abandoned. As we looked for alternatives, a faculty member from the School of Library and Information Science who teaches library administration volunteered to assist us by acting as a consultant. In the Summer of 1995, an Organizational Development Committee was formed with membership coming from various units within the University Libraries. Together with the consultant from the library school this group started to work on the first steps. Three process study teams (Management Processes, Mediation Processes, and Technical Processes) were formed to address the various aspects of library operations. These study teams met and deliberated throughout the 1995-96 academic year. In the Spring of 1996 the Organizational Development Committee took the recommendations of the three groups and combined them into the beginnings of a workable plan.
The New Organization

The new recommended structure was very different from the old structure. The new organization centered around largely autonomous subject-oriented Service Centers rather than the central and branch library structure that had been in place for many years. The study team recommended that the Service Centers have their own operating budgets, function as independent units, assume management of their own technical services and public services, and serve a defined clientele. The Committee decided that the University Libraries would work toward this new model.

There was a great deal of uncertainty from library staff during the academic year that this plan was being developed. In order to ensure frank discussions the meetings were conducted confidentially, but staff were uncertain what the future would hold for them as individuals. Some even feared a loss of employment. The Director sent a letter to all staff near the end of the year assuring them that this was not the case.

The initial report proposed that a new Executive Committee to be made up of the Director of Libraries and the directors of the eight new service centers be established. This committee would act as a governing body for the library system. There were numerous Associate Directors who had been on the former Administrative Committee that were not initially included in this new governing body. Fearing a loss of expertise from these key individuals, the Committee expanded the new "Leadership Council" to include all Service Center Directors (renamed Team Leaders) and those reporting directly to the Director of Libraries (who were largely the former Associate Directors). This brought the number of members on the Leadership Council to nineteen people.

Concurrent with the conclusion of the work of the Organizational Development Committee we were able to secure the services of a management consultant from the Center for Community Partnerships (part of the Lexington Community College) who specialized in team-based management. This consultant had assisted several large organizations in making similar transformations. The Leadership Council began working on a weekly basis with her on the basic principles of team-based organizations.

Jumping Off the Cliff

Communication of the new plan to the library staff was judged to be a very high priority because of the level of staff anxiety. We found that while we thought that we shared news about the status of the reorganization in many ways the staff still felt uninformed. Many staff members generally felt that they were not being told all of the details of the plan, while in reality there weren't many details to the plan. For the most part we were developing the plan as we proceeded.
As we moved into a shared decision-making model we found that the group needed some basics on how to conduct ourselves as a team. We started by learning the principles of conducting more effective meetings. We established both procedural and behavioral ground rules and had a trained facilitator to assist in team process. Meetings now included agendas with set times for each item, a timekeeper to keep the group within time limits, and “parking lots” for future agenda items. The recorder distributed meeting records to participants at the end of every meeting and team members evaluated the meetings for procedural and behavioral compliance. We found that while we were spending a great deal more time in meetings, we were getting more accomplished during those meetings.

It was very uncomfortable at first since the entire group had been used to operating in a different way for so many years. We adopted consensus as the method for making decisions even though it takes longer than our previous model (majority rules). We found, however, that everyone is happier with the decisions that are made under this new model. We agreed that consensus meant that we could live with the decision being made and could support that decision after we left the table. Team members could no longer leave meetings and say “they” decided, but instead were able to say "we" decided.

The Leadership Council charter stated that the purpose of the Leadership Council was to provide overall leadership and management for the UK Libraries and to insure that the Libraries met the objectives assigned by the University Strategic Plan. The charter defined the purpose as setting direction, not approving every project and plan. Day to day decision-making was placed with the units providing the service.

The consultant recommended that the members of the Leadership Council take her credit course together, "The Principles of Quality Management.” The textbooks for the course included Stephen Covey’s books *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership*. As a trained Covey facilitator, our consultant and teacher led us through this material and provided the foundations on which we could build a new organization. During spring semester we took the follow-up course ”Total Quality Management Principles” where we learned the tools of Total Quality and how to use Total Quality processes to assess and fix problems within an organization. The textbook for this course was *Fourth Generation Management: the New Business Consciousness* by Brian L. Joiner supplemented by a handbook Total Quality Tools by Productivity-Quality Systems, Inc. [See References]

**Things That Helped**

Without the help of the consultants it would have been difficult to be objective enough to effect real change. It was crucial for the Leadership Council to start working as a team rather than as competing colleagues. Taking the classes together and talking about issues of trust and support made a tremendous difference. We
went on several retreats in which we focused on teamwork and leadership issues. This time together enabled us to work in new ways with each other. We set a goal for ourselves to model teamwork for the rest of the organization.

Many times during the year it seemed as if we would never survive the changes. However, through persistence and commitment we found that we had not only survived but had been transformed into a stronger unit. We found that trust is something that comes over time and that cannot be forced.

**First Assessment**

At the end of the first year the Leadership Council determined that we needed to assess how far we had come during that year. A major accomplishment was that we had agreed as an organization on our mission, vision, and values. We also agreed on four initiatives to focus our energy and resources on customer-related priorities. We began to set goals and measures for every team, and we began to use strategic planning as a method to actually measure our effectiveness and as a way to keep on track with our initiatives. [See Appendix]

The Leadership Council asked the rest of the Library staff for an assessment of the progress that had been made. Throughout the year we had been working on honest communication and the staff now felt able (or frustrated enough) to be brutally honest. Many staff members indicated that they felt that by having the Leadership Council take courses and go on retreats together that an elitist group had been established that was segregated from the rest of the organization. Comments about a lack of communication and a lack of empowerment were pervasive in the feedback that was received. The tone of the comments was surprising to many members of the Council, since we had been working throughout the year on issues of trust and communication. Upon examination we realized that we had been spent a great deal of energy on building the leadership group and could have done more to facilitate communication with all the staff.

Another retreat was planned to absorb the information and to plan next steps. During this retreat we examined what we could do to become more effective leaders what we could do to change the perceptions of the changes that had been implemented. During this retreat we explored the possibility that we had asked a tremendous amount of the staff while at the same time we had left so much undefined throughout the year. What staff perceived as an unwillingness to communicate was instead a lack of anything to communicate. It had taken us a very long time to make every decision throughout the year. While we had accomplished a great deal, the process had felt painfully slow as we learned new methods of decision-making and new ways of working together.
We agreed that we needed to make some changes to answer staff concerns. The Leadership Council was reconstituted as a small team whose members would be representatives of the Service Centers plus the Director of Libraries. We changed the name of this group from Leadership Council to the Service Center Team to reflect the representative and service-oriented nature of the group. This took the size of this group from nineteen to seven. The other members of the old Leadership Council were included in a Service Center Support and Communication Group that would meet monthly for communication purposes.

**What We Could Have Done Differently**

Unquestionably if we had spent more effort finding ways to communicate better everything would have gone smoother. Team leaders now are regularly spending much more time communicating with their teams. We are asking for participation and feedback at the start of projects rather than later in the process. When we had tried to expedite processes by "jump starting" projects, we had been sending the message that solutions were predetermined. Trusting the team process more and empowering the staff to make sound decisions has helped both the quality of projects and staff buy-in.

Taking more time for initial planning rather than planning and implementing change at the same time may have facilitated the process of change. Phased in changes starting with one team and then building on the successes of that team would have been easier to implement and easier to explain to staff.

Team training came too late. We did not start formalized team training until we were already one year into the transformation of the organization. If we had provided this training earlier in the process the staff would have had a better understanding of the expectations and implications of the reorganization.

**What We Did Right**

By continuing to exhibit a commitment to these changes we have underscored the importance of them to the staff. Many staff members had the impression that this was another fad that would pass as had several other initiatives. At the end of the first year, we acknowledged that the changes were not always easy, but that we had overcome some large hurdles and were not going to stop the process of change.

We celebrated the successes of each team. By acknowledging team success we continue to send a message of support to each team. Treating our staff as important members of the teams assisted in individual commitment to the organization.
Team decisions have been supported. This underscores the administration’s commitment to the team process. Teams are learning to depend less on intuition and preconceived assessments of user needs and to rely more on real data. This process leads to decisions that are sound and easy to support.
What Do These Changes Mean To Users?

By moving decisionmaking closer to the front lines we are enabling staff to feel more comfortable to make exceptions to policies based on circumstance and user need. When staff are a part of the policymaking they have a better sense when it would be acceptable and appropriate to make exceptions to established policies. Fewer incidents escalate to be problems for supervisors to resolve and users are more quickly satisfied when front line staff are able to make immediate decisions.

By setting clear library-wide initiatives to govern projects and resource allocation, we have been able to better focus energies and resource allocation toward projects that will most impact users. In the past we have been guilty of spreading ourselves too thin in a "mile-wide/inch-deep" model. For many years we have taken on more and more projects with shrinking resources. Many projects only received enough time and resources to barely be viable. The new model calls for "inch-wide/mile-deep" thinking and resource allocation. By selecting a few key initiatives for the year, we have started to better focus on those things that really matter to users. At the same time we have been trying to stop doing the things that make no difference to users. This is extremely difficult, but we hope to be better able to do this over time.

What Issues Still Need To Be Addressed?

We have not yet taken on any compensation or performance management issues. The University of Kentucky is presently undergoing a revamping of the performance management system for all staff, so we decided to put those issues aside until the University's review is completed. We have acknowledged that performance evaluations need to be tied to the team structure in some way, but for now we are using the old system with team leaders completing the evaluation forms. We have had initial discussions of team evaluations (peer evaluations) in addition to those done by team leaders. This gets more complicated as we participate in cross-functional project teams that fall outside our primary work unit. There is general consensus that the work we do in those situations should be a part of the evaluative process, but the details on how to accomplish this remain unclear.

Many teams that were formed initially are too large to be effective. Some teams have divided into smaller sub-teams and some have actually divided, but many are still too large. Optimum size for project teams seems to be seven to nine people, but many of our work unit teams are much larger than that. With larger groups the decisionmaking process is slowed. Over the course of the first year we discovered that for many projects we can do a lot of small group work outside of regular meetings. Small sub-teams then bring back nearly completed projects back to the big group for finalizing. This is not optimal but is working for now.
There are still a few units that are not operating as teams. Some units had a largely student workforce that made the transition difficult and others moved slower due to the reluctance of the supervisors. In the case of supervisor hesitancy the transition to teams was perceived to be too difficult or not feasible in a production environment. Gradually, however, as we are more able to get everyone trained on the mechanics of the team process the impetus for change is coming from the employees themselves. Training of all student assistants to help them understand our mission, vision, and service principles will begin this Fall.

**Summary**

Clearly not everyone is comfortable with these changes. There are several staff members who were content in not making decisions and were very happy to pass any issues that needed resolving up to a supervisor. Making decisions requires taking on a certain level of responsibility that some of our staff have not wanted to absorb. All change is difficult, but gradually as we continue to open communication and to build a solid level of trust many of these issues are being resolved.

As we move forward, we will be collecting data from users and will be better able to measure our effectiveness. Our new physical infrastructure and our new organizational infrastructure will hopefully work together to assist us to better meet the needs of our users. Initially, some staff members believed that if the new organizational structure did not work, then we could return to the old model. Time has proven, however, that this is impossible. Staff are generally enlivened with the changes and are enthusiastically working on user-service related projects. There is no going back!
References


Appendix

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY LIBRARIES

OUR VISION

We will be a leading user-centered provider of information resources and services, continually anticipating and responding to all information needs and expectations.

OUR VALUES

TEAMWORK
• We achieve better results through cooperation and collaboration.
• We commit to creating an environment that encourages working together.

CREATIVITY
• We are open to innovative ideas and flexible solutions.
• We believe that life-long learning is essential.

INTEGRITY
• We believe open and honest communication promotes trust.
• We adhere to the highest standards of personal and professional integrity.
• We value the trust placed in us by both our colleagues and users and we believe that to maintain trust we must be trustworthy.

SERVICE
• We strive to seek out our users’ needs.
• We provide quality services that meet or exceed our users’ expectations.
• We strive to serve library employees as well as we serve our users.

RESPECT
• We hold in high regard the strengths that individuals bring to the library
• We value an open, accepting, and diverse environment for employees and users.
• We treat users and employees with kindness, consideration and compassion.
OUR MISSION

As the major research library in the Commonwealth, we provide comprehensive access to information essential to teaching, research, and service at the University of Kentucky, through our human resources and maximum use of technology. As library staff meets these needs for the University community, we extend information services to the Commonwealth and make unique holdings available to the world.

UK LIBRARIES -- 1997/98 INITIATIVES

I. EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
Train and educate library employees in teamwork and information technology.

II. TRANSFORMATION TO TEAMS
Focus on development of shared vision and goals; team-based resource allocation; and building team culture.

III. USER-CENTERED SERVICES
Involve users and library employees in the creation and improvement of library services. Strengthen communication with users, including documentation of our services and access to holdings and with special emphasis on electronic resources. Collaborate with other institutions to enhance services to our users.

IV. FACILITIES
Complete and open William T. Young Library. Work on Phase II (King and information centers) building projects.