

Analysis

Culture Change

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Libraries

Florida State University (FSU)

Northern Arizona University (NAU)

Rice University

University of Manitoba (U of M)

Introduction

Each of these stories takes place at a large, public R1 or R2 university, one of which is in Canada. It comes as no surprise that culture change related to library employees is at the heart of these stories since people are central to a culture in an organization. Some aspect of public service unites these examples, from an emphasis on library users at Rice University and NAU to repurposing the work of employees at the other two institutions. The common thread among these stories is how to serve stakeholders or users better while breaking down silos among employees and library departments. What differs from institution to institution is the degree to which employees embraced these changes. Culture changes at FSU and U of M took place across multiple libraries, whereas the changes in culture at NAU and Rice primarily took place in a single library.

I. Warm-up Phase

STAGE 1: ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF URGENCY

The catalyst for change at three of the four institutions in this category was intentional and part of a broader planning process. Strategic planning was a driving force for culture change at NAU, where newly crafted mission and vision statements clearly put engagement with users at the forefront of library operations. Strategic changes to the wider Research and Learning Services (RLS) division were driving change at the STEM libraries at FSU. However, the library administration specifically called for a task force to examine modes of communication in the library at Rice in response to strategic planning at the university level. Although culture changes at these three institutions stemmed from hunches that they could do better for their users, the changes at U of M were in response to a much more urgent and dire situation. Services to patrons were in jeopardy due to unexpected staff layoffs. Library employees at this last institution were

dealing with low morale, fear, and anxiety to a much greater degree than employees at the other institutions where entry into culture change was much more gradual.

STAGE 2: CREATING THE GUIDING COALITION

Except for U of M, new leadership was at the helm of these change stories. The guiding coalition at FSU was a collaboration between a new associate dean of the library-wide RLS division and the STEM library director. Together, they crafted a much-needed position for a STEM data and research librarian, who was hired from within and quickly became an integral part of the guiding coalition. Together, this team of three led the change until the STEM library director took a position elsewhere and the STEM data and research librarian became the director. Library administration at NAU hired in the talent they were seeking to support their change. They selected a head of user services, who had oversight for the new User Experience (UX) Group with library-wide representation. Though the guiding coalition at Rice consisted of members of the existing marketing and customer service committee with fairly broad library representation, the drivers behind the customer service program that this group worked on were the new access services manager and the organizational and development manager, another recent hire who worked in human resources. The guiding coalition at U of M consisted of two head librarians from the three largest libraries in its library system. Trusted to do so, they stepped up to lead others through the chaos. Their library administration approved their plan to find ways to reduce hours the library was staffed, increase staff during peak hours, increase support to librarians, provide more fulfilling work for support staff, and improve morale and work satisfaction.

STAGE 3: DEVELOPING A VISION AND STRATEGY

As the result of a larger library-wide FSU strategic planning process, the STEM libraries were charged with increasing the level of service provided to scholars as a major opportunity and as their top priority. A STEM library committee was formed to work on this, and through the Balanced Scorecard process, they decided to raise awareness of library services and programs to their community, build relationships with stakeholders, and increase outreach to international students at the undergraduate level. They also wanted to continue the momentum with a few emerging initiatives. To do this, they needed to centralize some of the day-to-day access functions of building operations with the main library as part of an RLS-wide reorganization. In a similar vein, the team at U of M was trying to get a handle on staffing issues related to day-to-day operations and in support of user needs. Their vision was to create a sustainable support staff model—one built on collaboration and designed to support student success and the librarians. The guiding coalition wrote a staffing proposal that called for a tiered model where staff would be moved to peak hours during the day. During less busy times, private security guards would provide oversight of the library. They sought and got approval from deans and department heads within the library and external to the library as well. Phase 1 of their plan called for a pilot in one of the libraries to expand the hours but reduce the staffed hours. Phase 2 called for giving support staff fewer desk hours and more meaningful work to offset librarian loads. In phase 3, they replicated what they had tried in the

pilot with the rest of the libraries. The vision at both of these institutions was to change the roles and responsibilities of individual employees in order to create a culture where employees felt that they were moving forward with new initiatives and going beyond the routine operations of keeping the doors open.

At NAU and Rice, the vision and strategy were centered around the creation of a new assessment approach at the former institution and a new customer training program at the latter. Employees were skeptical of efforts to shift the culture because of earlier attempts or ingrained habits that suggested significant barriers. The dean and new head of user services at NAU created the vision, which also served as the charge for the guiding coalition. The group worked together to explore the design-thinking process, learn more about their users, and establish some guiding principles specifically around making their website more accessible. The working group at Rice had a similar trajectory in that they set about their work through the development of personas for each of their customer stakeholders. After they created a vision statement, they divided into smaller groups and started to build content that eventually served as a custom-built, institution-specific training manual.

STAGE 4: COMMUNICATING THE CHANGE VISION

Readers will find typical communication strategies in these change stories, such as presentations at staff meetings, department visits, email communications, intranet posts, and newsletter updates. A few unique approaches are important to highlight. In their charge, the leadership at NAU specifically referred to the UX group as consultants. This careful wording was intentional and signaled to staff that members of the UX group were partners and collaborators rather than decision-makers. At Rice, the planning team communicated customer service exemplars by actively modeling them in their daily interactions with others. Finally, at U of M, the two heads created a communication plan, which was especially important given that infrequent communication in the past contributed to the morale problems the team was trying to remedy. This team also stressed the importance of contextualizing communications by reminding employees of how changes are related to appropriate library and university planning documents.

II. Introducing New Practices Phase

STAGE 5: EMPOWERING BROAD-BASED ACTION

FSU and U of M experienced similar barriers when making changes to staff responsibilities. The employees at U of M seemed to have higher levels of anxiety due to recent and unexpected layoffs. From a leadership perspective, the two head librarians expressed frustration with delays because they lacked the authority to make decisions autonomously. Other frustrations included staff wanting to revert to old ways of doing their jobs and having to contend with vacancies. Some librarians at U of M were reluctant to delegate some of their responsibilities for fear of becoming obsolete and losing their jobs too, while librarians at FSU were uncertain of what to do with the time they gained from not having to do the daily operations. At FSU, the librarians are now expected to engage with department faculty for 25 percent of their job responsibilities, yet these engagements were not well defined.

The UX group at NAU began to change the decision-making culture at their library by conducting usability testing with users to make small changes to their website. The user became the decision-maker for changes rather than the staff, who were used to following a more hierarchical decision-making process. After a few successes, they began to gain confidence in this approach to website changes. At Rice, the customer service team gained confidence by piloting their training with the leadership team, who responded positively to the experience with a few minor suggestions for improvement.

STAGE 6: GENERATING SHORT-TERM WINS

In spite of the turmoil taking place behind the scenes at U of M, the student response to increased access to the libraries was positive. The head librarians leading the culture change at U of M were able to get some of the support staff position descriptions reclassified, which resulted in equal or higher compensation. Perceived inequities among employee groups were diminishing, and job satisfaction and morale were increasing. At FSU, work-life balance for the STEM librarians was better now that they did not have the burden of keeping the facility open with too few librarians. Their individual appointments and instruction increased, and they were able to hire two new STEM librarians to further their mission to engage more meaningfully with department faculty.

The UX team at NAU created personas of their various users to ensure they understood their users. They also solicited feedback from staff and users about their suggestions for changes to the website. This information was used to design the usability studies. Most of the changes they made to the website were small and aesthetic, but all changes were informed directly by users. Rice's short-term wins included a successful pilot of the training session with library administration and a high participation rate for the training session they conducted with staff. In spite of failed attempts in the past to conduct customer training, the reaction to their custom training materials was positive.

STAGE 7: CONSOLIDATING GAINS AND PRODUCING MORE CHANGE

After many short-term wins that amounted to improved service and employee satisfaction, the head librarians at U of M have begun working with employees to move away from traditional tasks and toward new initiatives. STEM librarians at FSU embraced a spirit of continual evolution, a change in their culture, as they are finding concrete ways to collaborate with others on campus. They have reviewed more positions and have a commitment to rework vacated positions in support of the new service model and culture.

With a few successes under their belt, the UX group at NAU split into two subgroups: UX-Web and UX-Spaces. The former group agreed to collaborate with campus ITS to be early adopters of their new CMS while also migrating to a new discovery layer, ultimately resulting in a complete overhaul of the library homepage. They continued their work with the user at the center of decision-making. Through focus groups, they defined key services that should be readily available on the newly designed website. The UX space group gathered input about the physical library from users by placing whiteboards throughout the library and asking for comments. They also conducted a

library mapping exercise with users. They learned that they needed to improve signage at the point of service within the building rather than solely relying on students to go to a website for details. Just as UX was becoming the cultural norm to facilitate change at NAU, the culture was changing at Rice too. All new library staff at Rice are expected to take the customer service training within three weeks of starting.

III. Grounding Phase

STAGE 8: ANCHORING NEW APPROACHES IN THE CULTURE

The culture at FSU continues to evolve as the STEM librarians discover new ways to serve the faculty and students. They are even beginning to collaborate with librarians in other disciplines. Silos are eroding at U of M, and teams are beginning to form organically and tackle new initiatives. A culture of distrust and uncertainty has been replaced by one where employees feel that they meaningfully contribute and that they are safe to offer new ideas. Though upskilling and reassignments are still in progress, consistent and contextualized communication has begun to change the culture at U of M.

The customer training program at Rice was successfully implemented and delivered with the expectation that newcomers will engage with the materials. The team has plans to offer refreshers, too. Orchestrating change through the lens of the user has altered the culture at NAU, from one where decisions were made through a traditional hierarchical structure to one where decisions are made faster, with user input, and without fear of reprimand for failure. NAU's UX team thought they would have benefited from hiring a consultant to help them with UX methodology, but one could argue that a team of people learning through short-term wins and small failures was beneficial and helped them build community. They also anchored this new approach by hiring and training student employees to serve as user experience assistants to help them gather data.

It is also worth noting that department name changes—to User Services and Experiences Department at NAU and to STEM Research and Learning Services at FSU—signaled that these new approaches were becoming rooted in their culture.

Analysis and Conclusions

A common complaint among contributing authors about the use of Kotter's model is that libraries are not typically competitive entities like businesses, nor does change happen in a linear fashion as he describes in his model. The authors of the change stories in this category referenced these same criticisms. FSU pointed out that their change is still underway. It is safe to say that this is likely the case for the other institutions as well. U of M emphasized the importance of Stages 1 and 2, as does Kotter. Their mantra of consistent and contextualized communication served them well as they emerged with a much stronger culture. NAU gives credit for their success to their exploration of UX, their creation of a new organizational structure to support it, and trusted employees who were able to run with their new responsibilities and deliver results.

TIPS FOR CULTURE CHANGE

It comes as no surprise that the tips in this section focus on people and their interactions internally with the library and externally with users.

- The librarians at Rice stress the importance of modeling the type of behavior they wanted to see from library staff. They sent thank-you notes to participants, sent follow-up emails to those who participated in their customer service training, and continued to reinforce the material offered in their training. Library staff at FSU and U of M exhibited fear and anxiety throughout the change process as they transitioned away from historical organizational structures and processes, even though those structures and processes were unsustainable. Both institutions report that their staff members experience better work-life balance and a better work environment now that they have implemented new approaches to meet the needs of a service-based library. It may be helpful if change leaders help people understand how change can improve their experiences in and out of work when they let go of historical approaches.
- Barriers exist between departments in a library as well as between a library and its external users. When breaking down departmental silos, change leaders should also consider ways to break down silos between libraries and their users. NAU accomplished this with its UX groups examining its website and physical library and allowing more nimble decision-making based on user needs.
- A theme throughout all of the change stories is a move toward collaborative, consultative decision-making and away from top-down decision-making. While it may require more communication and time, it helps people get on board and contribute to the change process. NAU went so far as to describe its UX groups as consultants who worked broadly across departments, not as decision-makers. Librarians at U of M also modeled the kind of consultative decision-making needed to implement the changes they desired.