
The Retreat as a Response to Change

JANICE KIRKLAND AND LINDA S. DOBB

LIBRARY AUTOMATION CAN CAUSE dramatic changes in the workplace; new machines and new systems offer unique opportunities that challenge staff and accelerate the pace of everyday interactions. Such change, however fruitful, may also prove stressful as personnel are pulled in several directions, implementing new technology while maintaining normal work loads.

The need to examine organizational goals and prescribe new objectives for the continued good health of the work environment has therefore never been more important than it is at the present time—i.e., in the midst of a technological revolution. Possibly there is no better forum than a carefully planned retreat for reexamining present procedures and outlining new ones. In a setting outside the work environment, participation in library assessment and goal definition can prove beneficial for both the personnel involved and for the library, because those “who have invested time and energy in helping to mold a ‘new organization’ will naturally be more committed to the *product* of change if they have been involved in the *process* of change” (Azzaretto & Smith, 1986, pp. 18-20).

The two narrations which follow describe a retreat as a response to automation and a post-retreat goals assessment by the libraries of two campuses of the California State University (CSU) system. The first retreat, at CSU Bakersfield, was departmental and involved both professional and paraprofessional staff; the second at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, was librarywide, but involved primarily supervisors from various library departments. Both retreats received essential administrative support and input.

Janice Kirkland, California State University, 9001 Stockdale Highway, Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099

Linda S. Dobb, Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 37, No. 4, Spring 1989, pp. 495-509

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A RETREAT ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

The employees who are involved in a retreat may function loosely as a quality circle, analyzing problems, contributing ideas, and recommending possible solutions. At CSU Bakersfield, the entire retreat process was to be composed of five steps: planning and research, a preparatory film, the retreat itself, a written evaluation, and a post-retreat discussion with the Library Director, Rodney M. Hersberger.

Planning began with discussions during regular catalog and serials department meetings. We selected the umbrella topic of quality of work life and decided to combine general group participation with individual reports; everyone read for discussion at the retreat the same three basic articles (Martell, 1983a; Martell, 1983b; Martell & Tyson, 1983) from a series edited by Charles Martell on quality of work life and each person selected one aspect of quality of work life for a separate report. To avoid duplication, we compared report topics and sources, but there were no other restrictions on the material for the reports; each person could choose any appropriate readings to discuss or to use for handouts at the retreat.

The videocassette "In Search of Excellence" was shown two days before the retreat. Based upon the book of the same title (Peters & Waterman, 1982), the video covers in eighty-eight minutes the importance of people-centered management. The showing had been announced at a librarywide staff meeting and was attended by personnel from other departments as well as those planning the retreat. Although the film and book are intended for profit-making organizations, there is much carryover for the nonprofit sector in both philosophy and method. Such factors in the film as work climate, rewards for achievement, balancing productivity with creativity, sharing information, cooperating in problem-solving, and other aspects of a people-centered participative environment prepared us for the concentrated effort of the retreat itself.

The location of the one-day retreat was in the mountains eighty miles from campus, far enough from the normal San Joaquin Valley work setting to enable participants to view the scene of their usual forty hours of activity from an entirely different physical perspective and ideally from a different psychological perspective as well. Urban or rural settings may be equally effective for retreats as long as they provide a complete relaxed change from the usual workday surroundings. If enough time is allocated, recreational facilities for nonmeeting times can be beneficial, and food should be served no matter what the length of the retreat.

Changing with Change

At the CSU Bakersfield retreat, after breakfast and a view of mountain scenery, the presentations covered an overview of the process of change, and the importance of good supervision and communication in

meeting the challenges of change in the workplace and maintaining good quality of work life.

The first participant to give an individual report provided an introduction which began with an analysis of the cultural framework for change and the way in which change occurs at the cultural level, drawn primarily from Thomas Kuhn's discussion of paradigm shifts and Alvin Toffler's assessment of the third wave information revolution (Kuhn, 1970; Toffler, 1981). The focus was then narrowed to examine the ways in which people are affected by (and can affect) the process of change, and discussion followed on the adjustments required of individuals caught in the midst of rapid cultural transition, linking change in the work place to several job satisfaction issues.

In response to the question "Why is quality of the work environment a concern?" there were at least three key answers. First, the new technology liberates us in many ways to pursue meaningful personal agendas, yet the more automated our surroundings, the more we need and value human contact. John Naisbitt (1982) has characterized the two sides of this issue as "high tech/high touch" (p. 39). Second, in an information society, human resources provide the competitive edge; innovation is a uniquely human product best cultivated in a human environment. Third, as hierarchies give way to more informal organizational networks, an ensemble approach to problem-solving emerges, and the value of cooperation is enhanced as a central aspect of effective management.

Shifting from the theoretical to the practical, the next presentation investigated developing tools for improving the quality of work life. This involved examining intradepartmental and interdepartmental relations, particularly the role of the supervisor. Handouts aided in the identification of different managerial styles, and provided an awareness of the way in which styles differ from person to person. Such an awareness is vital in lessening conflict which is due to differing approaches to common goals.

Communication

A third presentation covered the essentials of communication as a factor in establishing and maintaining harmony in the work situation. Successful communication results when the receiver/listener interprets the sender/speaker's information as the sender intended: this requires good listening and speaking skills. We learned that when listening one must block out distractions, concentrate on the sender's verbal and nonverbal messages, and, most importantly, give feedback. If there is no feedback, there is no communication.

We discussed good speaking skills, agreeing that words are symbols and are always open to interpretation; that each person has her/his own expectations of a situation, and that each person selectively perceives those communicated items which he/she feels are most important.

Therefore when speaking it is best to keep it short and simple, and to orient the information to the receiver; if this is done, misunderstandings will be less likely to occur (Dellinger, 1980).

The sessions after lunch began with a presentation which dealt with quality of work life for student assistants. Since all of the paraprofessionals who were present supervised student workers, all of them recognized the improvement of student working conditions as a test arena for ideas which might later be applied to their own full time situations. The discussion was based on three articles on management of student employees in academic libraries (Cottam, 1970; Frank, 1984; Kathman & Kathman, 1978), and concentrated on three suggestions for improving student work life: management training for paraprofessionals responsible for supervising student assistants, better training and more extensive library orientations for new student assistants, and the development of a method of supportive supervision.

We concluded that more emphasis should be placed on conveying to each student an understanding of the individual's particular role within the scheme of library operations. To this end, we discussed expanding new student orientations from technical services to encompass the entire library, and compiling a glossary of frequently used library terms, including automation terminology, to help new students understand library procedures and equipment which regular staff often take for granted. We also decided to use a checklist of all student duties in each department to record the breadth of training and level of expertise each student attains. As a long-range goal, we considered developing an orientation/training presentation on videotape to supplement or replace the existing personalized methods.

As a logical extension of supervision, we then looked at formal and informal authority, its limitations and utilization, and questioned ourselves about our own effectiveness as supervisors in a positive and noncritical manner.

Each retreat presentation was enthusiastically given and received; each ran over the time allotted, and was interrupted and followed by questions and discussion.

Finally, using material from D. L. Foster (1987), we discussed the decision-making process and identified the steps in that process—define the problem, analyze the problem, examine alternatives, reach a decision—in preparation for dealing with a specific problem presented at the conclusion of the retreat. This problem was to plan a cross-training program which would allow staff members to gain practical familiarity with the work procedures of library departments other than the departments to which they were regularly assigned.

Such training should promote better understanding of the library as a whole and provide trained backup personnel to help out in times of unusually heavy work load or personnel shortages. More importantly, it should also increase communication between otherwise separated segments of the staff, should expose staff members to the ideas and managerial styles of others, and should improve quality of work life by

promoting more personal contact in an increasingly automated workplace—i.e., high tech/high touch.

Retreat participants completed the day by putting together a flexible outline for such a cross-training program, tailored to the existing structure of the library and involving all departments. The outline was submitted to the director after the retreat.

Evaluation

During the week which followed, retreat participants filled out evaluation sheets covering their opinions of the preliminary film, the amount of time allocated for the retreat, the relevance of the topic of quality of work life, and the content of the individual presentations (see Appendix A).

In answer to the question, "What do you feel was most valuable to you from the retreat?" one person wrote, "I came away from the retreat with the feeling that my thoughts and suggestions are important and are considered as such." Another saw the retreat as an "opportunity to articulate ideals/goals/approaches and to discover the extent to which they are shared." A third said it provided a chance for "actively seeking solutions to problems, not just silently acknowledging them." They all viewed permission to hold a departmental retreat as important evidence of administrative interest in, and support for, an attempt to improve job satisfaction and the work environment.

The library director read the evaluations, submitted without names, before spending an hour with the participants in a post-retreat discussion during which he answered quality-of-work-life-related questions about space use, equipment budget, training funds, and the library policy on staff development.

He recommended that a follow-up meeting be held later in the year to measure progress on the plans made at the retreat. Because of staff turnover and a general library reorganization, no later retreat assessment was held at CSU Bakersfield, but participants felt that it was an experience worth repeating. Some of the ideas which had been explored were implemented: e.g., student assistant checklists and a glossary were compiled and used, and two persons attended supervisory workshops and shared what they learned there. Interdepartmental cross-training was begun on a trial basis using some of the suggestions in the outline compiled at the retreat and currently continues on a modified basis under the new organization. Much had been communicated at the retreat, and the retreat process itself was regarded by those who had taken part as a valuable type of participation in work environment examination which we had not previously tried.

The next section of this article, written by Linda Dobb, presents the goal analysis of a different retreat which was later reevaluated by its participants, how they did this reevaluating, and what resulted from the process.

RETREAT REVISITED: LOOKING AT GOALS TEN MONTHS LATER

In the summer of 1987, the Library Advisory Council of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, decided to hold the library's first retreat. The Dean of Library Services, David Walch, stated as its objectives, to become familiar with each department's goals and to determine if any of these goals were at cross-purposes with each other or required special infusions of money and energy for their accomplishment (Walch, 1987). Each department head and representatives of the Staff Council and Librarians' Council submitted goals for discussion. The two-day retreat was held at Cambria, a coastal resort forty miles north of the campus. During sessions on both days and even at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the participants stated and analyzed for each other what they foresaw as their agendas to fulfill the mission of the library and the goals of their areas. Ten months later, a questionnaire (see Appendix B) was sent out asking each individual to evaluate how successful he or she had been in setting priorities and achieving or progressing toward those goals.

Not everyone responded to the questionnaire and some who did gave rather curt and cryptic replies. Generally, however, the replies made several things clear—as a group, department heads set realistic goals for themselves and most heads were satisfied that they had accomplished, or were on their way to accomplishing, their goals. On the other hand, where objectives crossed departmental lines, there had been less accomplished, and all retreat participants felt that follow-up could have been stronger, with goal reinforcement being a librarywide ongoing part of the process.

What Were the Goals?

The head of Government Documents stated as some of his goals at the retreat: "to improve the quality of the collection," "to stimulate public interest and use of the collection," and "to exploit available information handling technology for increased access to government information and increased efficiency of processing documents" (Kim, 1987, p. 1). He laid out a point-by-point plan for accomplishing the goals, including such processes as weeding, upgrading, advertising, exhibiting, and lecturing on the collection. Also planned was an investigation of possible online systems for processing government information.

Ten months later, this department head wrote that his goals had been deliberately realistic, practical, and capable of realization. He had not committed himself or the department to goals with which he did not feel comfortable, but in general he did not feel that goal-setting had been important to his department. His plans for action were not far-reaching visions of change but individual steps with a cumulative impact on his continuing objective—i.e., the satisfactory operation of the Govern-

ment Documents and Maps Department. Perhaps this department head was correct in perceiving that no radical change in direction or enlargements of scope were necessary for his area; this methodical goal-setting and tendings seems to have been a prescription for success since seven months after the retreat the department received a citation for its excellence.

The head of the Learning Resources and Curriculum department similarly expressed realistic goals that were for the most part capable of fulfillment within the bounds of the department's budget, staffing allocation, and other resources. Among these goals were: to finish conversion of resource material records to machine-readable form, to redirect the activities of a microcomputer center in the department toward a model for experimentation and testing rather than simply a station for use and instruction, and to appoint a librarian from the department as a consultant to the community's teachers on instructional materials.

Ten months later the department head still saw these goals, now in the final stages of accomplishment, as practical and appropriate. Two other goals based upon library automation, however, were less certain of fulfillment; the first, which depended upon cooperation by other departments and realignment of the overall library budget, involved adding space to accommodate automation. The second was a matter of personal attainment, the redirection of professional time toward automation. Both goals were continually reassessed during the year but had not been achieved. Stating them as goals, however, seemed to remain important to the department head: "I think you can account more for your work when you have definite goals to strive toward. It helps one focus on what needs to be done now as opposed to later" (Brady, 1988).

The dean also set forth goals at the time of the retreat; among these were "to refine the library's administrative organization," "to provide increased office space for librarians" "to integrate into the library automated procedures that would improve service," and to improve external and internal library communications (Walch, 1988). He felt that these goals should be achievable through reviewing and modifying the organizational structure, husbanding funds for construction purposes, reviewing departmental goals for automation, and publishing external and internal updates on library events.

Looking back on his plans and activities of the previous ten months, the dean believed the goals to be realistic although not yet fully accomplished. The wheels are in motion; however, the wheels are moving at various rates of speed." The dean's goals were broad: restructuring part of the organization, creating space within a completed structure, and building a broader communications network for the library; they would also be far-reaching, affecting personnel, budget, and the library's overall standing in the academic community. Perhaps it was the broad nature of the goals and the fact that they crossed so many

boundaries both inside and outside of the library that made implementation difficult. Additionally, achievement of a dean's goals might involve not merely taking concrete steps to an end, but might also entail reinforcement of a vision to those within the organization, an agenda much more difficult to accomplish.

The dean, in responding to the questionnaire, felt that there was a need for more formal review of departmental goals and their status. Indeed, almost everyone who answered the questionnaire felt that the discussion of goals during the retreat had been valuable, but that follow-through via subsequent discussion and coordinated action had been less strong. Most thought that goal-setting (even if one did not constantly refer to one's stated objectives during the course of the year) was of some use, but that organizational review was necessary so that we were not merely individuals identifying problems, but also a collective moving to solve them. With strong institutional reiteration of goals, interdepartmental problems, such as those involving space or automation planning, might be seen as priorities for all, resulting in a more united movement toward resolution.

The Human Side of Goal-setting

Unlike many of my colleagues, as head of the Cataloging Department, I did not achieve the majority of my retreat goals, but nonfulfillment was not a result of crossing too many departmental boundaries or of lack of institutional-level push. Analysis, ten months after the retreat, revealed that failure was perhaps the result of having unrealistic expectations, or of circumstances beyond my control, or, more importantly, of not considering goal-setting as a serious shaping of management style either at the time of the retreat or later.

As new head of a department which had always been production-oriented, I wanted to instill in the library assistants, who do the bulk of the cataloging, a sense that they could make an intellectual contribution to the public catalog. Automation, so heavily used in technical services departments, should free workers to spend mental as well as physical energy. I wanted us to explore the concepts of adding headings to accepted copy and questioning the appropriateness of preassigned call numbers in relation to the needs of the library's users. To this end, I held discussions with the cataloging department staff and routed articles (e.g., Dwyer, 1987) on improving catalog access points. Unfortunately, the discussions and source material served more to confuse the staff than to convince them of the need to read Library of Congress copy critically and bolster its effectiveness as a key to our collection. Staff members wanted to know if we weren't defeating the purpose of using national data, if we wouldn't be corrupting accepted standards, and if we could possibly maintain a demanding production schedule if we had to evaluate and change records commonly accepted as the best available copy. Despite my assurances that production would no longer be as critical as

thoroughness and that "corruption" can be acceptable, it has not been easy to convince the staff to manage the data which machines make accessible.

Another goal that seemingly eluded accomplishment was successful teamwork on materials. I had a strong desire to expand the range of cataloging capabilities available in the department to include classification skills for all library assistants, learned by working with experienced catalogers on projects of reclassifying individual sections of the collection. Regimented compartmentalization of functions, however, closely tied to the machines we used, seemed to defeat original work; as the year wore on, reclassifying remained strictly the duty of those who knew how to do it.

Finally, an accident altered the direction of the department work flow entirely and convinced me that setting goals in a heavily automated environment requires more than functional thinking: the datafile on our circulation system was mangled through circumstances almost entirely beyond local control. The inventory portion of the records was recoverable but unhappily the bibliographic portion, the portion built record by record over eight years of cataloging staff activity, was not. What was lost was not merely data but also confidence in the system of work that had produced the records, belief in the efficacy of automated systems in general, and pride in past accomplishments. The relationship between the departments which shared responsibility for the database also collapsed.

It should not have taken a crisis of these proportions, however, to make me realize that a most important goal for a manager in any environment, but particularly in an automated one, is to keep morale high and personal motivation for performing quality work paramount. My first priority should not have been the intellectual improvement of cataloging, but a willingness to try group discussion as a way of changing how the staff viewed their jobs. Expanding library assistant skills might expand production, but did they have in mind other changes which might improve overall work life? The accomplishment of day-to-day tasks is important but so is the spirit with which the tasks are accomplished. With a good spirit intact, an organization can more easily weather a crisis and cope with change.

What are Appropriate Goals in an Automated Environment

Most of the retreat participants stated as a goal the rather open-ended desire to integrate automated systems into all aspects of the library, but the objectives given as milestones on the way to this goal concerned machines and systems, not the education and motivation of the people behind them. This is a problem for many administrators and librarians who "become so engrossed in technology that the human side is often overlooked" (Rooks, 1988, p. 14). The library might have profited if the retreat had involved working on a long-range plan of

implementing coordinated automation for all departments, a plan which laid out specific objectives on both sides of the fence, human and technological. Among other people-oriented goals we might have established were a conscientious review of library organizational structure to accommodate the possible blurring of distinctive functions (Myers, 1986); a comprehensive plan for involving all areas of the library, and, perhaps, faculty outside the library in automation procurement and implementation; a librarywide policy of ensuring educational growth to expand staff awareness of change and to encourage creative input into the change process; and provision of a forum to discuss staff concerns on automation and the modifications it might bring in job design, work conditions, and organizational responsibilities.

Even without stating some of these human considerations as goals, the retreat recognized and instituted some measures that allowed group involvement. However, the ideals of a retreat, "to create a new organizational climate, help clarify organizational goals, improve overall communication, and involve all employees in the change process" (Cargill, 1988, p. 101), were only partially realized. We had the benefit of sharing departmental plans and the dean's vision for future efforts; had we but coordinated our designs, recognized a common theme, and foreseen the necessity of accommodating personal as well as functional goals, we would have derived more benefit from the retreat.

The library staff was unanimous in requesting a second retreat which was in the planning stage as this article was being written. It is planned for a similar resort-like setting and two-day period. This time, however, facilitators for the retreat are attempting to coordinate goals for the library and promote team building through reciprocal goal establishment. Each department has been asked to submit two goals on automation, one specific to the department or group represented, and another for the entire library. In this way, we are hoping to generate ideas that involve the entire staff in a common purpose and ideas which may take into consideration the human component common to all departments and groups. Additionally, each representative will be asked to suggest anonymously one goal for a department or group chosen at random. We are hopeful that this approach and the discussion of its results at the retreat will lead to a "team feeling" in the work of the coming year.

The facilitators are also attempting to provide after the second retreat a continuing followup, perhaps by including goal-tracking discussions in library council meetings. Part of the retreat agenda will be a discussion of milestones by which we can track progress, and use of departmental reports given at the biweekly council meetings as a forum for such tracking. Some departments, such as the Cataloging Department, are also scheduling their own retreats for group goal-setting prior to the library's management retreat and will schedule follow-up sessions to discuss progress in various areas or the need to establish new goals as changing circumstances dictate.

As the questionnaire revealed, feedback and a consistent reanalysis of goals as the year progressed might have helped the California Polytechnic library to profit more from its first attempt to step back from current operations and then move forward with a new awareness of our motivations. We are hopeful that through the exercise of reexamining our past experience and carefully shaping the next retreat, we can all share successful adaptation to an increasingly automated library environment.

SUMMARIZING THE RETREAT CONCEPT

As the two preceding narratives have brought out, the retreat is one effective method which the administration and staff of an automating library may choose for responding to technological change. As the number of machines surrounding us in the library workplace grows, and the variety of machines which we must master to remain in control of the information environment proliferates, the need for human contact and occasional refreshment by immersion in nonautomated surroundings likewise increases whether or not we are aware of it. Stress is caused by lack of control, actual or presumed; stress erodes library efficiency. To increase control of the automated workplace by improving planning and coordination, and to satisfy the need for human refreshment simultaneously, a retreat can be a very useful tool. Libraries of all types may borrow a page from business literature in which retreats have been featured frequently in recent years. "The four most important considerations when using a retreat as a means of facilitating change... [are] purpose, process, product, and people" (Azzaretto & Smith, 1986, p. 18).

A retreat must have a purpose, which must be understood by all of the participants: the purpose may be to analyze quality of work life, to set operational goals for a future period, to improve communication and relations between attending departments, or any of a large number of other worthwhile undertakings.

A retreat must be run by a defined process, or method of organization, so everyone knows what to expect. The process may include guest speakers, an externally procured facilitator, group discussions, brainstorming, question-and-answer sessions, structured and unstructured intervals, quality control circles, written exercises, prepared participant reports, or any process combination which seems desirable to the retreat organizers. The process may include evaluations during and/or after the retreat, both as a basis for assessing its short- and long-term effectiveness, and as a guide to planning future retreats.

A retreat must have a product. The product or plan which issues from the retreat must be realistic in terms of the environment in which it must be applied, and must be detailed enough to serve as a blueprint for action, yet remain flexible enough to be adapted to shifting situations and unexpected developments during the period in which it remains in force.

And finally, purpose, process, and product may be brilliantly conceived but, for a retreat to succeed, the most important resource is people. If participants regard the concept of the retreat favorably, and if it provides an atmosphere of openness and trust in which each person's point of view is respected, they will be able to use the retreat as a forum for the solution of the problems which they bring there for examination.

A retreat may also serve both as an effective response to change in the library environment and as a source of change in the participants themselves. When members of a staff become jointly involved in analyzing problems and suggesting solutions, they develop a sense of commitment toward successful outcomes, and those who questioned the need for a first retreat may become the most enthusiastic proponents of a second one. Retreats can be rich and rewarding responses to technology.

Appendix A

Questions for an Immediate Post-Retreat Evaluation

1. How much time did you spend preparing for your part in the retreat? Was this enough?
2. Was the preparatory film useful?
3. Was one work day enough time for an effective retreat? Too much time?
4. How relevant was the topic "quality of worklife"? The three articles on QWL?
5. What is your opinion of the size and composition of the retreat group(s)?
6. What is your opinion of the presentations and related discussions?
7. What do you feel was most/least valuable to you from the retreat?
8. Would you support regularly scheduled retreats? If so, how frequently? If not, why not?
9. If you answered yes to question 8, what topics would you like future retreats to cover?

Appendix B

Questions for a Later Assessment of Retreat Goals

1. Looking back, do you think the goals you set for yourself and for your department were realistic?
2. Would you set different goals and priorities if you were establishing them today?
3. Have you been successful in realizing any of your short-term or long-term goals? If so, how has this been accomplished?
4. Have you put the wheels in motion for future accomplishment of some of your other goals?
5. Did you commit yourself to any goals which you wish you had not?
6. Do you find goal-setting a good tool for establishing priorities in your work?
7. Have you referred to any of the materials prepared for the retreat in the period since then? If so, which materials?
8. Have our follow-up discussions of issues helped the Library accomplish the goals set during the retreat?
9. Do you think the Library needs to reinforce the unaccomplished goals we set as a unit at the retreat?
10. Would you like to see the Library hold another retreat this year?
11. Additional comments:

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