Great Expectations: Leading Libraries Through the Minefield of Continuous Change

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Great Expectations: Leading Library Staff Through the Minefield of Continuous Change

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Welcome to this Lively Discussion, “Great Expectations: Leading Library Staff Through the Minefield of Continuous Change.” My name is Denise Novak and presenting with me is Corey Seeman. We’re going to talk about CHANGE for a few minutes and then we’d like to hear from you since this is a discussion.

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”
—Andy Warhol

Every one of us in this room has dealt with change. Whether in our personal lives or at work, change is the one constant in our lives. I would like to talk to you about five factors of change, which influence how we manage and deal with change in the workplace.

Nature of Change: How We Try to Control Change

Change is a part of our lives both internally in our private lives and externally in our work or other outside forces. How we handle that change lies within our own personal experience. These changes may be low-key and easy, or challenging and stressful. We may meet change with acceptance and grace, or with anger and resistance.

Change transpires when we decide to make/accept change. This means we move from the passive state of just watching how things unfold to taking some action that enables us to utilize the change to create an outcome of our own choice. Shifting our focus from what happens (the events themselves) to what we do with what happens is another way to describe transition. Ultimately, the way we make change is our personal choice and responsibility (Brenner, 2011).

An obvious example of change that I think we can all agree with is moving to a new ILS system. This transition is usually welcome but at the same time challenging. The outcome is a better system for all constituents; getting there is not so easy.

The Process of Change or the Mechanisms Involved in Change

Every change effort should be accompanied by an action plan. Sometimes there will be a project manager who will direct the trajectory of the change. Although each action plan for change will be unique, all plans should follow a basic structure: (1) identification of a course of action; (2) designation of the authority, responsibility, and relationships that will drive the change efforts; (3) determination of who will lead the change effort and the specific roles and responsibilities of these individuals; (4) a description of the procedures and processes that will expedite implementation of the change; (5) identification of the training that will be required to enable people to incorporate the change into their work processes; and (6) identification of the equipment that will affect the way work is accomplished (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

Many, if not all changes come from the leadership of the organization. These changes come to the rest of the organization via e-mail or a meeting. It is up to the middle managers to garner support from their staff. However, a common misconception about carrying out a change is that it must be directed from the top. The foundation of successful change management lies in involving the people who will be affected by the change.

Three years ago, my institution made the decision to move to a new ILS. Prior to that decision, I talked to my team about moving to a new Acquisitions/Serials module, and I arranged to have some demos for my staff that would inform them about what new technologies were out there. Suddenly, after receiving an e-mail from the dean of the University Libraries, the demos became full-fledged exhibitions of entire systems from several companies. All staff attended the demos and we were asked for our input prior to a final decision, which was made by the leadership of the University Libraries.

Role of Change: The Key Roles in a Change Project

Communication is so very important in a change project. Communication must reach the staff in a personal way. Staff need to know what is happening, why it's happening, and how they will be affected during and after the change has been implemented. Communication may be facilitated in many ways. Oral and written communication along with tutorials are ways to disseminate information.

When we began the move to the new ILS, an implementation team was appointed to work with the vendor's implementation team. As a part of that team, I knew I would want to keep Acquisitions and Serials staff informed and ready to test the system.

The Culture of Change: How the Organizational Culture Affects Change

What the library values as an organization builds and shapes this culture which in turn molds and prescribes members' actions. Culture can impede or facilitate change, unite or divide members, and cause the library to achieve or fail at its mission. For these reasons, organizational culture is an important concept for librarians to understand. (Martin, 2012)

Organizational culture is a set of shared values and beliefs that are learned and all-encompassing. The learning of culture can occur through formal training programs within the organization as well as through

informal means such as stories told during the morning coffee break and advice given in the hallways between meetings. Maybe the most common way to learn about and understand organizational culture is through the expression, "That's how we do things around here." Culture shapes the beliefs of organizational members and creates bonds that unite them. Organizational culture may be created over a period, and while it is durable and long lasting, it can change, albeit slowly, over time. It may also be a jarringly rapid change such as when a new library director/dean comes on board or in the rapid implementation of a new ILS. We were given six months to implement Alma/Primo VE. That's not a very big window of time.

Organizational culture is not a "one size fits all" concept. No "correct," "proper," or "standard" organizational culture exists; culture is derived from the history of the organization and, in order to be considered healthy, must allow the organization to achieve its mission. Since the external environment plays an important part in the success and failure of an organization, the culture must also allow the organization to relate and adapt to the surrounding community.

And Finally, the Participation of Staff: Getting Staff Involved and Creating a Synergy

To me, this is the most important aspect of change. Without the buy-in of staff, change is very difficult and stressful. Some tips to help support staff during change are:

1. Set the expectation of ongoing change with all employees.
2. For every change, create an honest, positive, accessible, and compelling vision of the intended outcome.
3. Be specific about why and how the change will be implemented.
4. Openly discuss the pros and cons of the proposed changes.
5. Listen to staff concerns about the change.
6. Help your staff to manage fear.
7. Celebrate or recognize the good work that has been done.

“Change before you have to.”

—Jack Welch

In summary, change is happening to all of us every day. We have to be flexible and ready to accept change before it happens.

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Further Reading

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