

Managing change in information and library services

The need to place greater emphasis on people rather than technology in the change process is emphasised through experience gained on the IMPEL project (Impact on People of Electronic Libraries in the Higher Education sector). The major principles in managing change for information and library service managers are summarised.

Whatever the local differences between types of information and library service (ILS), there is no question that information and communication technologies are transforming our services, and with them, the role of libraries and librarians. In all of this, *people* matter most. The need for librarians to develop a range of new knowledge and skills is obvious, but too easily taken for granted, not least the ability to work in *partnerships* closely with colleagues from different culture backgrounds, particularly computing. The classical elements of organizational theory operate in a wider environment, where the typical climate of continuing financial constraint, a more diverse customer base and greater empowerment of the customer prevail. Whatever your sector, the concept of consumer choice and growing emphasis on quality and value for money needs a much stronger focus on 'customer care' than even the most user-centred library service has offered. 'Just in time' can easily become 'Just too late'; instead it needs to be 'Just for you'.

The IMPEL project

Automating library processes now seems a relatively straightforward affair in comparison with the impact of global information networks, but we can learn impor-

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tant lessons from it. Hans Geleijnse, librarian of the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands, one of the foremost electronic library developments in Europe, noted the imbalance of attention given to the two sides of change in analyzing the literature of library automation.¹ Eighty per cent is on technical issues, while less than twenty per cent concentrates on human aspects. Ask any librarian who has managed the introduction of automated systems, and he will tell you that the reverse is probably true.

This eighty-to-twenty approach holds good in the context of the total change approach we need to adopt to survive. To quote some real examples, it was the eighty-to-twenty premise that offered the starting point for our project investigating the impact that the move towards increasingly electronically based library services is having on the management of academic libraries in higher education in the UK. Rather than apply theory to practice as management theorists do, we are taking a very qualitative, 'bottom-up' approach to what is actually happening in a cross section of university libraries. We named the project IMPEL, the Impact on People of Electronic Libraries, and in the first stage concentrated on the impact on library and related support staff. The complementary study focusing on users began in 1996 alongside longitudinal studies of library staff.² The initial research team at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle comprised myself as head of a 'library school', needing to anticipate the changing needs of professionals in order to prepare students with the right kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the future; Graham Walton, a Faculty Librarian in our converged Information Services Department and working at the sharp end of the changes; and Catherine Edwards, who joined the team as Research Associate from a newspaper library, the Northern Echo, where she had been responsible for training journalists to use an online newspaper archive, and later developed training materials to support the launch of the first UK newspaper to be issued on CD-ROM. We now have a team of eight working on an expanded project under a national programme to promote electronic library development, eLib.

eLib: the Electronic Libraries Programme

We began our IMPEL study in November 1993 as an eLib project, just as the Follett Report on UK academic libraries was published. This committee had been set up at a time of growing crisis in UK higher education, stimulated by problems which, reduced to their simplest, were founded on the increasing demand for higher education against a background of escalating costs. The Electronic Libraries Programme, eLib, is funded under the JISC umbrella, bringing senior academic librarians on to a powerful committee formerly dominated by computer experts, sending a strong message to the academic community that libraries are changing and putting university libraries in the spotlight as never before. It is giving academic librarians in the UK the opportunity to radically reshape the future pattern of information service delivery. Librarians are being both pulled and pushed to think about electronic libraries. They are pushed by problems such as overwhelming quantities of information and inadequate funding, and pulled by the opportunities of more accessible networks and more affordable computers. Yet librarians as a profession are not known for their vision and dynamism; care and caution are more likely epithets to use. How, then, is the academic library community coping with change that some feel has been thrust upon them? If successful, the impact of the eLib programme will be far reaching and will affect electronic information delivery throughout the academic world and beyond. The IMPEL investigation, therefore, was carried out in an increasingly volatile situation, where change, which would have happened incrementally as more electronic sources became available in the marketplace, was being fueled

by the UK government's response to a crisis in funding of traditional print based collections and the expense of building yet more libraries to house them.

Key issues in the management of change

To state the obvious does not in itself lead automatically to change at either an individual or organisational level. There are many management change theorists, each with different advice on how change should be managed effectively. The one factor on which they all agree is that people in organizations generally resist change, and that the more bureaucratic an organization, the more difficult it will be to introduce change smoothly. Please think of a significant change in your own organization, e.g. the introduction of electronic mail as a way of communicating. How did you react? How did your colleagues react? The common pattern we can expect is that of some people making faster progress than others, and some actively opposing the implementation of change even when formally agreed. For change to be effective, all parts of the organization must reach the implementation phase. How can we encourage staff to accept change positively and shorten the timescale? Which are the key issues in the management of change?

There is no 'one way' to manage change effectively

What the IMPEL investigation is showing is that there is no one way to manage change, even where one would expect institutions to have the same general mission - university libraries. The 'right' way depends on a complex mix of social, historical, cultural and economic issues with a unique balance in each case. In particular, the 'soft' or cultural issues, the impact on staff and users,

eLib

In a library context, the rise in costs of library materials, particularly journals and a falling percentage of total funds allocated by universities to their libraries could be seen next to the opportunity costs of investing in new technology as a way of delivering information more cheaply to users. Not surprisingly, this influential government report from the Higher Education Funding Councils of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland predicted an electronic future for university libraries and was followed by the establishment of FIGIT, the Follett Implementation Group for IT, and the launch of the three year Electronic Libraries Programme, eLib. 12 million pounds sterling was made available to fund projects in seven programme areas: document delivery; electronic journals; on demand publishing; digitization; training and awareness; access to networked resources; supporting studies.

Its objectives include the use of IT to:

- improve delivery of information through increased use of electronic library services;
- allow academic libraries to cope better with growth;
- explore different models of intellectual property management;
- encourage new methods of scholarly publishing.

An eLib Information Pack is available from Chris Rusbridge, Programme Director, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK. WorldWideWeb pages for the eLib Programme are accessible at <http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/elib/>.

must be paramount, particularly when the change is technology driven.

Strategy and leadership

Particularly when change is rapid, the need to take a strategic view and share it with all parts of an organization requires clear vision and leadership. The style of leadership may be different, not least depending on personality, but ability to share the vision is essential. This leads on to the most essential feature of well managed change.

Communication

This must be in all directions, up as well as down, horizontal within groups as well as vertical. We have said that resistance to change is inevitable especially amongst longest serving staff, and time must be given to allow staff to understand the reasons for change and to accept the need to change themselves. Techniques found useful to do this include focus groups, bringing together a group of people who have different perspectives on a problem, who would not normally work together. The focus group is guided by an outside leader to explore the problem in a structured way and reach a constructive conclusion in a given time. Clearly written policies and procedures are important, and give people confidence that change is being thought through, but are not in themselves enough.

Partnership

Working in teams, in partnerships, rather than in isolated specialisms is becoming the norm. Some degree of convergence of libraries with computing services in universities is inevitable if electronic information services are to be delivered effectively, but it does not mean that the services must merge. Operational convergence while retaining separate organizational structures can work effectively as long as there is mutual respect and trust. This can be achieved through working on joint projects, joint training programmes, equal status on committees - any activity which leads to better understanding and shared strategic organizational goals.

Support for change

All of this suggests maintaining a supportive climate with managers ready to explain, listen, repeat, advise, be patient... it all takes time and good communication! Timing, method and frequency of the message is as important as the content. There needs to be the right balance between openness and honesty and overwhelming people with information.

Staff development

An essential prop in that support is training for new

roles; identifying training needs and providing opportunities to gain the necessary knowledge and skills. Changing attitudes is more difficult - some would say difficult in individuals, impossible in groups. This is where new entrants to the profession have an important part to play.

Professional education

'Library schools' should now be preparing students for a career in which change is the norm, knowledge and skills will be updated constantly, and there is a positive attitude towards change as a challenge and opportunity, not a threat.

A radical approach to managing change

Sheila Corral, librarian of Aston University, Birmingham while we were carrying out our IMPEL work and now librarian of Reading University, was faced with a substantial budget cut requiring a 25 per cent reduction in staffing. By having a clear strategy for the library service, a commitment to Total Quality Management allied to a team approach and participative style of management, they were able to realize significant advantages and opportunities and implement a complete reorganization. Her approach to managing change, based on the latest theories of human resource management, contrasts markedly with the traditional style of management typically found in large organizations, including academic libraries.³

A total organizational approach to change begins with strategic management and the development of clearly articulated strategies, marketing and business plans. Too rigid a planning approach to organizational change can, in itself, be a straightjacket in a turbulent environment - who now has 25 year strategic plans? Rather, to survive in this electronic age, planning needs to provide a framework for rapid decision making and, above all, support communication with all 'stakeholders' - funders, service partners, clients and LIS staff. Flexibility means authority to make decisions within the prevailing plans as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This in turn assumes 'ownership' of policies through participation in planning and objective setting, together with the confidence to accept responsibility for decisions taken.

At Aston, Service Level Agreements are used to market and target services to client departments more effectively, introduced within the content of institutional Total Quality Management (TQM). At my neighbouring university of Newcastle, the library was the first department in the university to introduce TQM as a vehicle for

change, culminating in the library being awarded the national Charter Mark for customer service, based on published standards.

These are just two interpretations of an overall approach to change which stresses involvement rather than imposition, and ownership and commitment by all levels of staff. Rather than power structures of command and control, reflected in vertical hierarchies and rigid roles and responsibilities, it generally leads to decentralization, devolution and flattened hierarchical structures. Individuals adopt more flexible roles. It is often driven by the need to reduce staffing costs through a more multi-skilled, flexible workforce. Flattening organizational structures will not in itself achieve the benefits outlined if *people* are not committed to working in more project-based, self-managed teams.

How can the change process produce the desired results? Modern human resource theorists, exemplified in Britain by the Institute of Personnel and Development, contrast the traditional-mechanistic model of *managing* change with the radical-dynamic model of *creating* change. In the traditional model attempts are made to manage change in an incremental, evolutionary and linear fashion within a systematic framework. The radical/dynamic view, based on chaos theory, '...rejects the notion of *managing* change as an incremental, evolutionary, linear and orderly process, and instead sees it as one of *creating* change, viewing it as inherently transformational, revolutionary, circular/spiral, and essentially chaotic - but ultimately productive and beneficial. Moreover, it implies the process is never-ending and attempts to match the future beyond the initial direction will be futile, if not counter-productive'.⁴

Conclusion

Human resource development concentrates on current duties and skills rather than potential roles and capacity for change. The change agent role moves from the expert auditing the current situation and recommending solutions to one of the facilitator supporting staff to develop problem solving techniques that can be readily transferred to dealing with new situations.

This does not mean that library managers abandon any attempt to plan and shape the future electronic library service just because the world is becoming increasingly unpredictable and unstable. On the contrary, the IMPEL findings based on over 300 in depth interviews of staff in over 27 institutions identifies successful leadership of libraries as a key factor in organizational development. In conclusion, today's information and library manager needs the imagination, energy and commitment to design an organization which moves from dealing with predictability to one that welcomes change.

This article is based on a paper delivered to a symposium on Management of change: 'inspelen op veranderingen in informatie-dienstverlening' organised by Johan Van Halm Information Consultancy and InfoManagement Adviesbureau voor documentaire informatievoorziening, Utrecht, 20 March 1997.

References

- ¹ Geleijnse, H. - Human and organisational aspects of library automation. - In: H. Geleijnse and C. Crootaers (eds.), *Developing the library of the future: the Tilburg experience*. - Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1994.
- ² WorldWideWeb pages accessible at www.unn.ac.uk/~liy8/impel2/impel2.htm for up to date information on project outcomes, with links to an updated bibliographic database of over 700 items on electronic libraries.
- ³ Corral, S. - An evolving service: managing change. - In: L. Dempsey and others (eds.), *Networking and the future of libraries 2: managing the intellectual record*. Proceedings of an international conference held at the University of Bath, 19-21 April 1995. - London: Library Association Publishing/UKOLN, 1995. pp. 45-61.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 58.

Some principles of managing change emerging from the IMPEL experience

- it takes time and effort
- you need to take a strategic view
- communicate:
 - the reasons for change
 - the potential outcome - scenario building
 - don't exaggerate the benefits
 - anticipate concerns
 - listen and respond
 - monitor the pace of change
 - link to service plans
 - treat people as individuals
 - be open and honest
- leadership committed to quality
- measure performance
- train staff for potential roles and develop their capacity to change
- work in problem solving teams
- involve the customer