

Change in Academic Libraries

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Institutions of higher education and academic libraries are no longer the traditional organizations they once were. Instead of being stable, predictable, and generally free from external influences, they are subject to a variety of forces, including shifting and changing populations, technological changes, and public demands for affordability and accountability.

In 2017, Ithaka S+R conducted a survey of 164 senior leaders and experts at colleges and universities, associations, research groups, and philanthropies and published the results in *Higher Ed Insights: Results of the Spring 2017 Survey*. Respondents were generally optimistic about higher education but had immediate concerns about the need to improve degree completion rates, the quality of student learning, and affordability for students. From their perspective, other significant changes in the educational landscape include federal policies affecting affordability, student financial aid, regulation of for-profit institutions, state support for higher education, protection of students at risk, and issues related to diversity, inclusion, and free speech.¹

In this climate, academic libraries can no longer establish their excellence and ground their missions, visions, and strategic directions using traditional means. Excellence in academic libraries was previously measured first and foremost by size, which required an organizational structure designed to support and manage the collections, not the user experience. Dempsey and Malpas contended that academic libraries are in the process of being shaped by changing approaches to research and learning in the context of their institutions and are shifting to a services-based model to support this transition. Elements of this new model include responsiveness to institutional needs and an emphasis on the user experience, flexibility, and collaborative work. In sum, the service-based model requires engagement. “Libraries are forging a new engagement-based identity which is not anchored in a building or a collection, but rather as a partner in the creative process of learning and research.”²

In 2018, ACRL identified the top trends in academic libraries that underscore the transition to service-based, engaged academic libraries serving local institutional needs and shaped by external political and economic forces. Academic libraries meet student needs by leading campus textbook affordability and OER initiatives; they meet faculty needs by supporting open access collection development and funding and supporting data management; they meet institutional needs by supporting learning analytics and data collection related to student success. All of these activities come with their own serious concerns that

need specialized attention. Librarians are engaged in ethical issues related to using student data to improve student success, copyright challenges related to the acquisition and use of data sets, and the need to leverage open and licensed content to increase affordability.³ Set against this backdrop of changing demands, academic library leaders need to create agile, flexible organizations that promote innovation and creativity.⁴

Dempsey and Malpas proposed that “articulating the new story” is essential as libraries transition from collections-based organizations to more flexible service-based institutions and become “partner[s] in the creative process of learning and research.”⁵ With twenty change stories from a variety of institutions and on a variety of topics, this book responds to their imperative to tell new stories about academic libraries.

A Framework to Analyze Change Stories: Kotter’s Eight-Stage Process of Leading Change

This book contains a collection of change stories authored by academic librarians from different types of four-year institutions. Librarians tell the story firsthand of how they managed major change in processes, functions, services, programs, or overall organizations, using Kotter’s Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change as outlined in his book, *Leading Change*.⁶

Numerous change management models exist,⁷ but Kotter’s is relatively jargon-free and offers enough complexity to afford substantive analysis of the change process. Credible, research-based studies substantiate it as a highly regarded model. Its eight stages can be grouped into three phases. Note: The terms *model* and *framework* are used interchangeably in the literature for Kotter’s process. Readers will find that is the case in this work.

WARM-UP PHASE

1. **Establishing a sense of urgency.** According to Kotter, “establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation.”⁸ He asserts that in order for change to take root, approximately 20 percent of the organization needs to go above and beyond the call of duty to make change happen⁹ but that approximately 75 percent of management needs to grasp this sense of urgency.¹⁰ He also contends that a major reason change fails is due to complacency among the staff. Complacency settles in for a variety of reasons. Chief among them are the following: absence of a major crisis, too many resources, low performance standards, an organizational structure that focuses staff too narrowly, internal measurements that focus on the wrong performance outcomes, “a lack of sufficient performance feedback from external sources,” low confrontation culture, denial that there is a problem, and “too much happy talk from senior management.”¹¹
2. **Creating the guiding coalition.** According to Kotter, teams are important in change leadership, but the members of the team must have the right position titles, expertise, credibility, and combination of leadership and management abilities.¹² He stresses the need to avoid putting staff on the team who have big egos, who will undermine the change process, or who are reluctantly on board.¹³ He also stresses the need to build trust among the team members and to establish common goals.¹⁴

3. **Developing a vision and strategy.** Kotter defines a vision as “a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future.”¹⁵ While he outlines a visioning process, he asserts that the guiding coalition should be responsible for creation of the vision and that the vision should convey “a direction for the future that is desirable, feasible, focused, flexible and is conveyable in five minutes or less.”¹⁶
4. **Communicating the change vision.** When it comes to communicating change, Kotter argues that leaders typically under communicate at a time when staff have the most questions. He suggests that the best strategies for a guiding coalition to follow are to keep the change message simple and easy to recall by employees, repeat it often, and most important, for everyone in the guiding coalition to be on the same page and to send a consistent message.¹⁷

INTRODUCING NEW PRACTICES PHASE

5. **Empowering broad-based action.** This portion of Kotter’s change model is about removing barriers that are preventing employees from engaging with the shared vision of change. These barriers can come in the form of the organizational structures that are in place, not having the appropriate skills in the organization, not having the right systems in place to get the job done, or having ineffective people with positional power.¹⁸ The barriers with employees can be addressed through professional development, reorganization, and active involvement in the change process. He also suggests the importance of addressing issues with managers undercutting the change momentum.¹⁹ Investing in the right tools, especially in libraries, can move change initiatives forward as well.
6. **Generating short-term wins.** In order to hold the attention of employees in the organization, Kotter explains that short-term wins need to be evident within the first six months of the change initiative. Timing matters, and so does the quality of the “win.” These accomplishments need to be highly visible to those who work in the organization and should be directly related to the change at hand. These changes don’t need to be extensive, but they need to demonstrate forward momentum.²⁰
7. **Consolidating gains and producing more change.** At this stage in Kotter’s change process, the guiding coalition assesses the smaller wins and increases the momentum of change by identifying larger scale changes that need to be made and by determining who else is needed in the organization to make this happen.²¹ Does someone need to be promoted or hired? Kotter underscores the importance of maintaining a sense of urgency for change at this stage and the necessity that project management be emphasized and shared with middle management. Kotter also stresses the importance of examining what he calls “interdependencies.”²² A good example of this in the academic library setting might be a call to question why certain data is being tracked if no one is using it or how a processing workflow could be streamlined.

GROUNDING PHASE

8. **Anchoring new approaches in the culture.** Because Kotter’s process follows a particular sequence,²³ he reinforces the importance of this stage coming last.²⁴ His rationale

is that employees within an organization need to see that the changes are superior to the old ways, but he also explains that it is important to frequently remind employees of these changes and to articulate what these changes are in order to actually change the culture.²⁵ Not everyone in the organization has a holistic view of the entire organization in the same way that a senior leader does, and employees need to spend some time with the new changes to be convinced of their value. He emphasizes the necessity of making staffing changes when continued, persistent barriers to change negatively influence the transformed culture.

AT A GLANCE

Kotter's Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change

Warm-up phase:

- Establishing a sense of urgency
- Creating the guiding coalition
- Developing a vision and strategy
- Communicating the change vision

Introducing new practices phase:

- Empowering broad-based action
- Generating short-term wins
- Consolidating gains and producing even more change

Grounding phase:

- Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Source: John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1996), 21.

Literature Review

Kotter's work on organizational change began with an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail."²⁶ It was so well received that he expanded the ideas in his article into his first book, *Leading Change*, published in 1996.²⁷ He went on to author five more books that delve deeper into the ideas expressed in his first article and book.²⁸ In 2012, Harvard Business Review Press released a second edition of his first book, with the addition of an updated preface in which Kotter describes the continued relevance and importance of the eight steps for managing and leading organizational change.²⁹

Use of Kotter's Framework in Academic Libraries

Kotter's change framework has periodically made an appearance in the library literature over the years, and growing evidence exists to suggest that it is gaining significant traction as a framework that has application within academic libraries. Some have used the framework

or an adaptation of the framework as a mechanism to guide change from the outset, while most have used the framework to analyze change after it has taken place. Farkas asserted that “Kotter’s model provides a pragmatic paradigm for change” and encouraged further use of the framework in the profession.³⁰ In a brief newsletter article, Pressley also encouraged librarians to rely on Kotter’s framework to propel change in their libraries. She provided two brief examples, one regarding digital scholarship and another regarding emerging scholarly communication practices.³¹ In Smith’s review of the library literature, he found that Kotter’s framework was often used by academic libraries, but he also highlighted Doppelt’s less frequently used Wheel of Change model.³² Novak and Day also found that Kotter’s framework seemed popular among academic libraries, as was Bolman and Deal’s four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—to analyze and advance organizational change.³³

Smith compared different organizational change models, but he did this alongside an examination of various organizational quality frameworks. He drew comparisons between these two sets of frameworks to summarize their commonalities. Smith went into a more in-depth explanation of Kotter’s change framework and Doppelt’s framework and presented similarities and differences between the two. Chief among them is that the progression of change in Kotter’s framework is linear while the progression through Doppelt’s framework is not. He also pointed out that both models are intended for use in the establishment of long-term change. To further explain these models in particular, he applied each framework to change at his university across many university functions, including the library.³⁴

Novak and Day examined the library literature related to reorganizations and determined that Kotter’s framework and Bolman and Deal’s reframing model were frequently used by librarians as roadmaps to implement or analyze change. They explained both models in their article and then created their own five-step change model based on overlap between the Kotter and the Bolman and Deal models. They then used the reorganization of their division at their library to explain the nuances of their five-step change model.³⁵

DEANS AND DIRECTORS LEADING LIBRARY-WIDE CHANGES

Fox and Keisling described their experience using an adaptation of Kotter’s model midstream through a large-scale strategic planning and reorganization change at their library at the University of Louisville. As the newly appointed dean, Fox began by aligning the strategic planning process with the university priorities, gathering some benchmark data from users, and creating a student advisory board. He learned that their spaces and services were outdated, which necessitated a space redesign and a reorganization of staff to provide the appropriate services to users. Fox and Keisling explained how they utilized a modified version of Kotter’s framework to overcome barriers and to root change in their organization.³⁶

Using Kotter’s framework, Horn relayed her change experience as the newly appointed university librarian at Deakin University Library. The sense of urgency for the change in her library came from the campus administration’s mandate to align library priorities with the university’s priorities and to meet new and more efficient budget targets. These mandates were officially part of the university’s operational plan. Because of this, the staff were already feeling a sense of urgency, but Horn made no assumptions and continued to communicate the importance and necessity of this change. She established an executive leadership team and her guiding coalition of middle managers. As a way to build support, she included the team in planning, communicating, and demonstrating accountability. Key outcomes of these change

initiatives included structural reorganization and changes to core client services. As a staff, they stopped some activities while initiating others. This approach resulted in eliminating some positions, retooling the skills of staff, and creating new positions. While all aspects of change were not complete at time of publication, they had conducted some assessments to gauge user and staff satisfaction, both of which were positive.³⁷

Wheeler and Holmes used Kotter's framework to explain their change initiatives as new directors at two different medical libraries. Though neither stated that she actively used the framework for change initiatives at her library, the framework provided a common language for both directors to describe their collaboration and communication with their staff to establish initiatives, including the creation of an internship curriculum, nontraditional reference services, digital systems, informatics initiatives, and much more.³⁸

Sidorko employed Kotter's model to analyze change that had already taken place at the University of Newcastle in Australia. The university's vice-chancellor provided a sense of urgency by asking for an investigation of "better co-ordination in the areas of library, information technology, teaching and learning skills support, educational technology and class room services." These units operated in silos with varying degrees of service quality, which was impeding progress toward the university goal of "expanding choice on what, when, where and how people learned."³⁹ The guiding coalition included the heads of the three largest units, which were IT, the library, and the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching. The three directors wrote a report that recommended the development of an "information and educational support unit," the combination of all five units involved in the change process.⁴⁰ The director of the IT unit was appointed director of the new division and was tasked with integrating the work of these units while involving the staff to create the shared vision and strategy for change. The director provided open forums, scheduled regular staff meetings, and held workshops that brought staff together in new ways. The first barrier to staff empowerment was getting all the members of the newly formed single unit to work together. The second barrier the director dealt with was redundancy in staffing when the various units merged. Among the short-term wins were library staff getting IT training, the development of a division-wide charter that defined service expectations, and merging library and IT help desks. Failures were prevalent as well and surfaced in the form of change weariness, culture clashes among staff in formerly siloed units, and prevailing cynicism. In spite of continued wins, ultimately the grounding of these changes never came to fruition due to a larger university mandate that shrank staffing levels and dissolved the newly formed unit.⁴¹

CHANGE RELATED TO A SPECIFIC LIBRARY PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE

Carter and Farkas wrote about Kotter's framework in the context of assessment. Farkas mined the library literature as well as the scholarship published in higher education, organizational behavior, and change leadership to establish ways to create cultures of assessment regardless of positional authority. She described Kotter's framework as a mechanism to outline a strategy to change behaviors toward assessment in libraries.⁴² Carter used a case-study approach to describe the change efforts at Auburn University Libraries to incorporate course-integrated information literacy assessment into the library instruction program with seventeen librarians. Though the libraries did not use Kotter's framework as they set out to create a culture of assessment, Carter used the framework to describe their three-year change journey in response to Farkas's challenge to librarians to use this framework more often as a mechanism

to describe change in academic libraries. Auburn spent the first year in phase one of Kotter's model. With support from the library administration, the guiding coalition consisted of the library instruction coordinator and three other librarians with varied perspectives and rank on the instruction team. A sense of urgency emerged externally from the library when the university added information literacy as a general education goal. The guiding coalition decided to emphasize with the staff the opportunity for professional development rather than just fulfilling the need to gather data for assessment initiatives. The guiding coalition decided to focus on one learning outcome at a time and to use a combination of authentic assessments and informal classroom assessment techniques popularized by Angelo and Cross. These decisions kept the guiding coalition focused during its small-group planning stage and also served as its vision. Over the course of approximately one year, the guiding coalition developed, tested, and actively used these assessment techniques among the four members before they entered into the two-year implementation phase and started communicating the vision to and preparing resources for the staff in formal meetings and presentations. Participation, at first, was voluntary to give staff the latitude to experiment. Then the guiding coalition required all seventeen reference librarians to try at least two informal assessments from a prepared LibGuide. With positional support from the library administration, the guiding coalition added instruction assessment to the formal evaluation cycle so that individuals could set areas of improvement for the following year. Librarians were then asked to expand assessment efforts the following term to also include two formal assessments. Phase three is still underway, but the librarians at Auburn are now generating their own assessment instruments and actively discussing what they have learned from their assessment efforts, and they know that assessment is there to stay.⁴³

In a case study, Hackman described how Kotter's model was actively used and adapted to reorganize the Resource Sharing and Access Services Department at the main library at the University of Maryland. Thirty-two staff members worked together to increase efficiency, staff engagement, and user satisfaction. Instead of beginning with an external or internal sense of urgency, active, direct, and clear communication propelled this change. The primary goal—to more fully integrate staff and services from two other units into the Resource Sharing and Access Services unit—was communicated and included the Information Services department and its Learning Commons department. As a result of this communication, the staff had the opportunity to address multiple issues related to the recent mergers: duplication of effort, competition for resources, overstaffing in some areas, understaffing in other areas, and staff skills mismatched with patron demands. The guiding coalition consisted of department heads and coordinators with supervision responsibilities. This group developed five goals as its vision: the integration of three departments into one, sufficient staffing at two public service desks, elimination of redundancies and improved efficiencies, a better understanding of staffing needs to make the most of staffing resources, and ways to build skills among staff. As part of communicating vision, staff were asked to annotate their job descriptions and to keep detailed logs of their work for a two-week period. Staff were also expected to participate in an interactive retreat with additional activities to elicit staff input. This provided the guiding coalition with the data it needed to generate some short-term wins. These included the development of a new department name and a new organizational chart complete with unit descriptions. Next, staff in each unit were empowered to work in small task forces to develop specific workflows for their areas of responsibility. Department heads updated position descriptions, and the change work was shared and communicated to the wider library audience. Once the

changes were rooted in the fully integrated department, efficiencies surfaced, such as improved turnaround times for course reserves and document delivery. Hackman credited the success of this ten-month process to the high levels of trust among staff members but admitted that the latter two stages are still evolving. He pointed out that Kotter's steps are not linear, nor is there much guidance on how to assess the change experience.⁴⁴

A review of the library literature substantiates the use of Kotter's change model within the library setting. An examination of these articles informed the editors and contributed to their approach in shaping this book.

Process for Soliciting, Accepting, Organizing, and Analyzing Change Stories

The editors distributed the Call for Proposals (Appendix A: Call for Proposals) to several email discussion lists, including acrframe@lists.ala.org, collib-l@lists.ala.org, and ili-l@lists.ala.org. Originally, the focus of the volume was on change stories in four-year institutions in the United States, but it was later expanded to include community colleges as well as institutions in North America.

The response to the call for proposals for this project was overwhelming. The editors received approximately 120 proposals and accepted twenty-three, twice as many as originally planned. They selected chapters based on the quality of the proposal as well as the subject of the change story as a way to balance and shape the collection. The editors asked authors to follow very specific directions for the chapters (Appendix B: Information about the ACRL Monograph Project) to facilitate analysis across chapters. While twenty-three proposals were accepted at the outset, twenty chapters were submitted in the end.

The editors reviewed the first draft of each chapter and, for the second and final submissions, asked the authors questions when more information or clarification was needed. Originally, the chapters were limited to 3,500 words, but in the end, authors indicated that limit was too restricting. The word limit then became 5,000 words. Using the second drafts of the chapters, the editors carefully examined the change stories in each category to identify patterns across each of Kotter's eight stages. The editors used only the information that the authors provided in their chapters for analysis and did not search beyond it for further explanation or clarification. In sum, the editors stress that this volume is not intended to be a critique of the institutions; rather it is intended to use Kotter's model as a tool to help others learn about best practices, common obstacles, and more.

Organization of the Library Change Stories

The chapters fall into one of five broad categories: strategic planning, reorganization, culture change, new roles, and technological change. Contributors come from a variety of public and private higher education institutions of all sizes.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Academic libraries strive to meet the evolving needs and missions of their home institutions. Strategic planning provides an opportunity to lay the groundwork and set goals to meet those needs. Kevin Messner and Lindsay Miller at Miami University Libraries analyze

middle management's role in implementing large-scale, library-wide change after a new strategic plan was complete. At Montana State University, Kris Johnson, Kenning Arlitsch, and David Swedman, along with Martha Kyrillidou, QualityMetrics, LLC, write about their collaborative, holistic approach using the Balanced Scorecard process to plan and map progress. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Michelle Brannen, Regina Mays, and Manda Sexton formed a team charged with formally tracking the libraries' strategic plan and advancing priorities through communication, incentives for participation, and assessment. Diane Klare and Melissa Behney at Wesleyan University recount difficult moments in their libraries' history and the need for program and external reviews to help them envision a new future. Their libraries' efforts created the foundation for a collaborative, bottom-up approach to planning and a renewed confidence in the libraries, particularly from upper administration.

REORGANIZATION

Reorganizations have become common practice as libraries downsize, grow, or change leadership. Miami University Librarian Aaron Shrimplin and brightspot strategy consultants Elliot Felix, Adam Griff, and Emily Kessler explain how a design-thinking strategy helped Miami revise its organizational structure and adopt a "safe-to-try" philosophy rather than one based on perfection. Doug Worsham, Allison Benedetti, Judy Consales, Angela Horne, Nisha Moody, Rikke Ogawa, and Matthew Vest present their team-based, collaborative efforts to centralize the User Engagement division across multiple locations at the UCLA Library. C. Heather Scalf and E. Antoinette Nelson from the University of Texas at Arlington relay their experiences aligning the library with their institution's strategic directions and developing a singular vision for a major library-wide reorganization at a large R1 institution. Julie Garrison and Maira Bundza describe ways the Western Michigan Libraries reorganized a more traditional, collections-based library into one focused on the user experience.

CULTURE CHANGE

Four chapters comprise the culture change section. Renaine Julian, Rachel Besara, and Michael Meth at Florida State University explain their approach to rethinking their unit's daily work in order to increase effort related to engagement with users. Andrew See and Cynthia Childrey at Northern Arizona University present a solution to moving beyond siloed departments by implementing and instituting two cross-departmental user experience groups, one focused on user experience in the physical library and the other on the web experience. Susan Garrison and Jeanette Claire Sewell at Rice University write about creating an intensive homegrown customer service training program after realizing that a more general human resources approach to professional development did not meet their needs. Emma Popowich and Sherri Vokey at the University of Manitoba Canada present their library's approach to creating a model that involved librarians and support staff who needed to revise their work after a major reorganization and budget cuts.

NEW ROLES

Changing the focus from collections to engagement requires new roles for librarians and library staff and provides new opportunities to interact with users. Neal Baker, Kate Leuschke

Blinn, and Bonita Washington-Lacey at Earlham College report on an intensive two-semester information literacy program for first-generation college students. At the University of Florida, Laurie Taylor and Brian W. Keith write about a program designed to make the library a “laboratory,” where graduate students in a variety of disciplines have opportunities to explore alternative career paths. Gary W. White and Yelena Luckert write about the transformation of the University of Maryland library liaison program, which now includes a framework outlining new and emerging responsibilities. Carroll Wetzel Wilkinson at West Virginia University Libraries focuses on a collaborative program that promotes success for student veterans.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Against this backdrop of change, libraries contend with and benefit from technological transitions. At Stephen F. Austin State University, Jonathan Helmke, R. Philip Reynolds, and Shirley Dickerson recognized that their institutional repository was far too expensive to host approximately thirty documents and that the IR could be far more robust. Their efforts successfully increased the number and type of materials now hosted in their IR, making their investment worthwhile. Jeffrey Graveline and Kara Van Abel discuss a merger of libraries at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which required the revision of two individual library websites into one unified presence. Jennifer O’Brien Roper and her colleagues Jeremy Bartczak, Jean L. Cooper, Christina Deane, Mike Durbin, Kara McClurken, Elizabeth Wilkinson, and Lauren Work present efforts to improve cross-departmental workflows for digital projects at the University of Virginia Library. Sara Byrd, Richard Stringer-Hye, and Jodie Gambill recount their collaborative efforts to remove barriers and improve communication for all staff at Vanderbilt University Libraries.

Readers will find an analysis written by the editors after each category of change stories, which serves to highlight opportunities, barriers, strategies, common threads, and differences among the stories. For quick access, they will also find in Appendix C: Summary of Resources Used across Change Stories a list of resources the contributing authors used during their change process. Those resources include data sources, readings, frameworks, names of consulting companies, activities, and various tools used.

Conclusion

In sum, authors of these change stories report that change at their institutions was not as linear as the process outlined in the Kotter model. However, the model provided a common framework for the authors to examine change at their own institutions, measuring their successes and areas for improvement, and, in the end, determining whether they were making progress. All of the institutions included in this volume have made some visible progress.

These change stories, taken as a whole, confirm that change is difficult but possible. The authors address some common challenges faced during the process—fear, anxiety, change fatigue, complacency, unexpected changes of leadership, vacancies, and resistance. Many authors found that their perseverance led to a better work-life balance for staff, along with renewed engagement with users, technology, and library staff. Several authors report that their libraries now embrace flexible, nimble, collaborative, and, perhaps most important, safe-to-try and fail philosophies and decision-making processes. This mind-set facilitates the transition from legacy collections-based libraries to forward-looking service-based libraries.

Notes

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23. Kotter, *Leading Change*, 1996, 23.
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