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Reorganizations: An Interview with Staff from the University of Arizona Libraries

Joan R. Giesecke

The University of Arizona is in the midst of a major reorganization as the library changes from a traditional organizational structure to a team-centered, user-focused organization. At the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Los Angeles, I had an opportunity to meet with a group of librarians from the University of Arizona who are actively involved in the change process. This was not a traditional interview, but more of a conversation with ten members of the library staff who spoke jointly about their experiences with the reorganization of their library. Answers reflect the comments of the group members; individuals are not identified as I found that the group really spoke as a group, finishing each others thoughts, expanding on answers, and describing their experiences. The answers didn't necessarily follow the order of the questions, so a bit of editorial license has been taken to create some order out of the conversation.

Involved in the interview were Carla Stoffle, dean of libraries; Cecilia Knight; Carrie Russell, undergraduate services team; Chestalene Pintozzi, science engineering team; Jeanne Voyles, team leader for materials access team; Mark Winston, undergraduate services and the social sciences team; Doug Jones, team leader of

the science engineering team; Janet Fore, team leader of undergraduate services team; Shelley Phipps, assistant dean for team facilitation; and Bob Diaz, assistant to the dean for staff development, diversity and recruitment.

Q. *Let's start at the beginning. Why did you decide to reorganize the library?*

A. An assessment of changing factors in the environment (rising serial prices, a pattern of yearly budget cuts, the implementation of an integrated library system, etc.) was leading us to rethink how our services and work processes were organized. When Carla arrived as dean she thought it was the right time to look at how to structure for the future. The committee formed to begin looking at this issue was very forthright in questioning whether Carla had a specific outcome in mind, but she assured them she didn't and wanted the self-study process to determine the structure. At the beginning, no one foresaw the actual structure that evolved. All levels of the staff had influence on the final structure.

Q. *Then how did you begin to examine the organization?*

A. A Steering Committee of three staff

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Clockwise from seated left front: Carla Stoffle, Bob Diaz, Chestalene Pintozzi, Mark Winston, Jeanne Voyles, Shelley Phipps, Janet Fore, and Carrie Russell.

and seven librarians was formed to begin looking at the organization. They started with a two-day workshop for the Steering Committee and the Librarians Council (department heads) facilitated by Susan Jurow of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Its purpose was to design a self-study process for the organization. The committee began with a conceptual session and asked, "If you could start all over, what would the library look like today?" How can a library move from a collection-centered approach to a user-centered approach? The committee was looking at the macro questions. Once a general design was developed, other groups would be formed to look at the micro issues.

The Steering Committee built on the work of task forces that had been looking at service issues before Carla arrived as dean of libraries. An Access/Ownership Task force had looked at the question of ownership and access. It had gathered input from the campus, conducted focus group sessions with users, developed cost data, and recommended studying the structure needed to support access to information in addition to ownership of material.

The Steering Committee sought staff input and incorporated staff ideas into the vision that resulted in the final model. The committee held an open house for all library staff to gather input and comments about the ideas that were

being developed. Common themes were identified and the committee developed two major design possibilities. These were presented to staff for input and then presented to the Administrative Group for a decision. At that point, Carla asked the committee which design they preferred and told them to go with that.

Q. *Now that you had a macro design for the organization, what happened next?*

A. Four design teams were formed to start looking at the detail of how to implement the overall model. These teams looked at Mediated Access (such as reference services), Direct Access (such as circulation and cataloging), Integrated Services (all services that impact the whole library such as outreach and planning), and Library Support (which included the administrative office, budget, personnel). Each design team looked at key work activities, roles and responsibilities, communication links, and decision-making processes.

The design teams had four weeks to complete their work. It was really wild trying to get everything done in such a short time frame. The design teams looked for duplication of effort and ways to streamline the process. Each design team did a presentation of their findings.

From the design teams, an Operational Adjustment Team was formed to try to compile the ideas from the four design teams into one plan and make it workable. This group had to draw the organization chart and then try to allocate resources.

Once the chart was drawn we realized we did not have enough information to allocate resources, so we stopped and let staff react to the organizational chart. After gathering input, the group formed implementation teams to look at key work activities in each area and to determine how many staff were needed in each area. The result of this work was a combined recommendation that the library needed about 100 more FTE than they had to do everything they wanted to do. Since the library was not able to add more positions, the Operational Adjustment Team reviewed the data from the implementation teams and made allocation decisions based

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on resources available and on input from the teams.

Q. *Can you briefly describe the organizational chart you developed?*

A. The chart is now very flat. All teams report directly to the dean. Each team is organized with a specified customer orientation, e.g., a discipline focus or a general customer. The assistant deans are staff positions in support of a specific function or activity, e.g., Human Resources and Finance Systems or Team Facilitation. The actual chart shows the dean at the bottom in a support role for the organization. The Library Faculty Assembly and the Staff Governance Association have representation on the leadership group, the dean's cabinet, which also consists of team leaders (eight), assistant deans, and the Assistant to the Dean for Staff Development, Diversity and Recruitment.

Q. *How did staff find out what the implementation teams were doing?*

A. We held weekly meetings where each implementation team reported on their activities. These were open meetings and everyone was welcome. At times it was hard to get a seat at the meeting if you weren't on a team.

Q. *Which leads me to my next question: How many staff were involved in the teams?*

A. About 65 staff served on the implementation teams, and 110 were involved in the process in one way or another.

Q. *How did staff feel about the process as you went through these changes?*

A. Staff were initially skeptical about the process. Many did not think that it would result in a major or complete reorganization of the libraries. Moving to a user-focused approach and a team structure was very exciting for most of us, but these are fundamental changes in philosophy and, thus, are difficult.

There were lots of meetings and opportunities for input, but some people still see this as a top-down process. Many staff were not convinced that Carla would actually let them design the organization or make allocation decisions.

Q. *The process you have described takes a lot of time. How did you get staff to buy into the process?*

A. As more and more staff become involved in the actual work of the teams, more staff had direct input to the process. The open house concept helped gather input as well, where staff could see what was being proposed by each group and could comment on the plans. There's no question, though, that it took more time than we expected, and staff felt stressed from the time pressures.

But mostly, the organization was ready to work as teams. Staff development sessions on change and on working together had already been offered. We had talented staff who were ready to try new things. There was also a high expectation of participation by staff. Staff involvement was a cultural and organizational value here.

Q. *Most of us are not really trained to work in teams or to carry out a TQM analysis. What kind of training was provided?*

A. We did lots of training. Susan Jurow and Maureen Sullivan of ARL conducted a variety of training sessions. Each team received training before they began working on an assignment. Staff learned how to do data analysis, how to work in teams, and how to do group decision making. They also learned how to create flowcharts and fishbone diagrams.

We also benefited from training available on campus. As the university began developing a quality program on campus, the Department of Human Resources offered training that we could use. The university also provided stress-management workshops and helped staff learn to deal with anxieties and fears as the change process progressed. The university also established a working relationship with Intel Corporation for training and support as the university looked at TQM.

Q. *Speaking of the university setting, how has the university community viewed the change process?*

A. About six months into the library process, the university campus began to look into introducing quality concepts. This helped as the university administra-

tion began to understand what the library was doing and how the changes would affect the campus. The library is seen as a leader in this area as the campus moves in this same direction, although we are not a TQM library.

Q. *What do you still have to do to make this new organization work?*

A. All the changes are really focused on improving library service. We are still learning how to make a user-centered library function. We still have things to learn about how to adjust to change. We will feel better about the library as a place to work when we are doing a better job for our customers. By focusing on what's good for the customer, we will create a better working environment for our staff.

Q. *Have you used the processes developed to look at the reorganization for other activities in the library?*

A. Definitely. We have changed how we operate as a library. For example, in bringing up an integrated library system (ILS), we used the team approach and brought up the system in record time.

It is important to remember that this is an evolving process. We have agreed as a library to follow a set of values and principles in how we operate. We try to model those in everything we do. It is awkward and bumpy at times, but we have to keep at it if we are going to really change how we operate.

In fact, central to all of the change was clarifying organizational values, the values that will shape the organization. The staff as a whole needed to understand and accept the values and assumptions. We test and assess plans now against our values to be sure we are doing what we said we would do.

Q. *You are quite enthusiastic as you talk about the change process. In talking to others who may be thinking about changing their organization, what advice would you give them?*

A. First, each situation is unique. You have to find a process that matches your environment. What worked in Arizona may or may not work in another environment. The overall process is to find a structure and operating style that lets

you do what you need to do to provide quality service to your customers.

It's also a very hard process. There is a great deal of stress and anxiety. It takes time to reinvent an organization, more time than you would expect. You have to be willing to spend a few years implementing the changes; it won't happen over night. Reinventing an organization may sound great in the literature, but you do not get there the day you decide you need to change. It is a very long process.

It is also a little scary to think about how a customer focus changes how we view our work. Users and data will influence expectations rather than the librarians and staff defining the standards for service along traditional lines.

Job descriptions are different in a team-centered environment. The skills needed to work in this environment are different from the skills used in a hierarchical structure. Training is important; it takes time, but it is essential. Another change is to get staff to realize that they are responsible and accountable for their work on the teams. The teams are making decisions, not just making recommendations to be approved by the administration.

Finally, it's an evolving process. You can't dream up the plan and then implement it. You implement as you develop the process. It becomes very tricky to implement changes at the same time that you are trying to do the day-to-day work of the library. You begin to feel you spend more time in meetings than you spend doing "your job."

It is also important to celebrate successes, to set milestones along the way. It's a very long process, and you need to have signposts to show you are accomplishing your goals. You can't plan out every issue, every decision. You have to act, assess, be willing to make mistakes, and try again.

Q. *Final thoughts on the process?*

A. Although the change process is difficult, with major changes for each staff member, we have had some real successes. It is an evolving process. We are doing good things as we change our focus to our customers and to making decisions and plans based on data, analysis of needs, and the realities of our environment.

We have agreed as a library to follow a set of values and principles in how we operate. We try to model those in everything we do.
