Hildesheim University Library - User-Oriented Change Management

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Abstract
Major shifts within the German university system, the increasing number of students and staff, and the restructuring of the faculties at Hildesheim University necessitated a user-oriented change management at Hildesheim University Library in order to ensure high-quality services tailored to the users’ needs. This paper focuses on the major facets of the library strategy, elements of strategic planning and dynamic steering with regard to print and digital information resources, library spaces, communication, and outreach. Aspects of governance will include securing funds, establishing new partnerships, and developing shared initiatives on as well as off campus.

Change management, leadership, strategic planning and dynamic steering, university library, innovative technology, library spaces, partnerships and shared initiatives

1. Change Management
A major stepping stone towards success is the ability to overcome stagnation and to wholeheartedly accept the necessity for development and change. When changes seem the better solution they have to be initiated and managed, though. The term ‘change management’ originally refers to a process transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations to a future state in a business environment. In the 1970s and 1980s, management consulting firms started to spread what, according to Robert Marshak, a prolific writer on organizational change and development, soon lead to a “change management industry” (Marshak, 2005, p. 25). Undoubtedly, there were and are external reasons for hiring consulting firms. To give an example: in the late 1980s German companies had to deal with major political, economic, and social changes. They felt that they needed the support of specialists in order to pilot them through rough times and hired consulting firms. Even today large German companies like Deutsche Post DHL employ consulting firms to help them initiate and organize structural changes within the company. However, as Klaus Doppler and Christoph Lauterburg argue, in many cases a new company management deliberately hires “troops of consultants” (Doppler & Lauterburg, 2014, p. 91) in order to impose new methods and structures more to mark the new leadership than out of necessity.

In the mid-1980s, change management also became an issue in library and information science with proponents considering several models of change management. According to Dharm Veer Singh the models range from a “planned change model” (Singh, 2012, p.12), which emphasizes standardization, automation, and optimizing traditional workflows within the library, to a “technical imperative model”, where technology is the primary driver of changes in libraries, to a

1 In this case, the chief executive officer, Dr. Frank Appel, served as a partner of member of German Business Management, McKinsey & Co. prior to his start at Deutsche Post AG.
"punctuated equilibrium model" with the presumption of a state of steady stability or an equilibrium as the preferred condition for libraries, which is interrupted only by short and discontinuous phases of change. However, all of these models neglect the fact that there are no phases without any changes. Singh rightfully argues that change has to be perceived as an ongoing process and, moreover, as a process which cannot be meticulously planned at all times because changes do not necessarily happen in linear sequence. Changes can occur simultaneously in diverse areas which nevertheless all affect the library. Convincing as Singh theoretically sounds, a test case would help to support his claim.

Hildesheim University offers a good example of how a university library responded to major changes within the German university system. And what is more, it was a response that was equally stimulated by important developments on campus. The focus of this paper will not be on technological change and the impact of technology on library services, but rather on profound shifts in the academic environment. They were the stimulus for a user-oriented change management and thus the basis for a successful transition of Hildesheim university library.

The academic environment of German university libraries has changed considerably in recent years with strong impacts in diverse realms. The so-called 'Bologna Process' – named after the place it was proposed, the University of Bologna, with the signing of the Bologna declaration by Education Ministers from 29 European countries in 1999 – was initiated to ensure comparability in the standards of higher education qualifications. In a time and energy consuming process, the degree programs and degree requirements at German universities were re-structured. Bachelor and Master degrees were introduced in order to make the diplomas from German universities internationally comparable. Thus the 'Bologna Process' led to fundamental and long-lasting changes in the German university system in general. Moreover, the Initiative of Excellence of the German Federal and State Governments, which started in 2006 and has reached its second phase now, had a large impact on German universities. Its aims were to promote top-level research and to improve the quality of German universities and research institutions, thus heightening Germany's attraction as a research location, and making it more internationally competitive and focusing attention on the outstanding achievements of Germany universities and the German scientific community. In general, competition between universities in Germany has increased, and the presidential boards are looking for ways of creating a unique profile for their institution.

An important impact factor was the introduction of tuition fees in seven – out of 16 – German states in the fall of 2006. At all state universities in Lower Saxony students had to pay € 500 tuition per semester – which was not very much compared to other countries. But to students in Germany – and their financing parents – this was new and caused highly emotional debates. The universities welcomed this new financial source which allowed them to hire more staff, offer additional courses, and invest in their facilities. But they also had to deal with students demanding smaller classes, better equipped classrooms, and a better infrastructure on campus.

As a result, the competition on campus has heightened with regard to hiring staff, modernizing computers and network equipment, or renovating buildings and adding space. However, this also offered new opportunities for university libraries if they were willing to respond to the changes on as well as off campus. Working in a German university library today means to work in a complex and challenging environment with numerous changes in the academic world, but also in information and communication technologies, in the way information is being made available in digital and in print formats, and in serving your users' needs. Leading a library requires the ability to inspire and motivate its staff, to cooperate on and off campus, to gain support from the stakeholders on campus and – of course – from the presidential board, and to manage changes.

Since the presidential board at Hildesheim University put special emphasis on increasing the university's attraction to new students and to new staff, a user-oriented change management was the appropriate strategy for the library to support this development. The change management initiative was user-oriented in a twofold sense: first, the feedback from users was the starting point and, second, changes in the library services were tailored to the users' needs.
2. Hildesheim University
Hildesheim University has seen major changes during the past two decades. It became a Foundation under Public Law in 2003 – one of the first of its kind in Lower Saxony and in Germany in general – giving the university greater autonomy and responsibility. This was especially important when it came to hiring new academic staff and with regard to facility management. The university’s faculties were re-designed and their number increased. The degree programs changed as did the area of studies which might now be selected from the following fields: Educational and Social Sciences, Cultural Studies and Aesthetic Communication, Linguistics and Information Science, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Economics and Computer Science. Hildesheim University has been quite successful in attracting more and more students over the past years. Since 2002, the number of students has increased by 78 %, and the number of faculty by 60 %. Hildesheim University has fostered international collaboration and the attraction of international students. It received the European Quality Label in 2007 and again in 2011, the European Language Label in 2011, and was the sole German university to be honored by the European Union for its Erasmus success story in 2010.

The organizational changes at Hildesheim University coincided with and were partly triggered by the ‘Bologna Process’. One of the effects was and still is that the new degree programs allow students only little time for taking extra courses or for activities that are not required. The number of exams increased and so did the demand for study spaces on campus.

At Hildesheim University the students’ wishes were taken very seriously. A series of evaluations were organized, asking students to comment on degree programs and classes they had taken. The evaluations also covered the infrastructure on campus, like the library services for instance. These student feedbacks were very valuable for the library because they pointed at improvements that were necessary. Some organizational deficits were known to us, others were the result of the increased number of students and staff. We succeeded in bringing about a few service improvements on our own but it was clear that we needed support – and funds – from the presidential board of our university in order to achieve major improvements concerning the library as a learning space and extending our print and digital resources.

3. Hildesheim University Library
The ‘Bologna Process,’ the introduction of tuition fees, the increasing number of students and staff, and the restructuring of the faculties were external changes which had several effects on Hildesheim University Library. Erected in 1990, our library was not ready for a large number of users. It soon became very noisy in the library, and students demanded more silent areas and more group study rooms. The number of computers in the library were insufficient and so was internet access and WIFI in the library. Besides, students complained that they could not find the information resources they needed for their studies. And faculty asked for more and better support.

At our library we believe that we can make a major and visible contribution to the success of Hildesheim University; first, by listening to and understanding the needs of our users – and offering services tailored to their needs. Second, by using innovative technologies to improve our services. And third, by informing and alerting the presidential board of our university of new developments, opportunities, and risks.

The evaluation of the degree programs and the university’s infrastructure provided us with helpful hints as to what we should do better. Moreover, in meetings with representatives from the student body, the head of the library discussed how we could improve our services. However, a change process cannot be successfully planned, led and executed by one person

\(^2\) The 16 German states (Bundesländer) each have specific laws for their universities (Hochschulgesetze). The state ministries regulate which degree programs each university can offer, which new buildings can be built etc. In Lower Saxony six universities were transformed into foundations under public law in 2003 giving them more independence. However, these universities still are depending on state funding.
alone. Therefore the communication within the library was intensified, and a collaborative form of discourse was initiated. At regular meetings with the heads of the library departments, the director and his deputy discussed the evaluation results and the students’ propositions. We looked at service improvements that could be done with little effort and within a short time. In addition, the library departments were encouraged to suggest improvements on the basis of their daily experiences with the users. And they were encouraged to look at our library services through the eyes of our users. The idea was to make the library team think, think about what we could do differently and do better, but also what we should no longer do because the way we delivered a service had become ineffective or because there was no demand for a particular service anymore. Participation, communication, and collaboration became the important factors for the change processes that laid ahead of us. This approach, which Joseph Raelin called “leadership-as-practice” (Raelin, 2012, p. 9), soon turned out to be quite successful.

Soon the heads of the library departments noticed the increase in responsibility not only for their department but for the entire library. At the same time they were encouraged to play an active role in change management processes. In addition, communication between the different library departments increased which brought about more collaboration among the departments. New staff members working in more than one department contributed to the increase of collaborations within the library. Equally important was and still is the development of the library staff through training because in the end it is the staff that ‘lives’ by the values of the service. And it was important to adjust the way part of the staff was dealing with changes in order for them to perceive the library as an organization that is always in motion, and to perceive change as a process that can happen in different areas at the same time and that is ultimately endless.

Looking for ways of solving our problems, the heads of the library departments together with the library director intensified their monitoring of new developments in information and communication technologies, electronic publications, in regional and national library systems and coalitions. In addition, the new degree programs as well as structural changes at other universities were analyzed with regard to new library services. We were looking for ways to improve our services by improving our local library system, extending our print and electronic information resources, and to improve the library as a learning space.

The head of the library made sure the evaluation results were also important topics at several library committee meetings. This increased the support from the faculty. In addition, the library director started jour fixe meetings with the Chancellor of Hildesheim University, and had several meetings with the President explaining the library’s plans to improve its services. To achieve the goals the existing partnerships on campus were intensified and new ones established. Together with the university’s facility management, the library developed plans for a separation between the noisy social interaction areas for group work and the silent study areas in the library. The library worked together with the computer center to improve internet access and WiFi within the library. Since the number of foreign students had been increasing the library initiated a new collaboration with the International Students’ Office on campus. We started to offer introductory courses for foreign students and added library introductions in several languages to our website. Today we have information online in English, Spanish, French, Turkish, and Polish.

On the basis of a detailed deficit analysis we convinced the Chancellor and the President to allot extra funds for improving the library as a learning space and for extending our digital and print information resources. In addition, the opening hours of the library could be prolonged. We were able to hire additional staff members as well as more student helpers. A grant from a local bank together with support from the alliance of local retail stores enabled us to buy new furniture and introduce a library lounge for relaxation. Later we introduced new group study rooms and a quiet reading room many students had asked for. Grants from the State Ministry of Lower Saxony as well as from the Canadian and American Embassies allowed us to improve our print collections.

In cooperation with the university’s faculty we developed approval plans, which are the basis for electronic webshop book ordering. We collaborated with several departments on campus as well as with a book shop in organizing guest lectures in the library which still draws the attention of Hildesheim citizens and of people living in the Hildesheim area. The library is known as a
popular place of cultural events. This attracted many faculty members which brought about a new series of events: faculty staff presenting their new publications in the library.

Hildesheim University Press has been part of our library for more than two decades. Recently we hired a new editorial director for print and digital publishing to improve our open access services and to offer book on demand printing as a new service. The presidential board supports this initiative and made extra funds available for the new position of the editorial director. Besides, the administration of Hildesheim University’s central learning management system was moved to the library in the fall of 2014 including additional staff. This was another important step forward because a new area of activities became part of the library services. It is a strategic move in tune with the recent trend towards media convergence. Our databases and e-books are directly linked with the learning management system. And the learning management system now supports the use of tablets and smartphones. This is a nice synergetic effect because we had introduced the support of handheld devices for our local library system the year before.

4. Partnerships off campus
We also started shared initiatives and new partnerships off campus. The electronic webshop book ordering was introduced in close cooperation with a book vendor and with the center of the regional library network GBV in Northern Germany. GBV was also involved in a project which we did with Lüneburg University Library and a software company to develop a library app because the number of students using tablets and smartphones grew significantly. Meanwhile this app is being used by several other university libraries in Lower Saxony and in other German states. Moreover, at Hildesheim University Library we were the first library in Lower-Saxony to introduce the new version of the integrated library software system, which was the basis for a faster processing in the acquisition department and for introducing the webshop book ordering system.

We worked together with two regional companies to introduce smart home technology in order to improve the lighting, heating, and air conditioning in our library. Hardware was replaced, and a new software introduced which allows us to operate our heating system, our lights, and our air conditioning more efficiently. Faculty and students from the department of economics participated in this project as well as students taking courses in environmental sciences.

5. Conclusion
The successful transition of Hildesheim University Library was made possible by the firm belief of the library staff that we can and will provide services that are valued by our users. No less important were the following: the use of innovative technology to improve existing and to create new services, seeking new partnerships and start shared initiatives on campus as well as off campus. Collaboration with students, academics, the computer center as well as the International Student’s Office, and other libraries was also vital to this transition.

The change management process consisted of different phases, some of which happened simultaneously or, to a great part, at the same time. The effect was that we had to operate in “multiple phases at once,” as John P. Kotter, an expert and prolific writer on leadership and management, rightly pointed out (Kotter, 1996, p. 23). This posed a number of challenges to the library director as well as to the heads of the library departments because we were managing structured change processes on the basis of well-developed plans but had to improvise and customize our plans several times. So we actually combined two different approaches: systematic analyzing, planning, and steering of necessary changes as well as dealing with changes that occurred on short notice and which asked for improvising and re-designing the original plans. And another combination of opposite approaches was necessary: bottom-up as well as top-down decisions. For instance, new library services for improving the information resources were based on suggestions from staff members in the acquisition department. To be

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GBV is the Common Library Network of the German States Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Thüringen and the Foundation of Prussian Cultural Heritage.
the first library in Lower Saxony to implement a new version of the integrated library software system which allowed for more efficient workflows in the acquisition department was decided upon by the director of the library. Establishing new partnerships off campus, increasing cooperation on campus, and the integration of the university’s central learning management system was also part of his strategic planning and dynamic steering.

Major external changes were the starting point for evaluating and partly re-defining our library services in order to meet our users’ needs. The library became an innovative and reliable partner on campus, and it gained more visibility. Receiving the award for the best services on campus in 2013 from the presidential board was an honor and an acknowledgment that we were on the right way. And the support still continues: recently, considerable funds were made available by the presidential board of Hildesheim University for the renovation of the library’s entrance and book circulation area. New group study rooms as well as an instruction room for teaching information literacy tutorials were added to the library in an adjacent building earlier this year. This was the first extension to the building since the present library was opened in 1990.

In order to keep the library staff involved in the change process and as part of his cooperative leadership style the library director introduced a new forum for exchanging ideas on how we can improve our library services in 2015 and 2016. These meetings are open to the permanent staff as well as to the student helpers working in our library, so everyone can participate. Each meeting focuses on a topic which was identified by the heads of the library departments and the library director as important for the advancement of our library services. Now we are in a phase of internal service evaluation which will lead to changes that originate within the library. However, the people who use our library, physically or online, remain in our focus. So the user-oriented change management still continues.

References


