
The Significance of Organizational Development in Academic Research Libraries

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ABSTRACT

MORE AND MORE ACADEMIC RESEARCH LIBRARIES are applying organizational development (OD) concepts in their organizations. The outcomes of focusing on and utilizing this management approach are described, including how OD has made significant differences in these libraries. To assess the current state of OD in academic research libraries, interviews were conducted in July–August 2003 with twelve individuals who have some part of OD in their job responsibilities or are library directors.

The approaches to implementing OD vary. In some organizations, it has been a complete library-wide undertaking, while in others the changes started in one or two units, sometimes with an overarching plan and sometimes with no intent to shift the entire organization. What is evident is that there is not a linear progression of OD from one step to another and it is a continuous process of change. Within the university structure, libraries have been given the leeway to be “different,” with the library becoming the focal point for demonstrating new ways to work in the academy. Most of those who have undertaken OD initiatives believe that their organizations would not be responsive or flexible if they had not committed to change.

As increasing numbers of academic research libraries are implementing organizational development (OD) concepts in their organizations, it is important to assess the results of focusing on and utilizing this management approach, as well as significant changes in these libraries due to OD. Because of the relatively new application of OD in the academic library arena, there is not an abundance of literature from which to draw conclusions

on the effects of OD in these organizations. To supplement the literature that is available, I conducted interviews in July through August of 2003 with individuals who have some part of OD in their job responsibilities or are library directors. These individuals were identified through several means: journal articles and books; participation in an OD online discussion group; and presentations at a series of conferences on organizational change in libraries.¹ Thirty-one academic libraries in North America and Europe were identified as having instituted some type of organizational change within the last ten years; of those identified, twelve individuals from nine libraries in the United States agreed to be interviewed.

The resulting list of interviewees is by no means a scientific sample since the total number of academic research libraries that are implementing some form of OD is not known. The interviews were conducted in order to create a sampling of the rationale, activities, and trends that OD represents in these libraries. The questions asked in the interviews appear in Table 1. Responses have been aggregated to form the basis of observations and conclusions in this article. The interviews were supplemented with publications describing libraries' forays into OD, and these are cited accordingly.

DEFINITIONS

There are many textbook definitions of OD, as well as many approaches to implementing OD. Over thirty years ago, Richard Beckhard published *Organization Development: Strategies and Models*, in which he notes

more organizational leaders have realized that it is not enough to carry out piecemeal efforts to patch up an organization problem here, fix a procedure there, or change a job description. Today there is a need for longer-range, coordinated strategy to develop organization climates, ways of work, relationships, communications systems, and information systems. . . . It is out of those needs that systematic planned change efforts—organizational development—have emerged." (Beckhard, 1969, p. 8)

In my research for this article I have found that academic libraries are

Table 1. Interview Questions

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1. Define organizational development as it is used in your organization.
 2. Why is organizational development a part of your organization? When was it initiated?
 3. What elements of organizational development are in place or in the planning stages?
 4. How have organizational development initiatives made significant differences in your organization, specifically in areas of individual (employee) learning and growth, internal processes, financial/budgeting, and customer focus?
 5. By what methods has your organization measured the success of these initiatives?
 6. What is your role in the organization? Do you see the organizational development position as necessary in the long term? How do you think it will evolve?
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using the term “organizational development” both in a formal manner, i.e., there are individuals or units in libraries that have OD as part of their titles, and in an informal manner when organizational development is part of an individual’s or unit’s function but the OD designation is not formally applied. Additionally, the term “organizational effectiveness” is being used in some quarters to connote a broader, ongoing initiative that is beyond the “development” stage. “Effectiveness” could also be viewed as a response to the economic climate, in that organizations have to demonstrate more accountability in order to secure dwindling resources.

The various answers to the question of how the term “organizational development” is used in an organization range from no definition, to systemwide engagement, to plans for the future. In more than one library the definition of OD is embodied in the work of an OD staff person, even if the larger staff population does not know or understand the term itself. Often OD is not understood as a succinct concept, even by those who are practitioners. There appear to be many pieces that make up OD; Table 2 contains some of the elements that contribute to the definition, as used in academic libraries.

The verbs used in Table 2 are intentionally in the active tense. What is apparent is that OD is a continuous process and, in many cases, a cyclical process. A definition of OD that has stood the test of time and captures most of these elements is that of Higgins: “a deliberate process of planned change which incorporates a long-range effort to improve an organization’s problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management of organizational culture” (Higgins, 1982, p. 333).

Table 2. Elements of OD

Putting decision-making closer to people doing the work.
Expressly understanding user needs and desires.
Improving group dynamics, organizational structure, and organizational culture.
Developing shared accountability and responsibility.
Learning how to work collaboratively and across hierarchies.
Building trust.
Being a flexible organization.
Improving processes.
Improving services to internal and external customers.
Making data-based decisions.
Developing performance management tools.
Designing and creating structures, processes, and systems that support the vision, goals, and values of the organization.

THE BEGINNINGS

Application of OD in academic research libraries appears to have begun in the early 1990s based on the published literature as well as those libraries represented in the interviews for which a starting date could be identified (ranging from 1993 to 2002). Several librarians were unable to pinpoint a specific year since the application of OD had been informal or evolutionary.

Given that businesses were implementing OD in the 1960s, we must ask what has taken academic research libraries so long to move from entrenched, hierarchical organizations to those demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to customers, often through flattened management structures? One answer may be found by looking to the larger organization in which most research libraries reside: the university. Charles Osborn has succinctly described the diverging paths of the research university and its library. He notes that "in contrast to overall university inertia, academic research libraries have established a recent history of initiating changes of the most fundamental kind" (Osborn, 1997, p. 246).

Several of those interviewed for this article stated that the library within the university structure was given the leeway to be "different." Directors and other library staff who have been successful in instituting organizational change have done their homework and have built strong relationships with key university administrators. In some cases, the library has become the focal point for demonstrating new ways to work in the academy. It is evident from a number of those interviewed, in particular library directors, that implementing a new structural organization within a university is not for the fainthearted. It takes the courage of conviction as well as support from university administrators.

Research into why academic libraries have moved to OD as a way to manage change in the organization revealed that technology has been the primary driver. In the preface to *Restructuring Academic Libraries: Organizational Development in the Wake of Technological Change*, Charles Schwartz states that "information technology in the 1990s is advancing more rapidly than our profession is prepared to assimilate the changes" (Schwartz, 1997, vii). At the time Schwartz conceptualized the book (1995), there were only a few articles in the literature that recognized that the demands of technology could not be met with traditional, hierarchical organizational structures.

What was discovered in the libraries surveyed is that technology is one of several drivers that has moved the organization to change. The economy as a driver was also evident in the responses to the question, "Why is Organizational Development part of your organization?" (see Table 3).

Most of the reasons for implementing OD are not mutually exclusive, that is, it was not one impetus alone that led an organization down the OD path. An atypical response to the question came from a library where there was not internal or external pressures to change, that is, there were

Table 3. OD Drivers

TECHNOLOGY

- Changing institutional framework to support a new information technology.
- Technology advancements and costs.
- Continuous improvement for technical services after implementation of an integrated library system.
- Changes needed to address technology-required development of new organizational capabilities.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL

- Need to reduce the budget.
- Availability of special funding to support special projects and initiatives.
- Static or declining resources.
- Escalating materials costs.
- Escalating (human resources) benefits costs.

CUSTOMER SERVICE/NEEDS

- Need to offer a particular service.
- Recognition that customer services need to be changed.
- More customized services.
- Shift in students' patterns of use of the library.
- Focus on services to undergraduates; providing all services in the best way possible.
- Change/improve reference services.
- Get as many electronic resources as possible directly to users.

STAFFING/STRUCTURE

- Resignation or retirement of key staff; vacancies led to opportunity to re-deploy remaining staff.
- Shrinking pools of available staff for new initiatives.
- Training crisis and lack of cross-training.
- Need to re-deploy limited staff.
- Changing jobs of technical services librarians.
- Combining departments to be responsive to customers.
- Training people how to work.
- Need to reallocate existing staff to new areas of work.
- Build collaborative skills in the organization.
- Existing structure coming apart culturally and not meeting demands of users.

MEASURING/ACCOUNTABILITY

- A strategic plan has been in place for some time, but decided to focus more on accountability and ways to measure it.

LEADERSHIP

- Vision of the university librarian to inculcate change in the leadership structure.
 - Director's vision of the library of the future, while facing budget cuts and the need to have flexible organization.
 - Initiative by the director to make the library more flexible, agile, and responsive to change.
 - Director's interest in changing the library's culture.
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no budget constraints, users were satisfied, and technology had been readily embraced. The director, however, wanted to get the library to act as a system. What is evident for most of the other respondents is that technology and the economic climate infiltrate almost all aspects of these initiatives.

An aspect of change that was interesting to assess is what OD has *not* been in these organizations. Unlike the early precepts of reengineering that were introduced by Hammer and Champy, libraries have not brought in these radical, dramatic change concepts to “blow up the old and replace it with something new” (Hammer & Champy, 1993, p. 33). Rather, it is apparent that libraries have, for the most part, taken more incremental steps through business improvement, business enhancement, or business modification approaches. Downsizing has occurred in some libraries due to shrinking budgets but not as an overt act of OD. Nor is there evidence from those interviewed that there was a conscientious displacement of librarians with support staff or vice versa.

Lastly, none of the changes described by participants in the survey were mandated by university administrations. The changes were initiated in the libraries by library directors along with an assortment of library staff, with staff members often taking lead roles. This is not to say that initiatives of this magnitude were undertaken in a vacuum. “Restructuring an organization, therefore, depends on understanding what your institutional culture and values are, and figuring out where you intend to go and how you can get there without violating revered norms. In other words, any library wanting to determine its own future must engage in some sort of formal planning with an eye on local traditions” (Kent, 1997, p. 186). At the University of Arizona Library, strategic planning incorporates an annual environmental scan, which includes review of the university’s mission, strategic plan, and other critical documents to ensure that the library is in alignment with the goals and objectives of its parent institution.

IMPLEMENTING OD

The approaches to implementing OD vary. In some organizations, it has been a complete library-wide undertaking, while in other organizations the changes start in one or two units, sometimes with an overarching plan and sometimes with no intent to shift the entire organization. There are also examples of grassroots initiatives where a unit or group is given the authority to change its work but without strong support from the administration or a clear understanding by the remaining staff of what the group is doing.

Of the libraries surveyed, a variety of implementation strategies surfaced. In one library the staff in a public services unit wanted to start strategic planning, and as they talked about the effort and looked to internal resources to help them, it grew into a library-wide effort. The result has been that the library as a whole has redesigned the strategic planning process.

Strategic planning was the starting point for a number of libraries. In several libraries process improvement was the impetus to change, and one library has a goal to undertake one process improvement project each year. Other libraries restructured by first eliminating layers of administration (but not the people in those positions) and/or establishing a team-based organization and then moving to strategic planning and process improvement. Another library has focused on improving internal communication as a first step, in tandem with strengthening delegation and decision-making. A less direct approach has been the expansion of human relations/resources roles in the library to include staff development and training and the creation of new roles, such as coordinator of personnel programs or manager of staff learning and development.

To give structure to these efforts, libraries have adopted different approaches to organizing their OD efforts. Three models that have been implemented are Galbraith's Star Model, the Balanced Scorecard, and Hoshin Planning.²

Galbraith's Star Model is a systems approach to reorganization with five points of the star interrelated: (1) strategic planning, structure and roles of people in the organization; (2) span of control (size and interaction of teams); (3) work processes (communication, process mapping); (4) people and human resources policies, evaluation; and (5) training and development.

The Balanced Scorecard is a framework for tracking organizational performance through a set of quantifiable measures derived from an organization's strategy. It can be implemented as a measurement system, a strategic management system, and/or a communication tool. The Balanced Scorecard was developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in the 1990s to expand an organization's performance measurements beyond the financial realm. The four dimensions, when adapted to public and nonprofit sectors, are (1) employee learning and growth, (2) internal processes, (3) customer perspective, and (4) financial perspective. Strategy is at the core of all the dimensions and provides an additional link to all of them.

Hoshin Planning is a strategic planning process to help an organization achieve breakthrough services and products for customers, in part, by targeting a select few critical areas in which the organization can apply its human and financial resources. Stated goals and action plans are the mechanisms to close the gap between the current state and the desired state.

There is not one path to implementing OD, and in each organization paths may take various directions. What is evident is that there is not a linear progression of OD, which makes it difficult for those involved in organizational change to be able to state definitively where an organization is in its OD saga. Table 4 is a snapshot of the current status of OD in the libraries represented in the interviews.

Sustaining change and moving an organization through the various

Table 4. Current State of OD in Participating Libraries

Focus on the strategic planning cycle with emphasis on the Balanced Scorecard.
Progress made in setting strategic priorities.
In limbo due to negotiations with a bargaining unit; however, exempt staff have been transitioning from work that will not be needed.
More work in understanding user needs and desires.
Human resources and training are works in progress.
Annually offer content-based symposia that focus on some area that engages staff on an important issue; 3 days on organizational methods and techniques; 2–3 days for planning.
Creating new positions to support OD.
Working on a multi-tiered program for leadership development.
Process improvement in specific areas.
Development of new employee orientation program to include elements of organizational philosophy of change and introduction to team practices and principles.

paths of OD is a challenging way of life for the people in those libraries who have committed to OD precepts. Those who lead the OD efforts are sometimes selected by administrators or peers, sometimes they are self-appointed, sometimes they are surprised at finding they are viewed as the OD experts, and sometimes they are human resources specialists who are reluctantly or enthusiastically engaged in OD responsibilities. Some are given OD titles (for example, Associate University Librarian for OD), and others are trying to decide if having an OD title in the library would be a help or a hindrance. Some have a master's degree in OD, and others are learning as they go. Some are the sole person in their organizations who is struggling to turn the ship, and others are part of an acknowledged core group of OD resources and in-house consultants. It is clear that the work associated with leading and guiding OD in libraries is evolutionary, and most of those involved in this work believe there are increasing roles for OD specialists in academic research libraries.

ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

One of the more difficult areas of instituting any new management system is to assess and measure its success in both the short term and long term. Some organizations approach this task through methodical, planned means. In 2001 the University of Virginia Library adopted the Balanced Scorecard to better use data to make choices (Self, 2003). After a relatively short period of time, the system appears to be a qualified success, leading the organization to focus on important topics and to set organizational priorities.

An assessment of the learning and growth dimension of the Balanced Scorecard is described by Franklin in a case study of the University of

Connecticut Libraries presented in 2003 (Franklin, 2003). In the study he describes the process by which the libraries measured the extent to which articulated organizational values were achieved through a library-wide reorganization.

What measurement activities are being pursued by the libraries surveyed? Four of the nine are using the Balanced Scorecard, while the remaining five participate in LibQUAL+™. LibQUAL+™ is a suite of services made available through the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) that are used to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality.³

In addition to the tools noted above, many libraries are also utilizing customer focus groups and surveys targeted to specific user groups. Also, library staff surveys and focus groups are conducted to elicit training needs, assess the cultural climate, and generate feedback on how the organization is doing from the employees' viewpoints.

Libraries appear to compile data willingly and frequently but not always in support of analyzing progress toward change and impacts of change. Required external data are not necessarily those that help an organization determine its success. So in addition to meeting university-imposed or association-imposed data reporting requirements, some libraries are developing meaningful quality standards that support progress toward goals and are indicators of success in reaching those goals.

At the University of Arizona Library quality standards include the increase in the number of people served; the availability of systems to users and physical and electronic access to collections; the increased ability of students to select, find, and use information in their research; and the timeliness of responses to requests for services or materials. Teams report on progress on the quality standards four times a year, both in written form and in presentations to the library.

A few libraries have not undertaken any measurements or assessment beyond those provided by LibQUAL+™, and two of the surveyed libraries do not have any measurements or assessments in place relative to OD initiatives. One respondent noted that their measurement efforts have been significantly enhanced by establishing an internal office for program assessment. Experimentation with new measures is surely a part of OD, and this experimentation is "for the purpose of discovering what needs to be done to achieve the shared vision of participating fully in the educational enterprise of the institutions of higher learning" (Phipps, 2001, p. 657).

IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

Although libraries are all over the map in terms of where and how OD is being implemented, most of those interviewed for this article were able to reflect on how OD has made a difference in their organizations. Table 5 contains their observations, which are organized by the perspectives used in the Balanced Scorecard.

Table 5. The Effects of OD in Participating Libraries

1) Employee Learning and Growth

Individual learning and growth is the keystone of whole OD program and commitment to an in-house training program is essential.

Recognizing and celebrating the differences among individuals has brought additional strength to the organization as a whole.

More cross-training and technology training has occurred.

Staff development is available for all staff classifications in the library.

Employees are taking responsibility to share their knowledge, skills, and abilities with others as part of culture, not because they are told to do so.

A lot of learning is going on, even without well-expressed plans and objectives.

Cultural assessment has led to development of roles and responsibilities for leaders; it is clearer how they are expected to communicate with staff and to work with them on decisions.

The Birkman Inventory instrument is administered to each individual to determine work styles; it is used as a frame for looking at team conflict and other team issues.^a

Most staff have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and there are plans to have all new staff take the instrument to help team members better understand and build their relationships.^b

There has been a distinct change in culture; staff are more inclined to do things rather than just talk about them.

A learning curriculum has been developed with mostly in-house resources, although all staff get some funding for outside workshops, seminars, etc.

The cross-functional project team environment has fostered accelerated learning opportunities library-wide.

All staff are equally involved in activities; this has broken down some class distinctions.

2) Internal Processes

Teams are working together more collaboratively.

Beginning to think about process mapping to get rid of redundant procedures.

People understand that there are group processes and they matter.

Development of team-level mission, values, and operating principles.

Focus on technology processes in terms of how information is delivered to the customer.

Introducing the concept of cross-functional teams.

Existing widespread ability and willingness to map processes and analyze process effectiveness.

3) Customer Perspective

Initial process improvement initiatives provided a test of customer focus.

Improved access to digital/electronic information.

Improved Web site.

New database services.

Improving training facilities for students.

Increased focus on customer service and training to support customer service.

Decreased delivery time in interlibrary loan and document delivery.

Library-wide goals are developed based on the customer perspective, that is, what does the customer want and desire.

4) Financial Perspective

Enormously successful in getting funding from provost.

Budgeting is done by a collaborative team, leading to more transparent information and understanding of the budget by more staff.

The library was only one of a few campus units whose budget was not cut; a direct correlation to OD can only be hypothesized, although library leadership believes this contributed to support.

Helped the library director articulate what the library's goals are to the campus, resulting in administration and funding support.

Recognition on campus of our successes, which has led to continuing financial support in times of dwindling resources.

^aFor more on the Birkman instrument, refer to www.birkman.com/ (retrieved May 10, 2004).

^bFor more information on the Myers-Briggs instrument, refer to www.myersbriggs.org/ (retrieved May 10, 2004).

Vision and strategy are situated at the center of the Balanced Scorecard system. For several libraries dramatic differences in this area were reported. Library-wide goals were finally understood by staff, even if there was not complete agreement with the goals. Several libraries formally implemented strategic planning processes that engage most staff, including in one instance the concept of funding to the plan (not planning to funds available).

In summary, based on the interviews conducted for this article, systemic changes that improve an organization's effectiveness can substantially impact all parts of the library, whether or not that is the planned outcome. An OD approach comes with the challenge of balancing the competing values in an organization.⁴ As one person interviewed noted, success in OD cannot be compared to what might have been if changes in structures and systems had not been made. Most of those who have undertaken OD initiatives, however, believe that their organizations would not be responsive or flexible if they had not committed to change.

NOTES

1. The online discussion group is sponsored by the Library Organization and Management section, Library Administration and Management, American Library Association. Living the Future conferences have been held biennially since 1996; information and selected presentations are available at <http://www.library.arizona.edu/conference/> (retrieved May 10, 2004).
2. See works by Bechtell, 1995; Galbraith, 1977; and Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 1996.
3. For more information on LibQUAL+™, refer to <http://www.libqual.org/> (retrieved May 10, 2004). LibQUAL+™ is a registered trademark of Texas A&M University.
4. See works by Schwartz, 1997; Faerman, 1993; and Quinn, 1988.

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