

Saddling the Whirlwind: Exploring the Organizational Culture of a Hybrid Library

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Abstract

Catalogers at the Wichita State University Libraries never complained about a lack of work. Their working lives have been always full with daily tasks and projects waiting for attention. Since 2000, the cataloging department has absorbed the selection and implementation of a new integrated library system, implemented an authority outsourcing project, cataloged e-journals (and decided outsourcing e-journal control was the better choice), and responded to personnel changes. Still, all of this was within the limits of traditional cataloging production and was directed by a hierarchical organizational culture. Now the work environment has changed! A library-wide reorganization has introduced “employee empowerment.” Empowerment has emerged as a method of customer service improvement in the business community, and has relevance for the library environment as well.

Being a “brick and click” hybrid library that offers clients a large variety of printed and digital services, the Wichita State University cataloging unit employs a “hybrid staff” that combines traditional librarianship knowledge and skills with formation of technology skills. The empowerment initiative, however, affected the professional catalogers and cataloging staff in different ways. Professional librarians received the previously unthinkable freedom to initiate projects, to build teams for the implementation of new and enhanced services, and even to choose their coordinators and middle management. Catalogers/faculty, as members of the newly formed Library Faculty Council, became participants in a library-wide decision-making process. Together with expanded freedom, faculty also received new responsibility for decisions they made. New freedoms and responsibilities did not involve all staff members, however. Entry level/routine copy cataloging positions and student assistants continued to be organized in a more traditional hierarchical structure where copy catalogers were supervised by professionals or cataloging managers, and student assistants were supervised by experienced paraprofessional staff. The split “hybrid organizational culture” was formed!

Observing the performance of hybrid organizational culture in the cataloging unit for less than a year, one can make some preliminary conclusions. “Team” culture allowed hidden talents to emerge and opened opportunities for people who embrace innovation and exploration. In a short time, a number of new projects and initiatives were initiated, developed, implemented, and offered to cataloging clients. All three professional catalogers became heavily involved in new

metadata and other departmental and library-wide projects. Professional cataloger involvement allowed new services to be introduced without additional personnel or expense. Staff members, especially senior copy catalogers, undertook additional assignments previously performed by cataloger-professionals. Traditional strengths of the hierarchical organizational culture (discipline and structure) helped staff cope with increased workloads and kept routine cataloging activities in good shape. Major tasks of processing the “brick” collections now are performed by the hierarchically organized support staff. Observation suggests a hybrid organizational culture in a cataloging environment can be used in the development of new services, but to play it safe, a more flexible “team” culture should be complemented by traditional “hierarchical” one.

Hybrid Library

When the term “hybrid library” first appeared in England in the end of 90’s, electronic library developers used this term to describe the new concept of the library. “A hybrid library is not just a traditional library (only containing paper-based resources) or just a virtual library (only containing electronic resources), but somewhere between the two. It is a library which brings together a range of different information sources, printed and electronic, local and remote, in a seamless way” (Pinfield). A hybrid library, according to this concept, is first of all an access provider, and only after that a collection owner. It directs printed as well as electronic resources to appropriate groups of users led by users’ preferences. Some users may want to read books and browse the shelves. The other users prefer electronic methods of communications, multimedia products, and chats. A hybrid library serves users whether they are in-house or in remote location and provides to them appropriate services. To become a “hybrid library,” the new information environment should be built; the new environment should consist of a seamless mix of printed and electronic resources.

The University Libraries

The Wichita State University Libraries is on its way to becoming a hybrid library. Currently, it provides its clientele with a variety of electronic and printed services available on campus and off-site. The Libraries offer access to its 1.3 million monographs, approximately 3000 printed serials, 550,000 government documents, 155 databases and e-journal packages with over 13,000 e-journals, and more than 25,000 eBooks from the library website, catalog, electronic delivery services, ILL, circulation and reserve. But to build the new information environment, printed and electronic resources must be blended seamlessly, more services, both new and value-added, should be offered to users; diverse groups of users should be reached in more precise and direct ways; new technology must be implemented in all areas of the library; the library as a space should be enriched and become a more attractive place with regards to the needs of the diverse library clientele.

Library Reorganization

It was noticed from the beginning of the development of hybrid libraries that:

[F]or universities, a range of key management, organizational, personnel and training issues are involved. There are significant implications for the roles of

support staff, which are bound to change even further, and for ways to organize, locate and develop relevant support staff. In addition, structures and procedures are needed to manage the process of change itself from the current structure of library service provision to the new hybrid environment. (Pinfield et al.)

For the last two years, the Wichita State University Libraries have been in a reorganization period with the goal of transforming the Libraries into a flexible, dynamic organization driven by empowered employees, “an adaptive enterprise.” This goal is hard to reach within the limits of the traditional library organizational culture. Traditional values: productivity and quality, stability and predictability support operational activities very well, but are not so active in initiation of new services. The dynamic organization needs to reward creativity and initiative and to support employees in their efforts to find the solutions to new problems brought by the changing environment. Employees must be confident that they will be given support to take risks and make significant decisions. The organizational structure should be flexible and allow the free flow of information and improved communication between units. The organizational culture of such enterprises should include collaboration, team work, a spirit of unity, a high level of involvement in the organization, and active support of and advocacy for its goals and mission.

Employee Participation

The initiative to increase employee involvement into decision making came from the Libraries administration. The new Dean initiated a review of the organization within the first year of his arrival in September 2003. Rather than making all decisions from the top, the Dean asked representatives of the faculty and classified staff to review the current organization, to look to the future, and offer ideas for change in the Libraries organization. The task force worked for several months and solicited ideas from the rest of the Libraries faculty and staff. This group made a series of suggestions and offered their ideas to library personnel in an open forum. Some of the suggestions met with great approval, others did not. The task force allowed a period of comment from their colleagues, and then revised some of their recommendations. More drafts of the plan were submitted for comment, and at the conclusion of this period the task force submitted a final revision directly to the Dean, who approved the presented model of the Libraries reorganization with a few minor modifications. All existing library committees, except those required by the University, were dismissed.

The new primary policy recommended organ, the University Libraries Faculty Council, was created. The Council, comprised of full and part time faculty and administration, and chaired by the Dean, holds meetings monthly. The similar organ, University Libraries Allied Professional Association, was created to address staff concerns and issues. University Libraries Administrative Council, chaired by the senior Associate Dean was created to direct operational activities of the Libraries. Some additional task forces were created to address specific issues, and the rights to create additional teams as needed were given to Associate Deans, Chairs, and both Councils. The Dean reserves his right to issue an executive order for cases not covered by existing policies (for the period of two months). This decision making structure is strong and flexible while at the same time providing a balance of strategic, executive, and day-to-day operational management of the Libraries.

Reorganization of Cataloging Department

The Cataloging Department participates actively in the library-wide reorganization. The goal of the Cataloging Department in the library reorganization is to:

- Provide access to traditional resources, plus accommodate new kinds of formats or information sources;
- Respond to even more diversity in our user community;
- Meet traditional faculty needs but also expectations of new faculty used to a great variety of electronic resources;
- Support a constantly changing student population (students who have only known the presence of the Internet, but also more traditional students who may be less comfortable in an electronic environment)
- Address the needs of our local community and distance researchers worldwide

In the process of reorganization, the Cataloging Department was renamed Metadata Services. Its organizational structure was flattened.⁴ The principal Cataloger assumed the leading position as Coordinator of the Department, reporting to the Associate Dean. Professional catalogers and lead support workers became more active balancing their operational and project activities on different levels, such as small units (e.g. Music and Media area; Processing Area, etc.), department, or library-wide involvements.

Professional catalogers received the opportunity to lead teams and to explore new aspects of their librarianship roles. Their workflow shifted toward initiation, development, participation and coordination of various projects. The Metadata Cataloger was hired to assume responsibilities for digitization projects. A Special Project Cataloger joined the Department. Metadata Services became more actively involved in the management of electronic resources and non-MARC cataloging. Several important projects were initiated including among others: record enrichment initiatives; electronic theses and dissertation program (ETD), and the implementation of an Open Access digital publishing database of works authored by University employees. The newest "OPAC re-design" project involves professional catalogers of the department. Faculty from different departments work together in various projects. In several cases, the administration appointed faculty as coordinators, or chairs of committees. Senior faculty and administration help junior faculty to obtain confidence with their new assignments when previously coordinators often were left to struggle with problems without administrative support.

Two Organizational Cultures

The new "team culture" made its first steps in the Metadata Services department. Ad hoc project teams are appointed by administration. Norms became less rigid, which is typical during

⁴ Similar changes happened in other university libraries technical services as well, see Bailey 307-329.

organizational change. Teams are formed to solve a particular problem. They bring together people with different skills, knowledge, and expertise. Charles Handy, in his Gods of Management, described the Athenian notion of team as creative “task culture,” participative management, and Apollonian “hierarchical culture,” or bureaucracy with his love of classical forms, systematizations, classifications, discipline, clearness, and order (Handy 34). Working in teams is different than working in a traditional cataloging production environment. Team assignments are given in general terms; details and direction are not determined; group roles are not defined; workflow is not formed; there is no reporting line inside the group except of appointed coordinator, or chair. But creative challenging assignments are usually more attractive than routine tasks and give people more satisfaction.

Today the library organizational culture includes both elements: traditional administrative hierarchy and empowered teams. Teams are directed to completion of the projects and the development of new services while traditional hierarchical units are responsible for operational activities. The presence of traditional management provides stability, which is very important during reorganization. “Team management” adds interesting projects and job satisfaction. Both segments are in balance, which helps to fulfill the library re-organization goals.

The new library organizational model has been in effect since September 2004. As soon as the new organizational model became effective, several important positive changes happened almost immediately. A Systems Librarian position had been on the books but unfilled for years – this position was filled. A need for an electronic resource librarian was voiced, and this position is likely to be the next “new” faculty member to come into the Libraries. Other issues are also being addressed – the Libraries are looking at using internal blogs to increase communication, and new faculty will serve in a primary department but will participate in another department’s activity a few hours each month to increase awareness of inter-relationships within the Libraries.

Conclusion

The way to become a genuine “hybrid library” is long and not easy. Often, we think about new technology and technological aspects of our work. When we talk about the human part of movement to the new information environment, we mention training and skills more often than anything else. We notice changes in clientele faster than changes of ourselves. In this paper the authors wanted to bring attention to the changes in our working environment, in ways we organize, how we communicate, and how we “do things.” We wanted to bring attention to organizational culture of hybrid libraries, which is changing with us and changing us. These changes are the important aspect of success of our endeavors toward the genuine “hybrid library.”

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