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Anchoring Change: Using the Kotter Change Management Framework to Analyze & Facilitate Change in Academic Libraries

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Anchoring Change: Using the Kotter Change Management Framework to Analyze & Facilitate Change in Academic Libraries

FLORIDA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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COLLEEN BOFF

Monograph Project

- Boff, C. & Cardwell, C. (forthcoming in 2020). *Leading change in academic libraries.* Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries.

    - 20 stories written by librarians in the US and Canada

    - 2 and 4 year institutions; public and private

    - Groupings: strategic planning, reorganization, culture change, new roles, technological change

Use of Kotter within Library Literature

- An examination of the Kotter model in the context of other long term change models (Farkas, 2013; Smith, 2011; Novak & Day, 2015)

- Case studies where library administrators use the Kotter model mostly to analyze library wide change after the fact (Fox & Keisling, 2016; Horn, 2018; Wheeler & Holmes, 2017; Sidorko, 2008)

- Librarians actively using the change model to transform certain functions in their library such as creating a culture of assessment (Carter, 2014; Farkas, 2013) or reorganizing a department (Hackman, 2017)

Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press

1. Establishing a sense of urgency

2. Creating the guiding coalition

3. Developing a vision and strategy

4. Communicating the change vision

5. Empowering broad-based action

6. Generating short-term wins

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

- Contributing authors used this framework to analyze change AFTER it occurred!

Stage 1:   Establishing a Sense of Urgency

"A majority of employees, perhaps 75 percent of management overall, and virtually all of the top executives need to believe that considerable change is absolutely essential." (Kotter, 1996. pg. 48)

Stage 1:   Establishing a Sense of Urgency
(findings from our stories)

HIGH CRISIS

- Unanticipated turnover in Library Administration

- Unexpected staff layoffs

- Mandates from University administration

OTHER REASONS FOR CHANGE

- To respond to user needs

- To align structure with direction

- To break down silos

- To foster better communication

- To centralize functions

- To streamline workflows

Stage 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 40)

- no visible crisis
- ample resources
- lack of rigorous performance standards
- a rigid organizational structure that focuses on job functions
- irrelevant or ambiguous performance outcomes
- insufficient performance feedback from external sources
- a culture that avoids confrontation
- refusal to acknowledge problems
- too much happy talk from senior management

Stage 2:   Creating the Guiding Coalition

Four key characteristics to consider when putting together guiding coalitions:

- Position power

- Expertise

- Credibility

- Leadership

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 57)

Stage 2:   Creating the Guiding Coalition
(findings from our stories)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Are the appropriate people at the table?

- Volunteers vs. appointments

- Team building

- Importance of middle managers

- Conduits between multiple teams

- Size of team

Stage 2: Creating the guiding coalition

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 59)

- Lack of trust

- No common goals

- People with big egos

- People who undermine the change process

- People who are reluctantly on board

Stage 3: Developing a vision and strategy

Vision—a central component of all great leadership (Kotter, 1996, pg. 68)

- Imaginable-a picture of what the future looks like

- Desirable-appeals to long term interests of stakeholders

- Feasible-realistic and attainable

- Flexible-allows for initiative and multiple responses

- Communicable-can be explained in 5 minutes

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 72)

Stage 3: Developing a vision and strategy
(findings from out stories)

THEMES ACROSS STORIES

- To improve the user experience
  - To improve workflows
  - To respond to changing needs
  - To align structures with new roles

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Library leadership is needed at this point in the change process
- The role of outside consultants

Stage 3: Developing a vision and strategy

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 81)

- Rushing through this stage

- Lack of team building within guiding coalition

- Lack of buy in from the guiding coalition and staff

- Complacency

Stage 4: Communicating the Change Vision

Kotter (1996, pg. 90) suggests following these key elements when communicating:

- Simplicity

- Multiple forums

- Repetition

- Lead by example

- Explain inconsistencies

- Two way communication

Stage 4:   Communicating the Change Vision
(findings from our stories)

TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION METHODS

- face-to-face meetings with individuals or with groups

- presentations to stakeholders

- newsletter and email updates

- sharing documents through some type of intranet to keep staff informed.

Stage 4:   Communicating the Change Vision
(findings from our stories, continued)

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Brand communications specific to change initiative

- Consider one-on-one communications when anxiety is high

- Buy-in may be expedited through participatory methods, though it may take more time

- Write a communication plan

- Communicate a focus on the future rather than a focus on past failures.

- Agree upon communication strategies and expectations with consultants beforehand to ensure an uninterrupted stream of communication with stakeholders

- Explore ways to bolster communication if multiple teams, committees, or working groups are in place simultaneously or if one team is handing work off to another

- Consider hiring a dedicated communication and marketing expert if resources permit

Stage 4: Communicating the Change Vision

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 90)

- Under communicating

- Vision is too complicated

- Staff can't easily recall the vision

- Guiding coalition is not on the same page

- Mixed messages

Stage 5:   Empowering Broad-Based Action

The biggest obstacles to transformative change are

- Structures

- Skills

- Systems

- Supervisors

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 102)

Stage 5:   Empowering Broad-Based Action
(findings from our stories)

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Anxiety	Burnout
Staff morale	Frustration
Buy in	Reluctance

Stage 5: Empowering Broad-Based Action

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 115)

- Employees don't understand/care about vision
- Unaligned structures & systems block needed action
- People feel disempowered without the right skill sets
- A bad boss can be a big blow to morale and to change efforts
- Not enlisting others to be involved

Stage 6:   Generating Short-Term Wins

Short term wins need to be

- Highly visible to many people in the organization

- Unambiguous

- Clearly related to the change effort

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 122)

Stage 6:   Generating Short-Term Wins
(findings from our stories)

SOME EXAMPLES

- Merged/eliminated service points, functions, units
- Small changes to organizational structure
- Defined projects with action steps
- Renovation of staff spaces

- Changed position descriptions
- Conducted user testing
- Pilots
- Relationship building

Stage 6: Generating Short-Term Wins

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 125)

- Lack of systematic and sufficient planning to gain short term wins

- Paralysis due to being overwhelmed

- Management lacking skills to orchestrate change

- Lack of commitment to change efforts by management

- Short term wins that are perceived as gimmicks

Stage 7:   Consolidating Gains & Producing More Change

Kotter recommends keeping change going by doing the following:

- Use the credibility from short term wins to tackle more change

- Include more people in change efforts

- Leadership should stay focused on providing clarity and maintaining urgency

- Project management from below

- Reduce/eliminate interdependencies

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 143)

Stage 7:   Consolidating Gains & Producing More Change *(findings from our stories)*

EXAMPLES

- Onboarding new staff

- Moving forward with new projects

- Increased collaborations

- Testing new workflows

- Celebrations & rewards

- Implementation of new organizational structures

- Growing new programs

- Changes in culture

Stage 7: Consolidating Gains & Producing More Change

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 132)

- Resistance creeps in

- Old culture rears its head

- Celebrating too soon and losing sense of urgency

- Leaders getting in the weeds

Stage 8:   Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

"Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement. Thus, most cultural change happens in stage 8, not stage 1."

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 156)

Stage 8: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture *(findings from our stories)*

We saw evidence of professional development, training and continuing education taking place at all levels including management and leadership!

Stage 8: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Threats

(Kotter, 1996, pg. 148)

- Changes are not anchored firmly in group norms and values (i.e. CULTURE)

Conclusions

IMPLICATIONS

Areas for further exploration

- Vision setting

- Dealing with barriers to change

New positions & skills are necessary!

CHALLENGES OF USING KOTTER AS TOOL FOR ANALYSIS

- Written for corporations, not higher education

- Not as linear of a process as Kotter suggests

- Assessment is not integral

- More "how to" needed at some stages

"Using the Kotter eight stages of leading change as an analytical tool has made it possible to see that the change initiative at West Virginia University Libraries to create a sustainable and permanent WVUL_VOP [Veterans Outreach Program] is on its way toward real success." Carroll Wetzel Wilkinson

"Library organizations are extremely complex and subject to completely unforeseen forces (e.g. a leader's death). Despite Kotter's framework, bringing about change can be difficult to institute within a precise and logically laid out model. Humans are complex creatures, and that complexity is evidenced daily as an organization evolves and confronts both planned and unexpected changes." Diane Klare & Melissa Behney

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