



Navigating Change Without a Director

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Background

In the fall of 2014, the library director at Slippery Rock University retired. An administrative decision was made to not replace the director. For the spring semester 2015, the library reported to the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment. Although this was a temporary situation, the library faculty and staff held their collective breath for a solution. During that semester, Slippery Rock University's administration created the Associate Provost (AP) of Transformational Experiences. They placed the library under the direction of this position. Besides the library, the AP would oversee the Honors College, Career Development, Global Initiatives, and the Center for Teaching and Learning. The difference between the library and the other areas under the AP is that they all had directors. Since the library did not have a director, the AP became the library's pseudo director.

How the pseudo library director's position was initiated gave us high levels of concern due to lack of inclusion on behalf of library personnel. Experience proved that the nature of the AP's role was too far removed to be an effective replacement for a library director. The AP's conglomerated role resulted in international travel and working on projects from the Provost. This left too little time to understand the library and its needs. Due to the absence of the AP, library faculty felt that the chain of communication was disjointed.

New Position

Bailey Library was not the first academic library to function with a management-style position at the helm. This new framework for library leadership was patterned from a sister institution. To assist with daily building functions the role of Manager of Library Operations (MLO) was drafted and implemented in 2015. This position, which focused on the physical details proved to be an asset for accomplishing tasks. An example includes the renovation project that took place during the past several years. The MLO strives to assist as needed, volunteering to help in the process as much as possible.

As with any new position, there where are growing pains. An extensive learning curve to establish what roles and tasks fell within this position. Often, collaborative efforts were used, such as the work with the strategic plan. While the MLO is supportive and has proven to be an asset to the library, the lack of leadership continues to be an issue in need of addressing.

The Need for Leadership in the Academic Library

The library faculty worked together with the library staff and the MLO, to address the need for a vision within the library and its services. Martin notes that constituents within libraries have expectations of leadership, moving beyond competence.¹ Those involved with library functions, referred to as "followers", are often active participants within the organization and may impact its leadership.² "Followers want particular actions and certain-

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ties from their leaders in crisis as well as banal times.”³ This was the case at Bailey Library. There was a feeling, or strong desire, for the AP to navigate the anticipated learning curve and provide leadership.

Building a Team

Moral was impacted, decisions were delayed, projects were on hold, and frustrations grew. At faculty meetings, the librarians generated innovative projects and innovative solutions. Yet, the projects and solutions never moved forward. The configuration of reporting and the chain of command acted as a roadblock to creative outcomes. After two years of living in limbo with increasing frustrations in the library, a partial solution was identified. The Systems/Health Sciences Librarian, who holds a green belt certification in Lean Six Sigma, transformed the committees within the library into teams, using Six Sigma as the springboard. Additionally, new teams were created to help the library move forward. Each team, both old and new, would help to provide the structure, vision, and leadership.

Six Sigma is “a disciplined, data-driven approach and a method for eliminating defects in any process. The fundamental goal of the Six Sigma method is the implementation of a measurement-based strategy that focuses on process improvement and variation reduction through the application of Six Sigma improvement projects. This is accomplished through the DMAIC and DMADV processes. DMAIC define, measure, analyze, improve, and control for incremental improvement. DMADV define, measure, analyze, design, and verify is used to develop new processes or products at Six Sigma quality levels.”⁴

The faculty teams include Assessment, Budget, Curriculum and Instruction, Data Management, Marketing/PR, Reference, and Technology. Each team had a faculty leader and a mix of faculty and staff (where appropriate) as team members. Each team had an appropriate mission and some power to make things happen. The configuration of team leader and members was based on skills, education, and job relevancy. The goal of each team was to create order, provide leadership, vision, and produce outcomes or find solutions. While this was not a solution to the absence of a library director, the teams did help to organize the library, define goals in systematic ways, improve control, and allow decisions to be made based on data and analysis.

Applying a Shared Leadership Model to Tackle Big Projects

As one effective problem-solving tool, teams were formed as needs arose. For example, when the state-wide decision was made by SHELCO, the Pennsylvania library consortium to select a new Library Management System (LMS) workflows in the library changed. These new changes in workflow and the management of day to day tasks resulted in the creation of a new position. A new staff position, Information Technology Technician was created. Taking the lead, the Data Management Team created the job description and secured a new person for this role.

Another example was the creation of a new service model for Research Services. The traditional model of sitting at a designated desk in a common area, waiting for students to come to you with a question, was still being used. Based on many discussions and adequate data collection the decision was made to move to a virtual research services model to best serve the campus community. No longer having to sit at the research services desk freed up time for librarians to work on new and innovative projects.

One of the most significant results of the team-based model for leadership was the creation of two new credit-bearing courses that were created by the Curriculum and Instruction team and are taught by librarians. LIBR 210 Library Research Methods and University Seminar (Information Literacy and Digital Citizenship). These library-based courses expose students to excellent research strategies and improve information literacy.

Challenges did exist with the creation and balance of teams. When applying a best practice of putting the players, based on skills, experience, knowledge, and job duties, on a team they tended to be out of balance. The goal of the team leadership configuration was to bring stability and order and thus living with the imbalance, although not ideal, was a reality. Issues did arise from the perspective of accountability. Since the library faculty operate as a flat organization none were in the position to hold members accountable. While innovative ideas were able to take off, accountability remained an unresolved problem. Team members can enjoy leadership development workshops and improving/developing shared traits.

Challenges and Future Implications

The big question is *Can an organization be effective without a leader?* In its current state, it appears that the library needs an involved leader to ensure the organization can move forward. Many books, articles, and workshops have been devoted to leadership. In Patrick Lencioni's book *The Advantage*, he addresses the question of why organizational health surpasses everything else. Without leadership that understands the culture and politics of a library, health cannot be achieved. Without health, it leaves the organization in disarray.⁵ Leadership is essential to the success of any organization.

"Employees in every organization, and at every level, need to know at the heart of what they do lies something grand and aspirational."⁶ Lencioni asks revealing questions that suggest without strong leadership your organization will fail.

Question 1: Why do we exist? The library exists to make the students' lives better. Plain and simple. Yet, the AP failed to articulate why the library exists beyond the basic understanding of libraries. Additionally, the AP never shared a vision of how the library fit under his division Transformational Experiences. During our five-year review, the external reviewer reported the need to determine our role within Transformational Experiences to ensure we were moving in the desired direction. Without a solid understanding of why the library exists how can it be successful?

Question 2: How do we behave? Organizational values create clarity and enable an organization to be healthy. An organization cannot be tolerating of everything or it will stand for nothing.⁷ Clear values help to make the organization healthy and attract patrons. Clarity reduces ineffective management and micromanagement. This request was based upon faculty members concern for equal work distribution and the meeting of 35 hours/week). Understanding what it means to be an academic librarian was not addressed. There was a mild attempt in understanding the roles of library faculty with, what appeared, to be a focus on managing the building. While there is a need for a management component within the role of library director, the value of the vision and leadership supersedes due to competent faculty and staff.

Question 3: What do we do? It is important for any leader to know what his/her employees do. After four years, the AP finally had one-on-one meetings with all faculty and staff to learn about our positions and develop an understanding of our day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. The un-sexy, one-sentence statements about our job duties needs to be available and clearly stated. Leadership had to be crystal clear about and describe the nature of the organization i.e. library.

Question 4: How will we succeed? Success is tied to a strategy. A well-crafted, authentic strategic plan will help create a healthy organization. "An organization's strategy is nothing more than the collection of intentional decisions a company makes to give itself the best chance to thrive and differentiate from competitors."⁸ The strategy is a plan for success. It has anchors that will guide every single decision so that there will be consistency in the plan. Roadblocks are a huge impediment to success. All the best plans in the world are useless against a formidable obstacle. If the leader cannot create an authentic strategic plan, then how can the library succeed

since no one would know what that was supposed to look like? In discussions about strategic planning, the AP asked this question. “Which units within TE that are housed in the library should be included in the library’s strategic plan”? The library department indicated that the library’s strategic plan should focus only on the library as department. Again, due to the lack of understanding of how the library fits within TE, too much time was spent on discussion instead of development of the strategic plan.

Question 5: What is most important, right now? The library faced many challenges without leadership. As a result, focus was lost, and the organization moved indiscriminately from one idea to the next. Teams began to function in silos, losing the teamwork structure in the process. Decisions that were made lacked input from vital players. Faculty and staff withheld information vital to the health of the library, albeit not intentionally. We developed organizational attention deficit disorder. The establishment of a top priority would have been fantastic instead, the library culture had no defined priorities. What was identified as critical or important was defined by various individuals, not from a consensus or in conjunction with the AP. The library functioned in the before mentioned silos, taking care of what each of us thought was the most important thing to do.

From a campus perspective, the library exists to serve students, yet its benefits are communicated from individuals, not a collective whole. There is a noticeable lack of thoughtful marketing from the AP. Without leadership or a voice in key discussions on campus the library finds itself struggling to receive recognition for its value to constituents. According to Forbes Coaches Council, “managers manage people while leaders lead people.”⁹ Forbes Coaches Council listed 15 key differences between managers and leaders:

1. Leaders want to win
2. Leaders are visionary, managers are tactical
3. Managers micromanage, Leaders inspire
4. Leaders ask “WHY” Instead of “HOW”
5. Leaders guide others towards an outcome
6. Managers train, Leaders develop
7. Leaders focus on long-term results
8. Leaders lead, Managers follow
9. Leaders have the courage to face what others fear
10. Leaders challenge the status quo
11. A manager is a position, Leader is a quality
12. Leaders know how to listen
13. Leaders grow people
14. Leaders give their power away
15. All managers must be leaders (Forbes Coaches Council, 2019).

No one in the library could make sweeping changes, so changes, if they occurred took quite a long time. Most decisions were made in response to some fire that needed to be extinguished quickly. After four-years without strong leadership in the library I decided to resign from my tenured position and accepted a job as the executive library director at Minnesota State University-Moorhead (MSUM). MSUM had been without a library director for a period and collectively decided that a library cannot be a healthy organization without a strong and effective leader, one who has vision, a strategic plan, grit, and guts. And thus, I landed my dream job. In conclusion, strong direct leadership, in the form of a library director or dean is necessary to bring health to the organization.

Endnotes

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 799.
4. ISIXSIGMA (2019). What is Six Sigma? Retrieved from <https://www.isixsigma.com/new-to-six-sigma/what-six-sigma/>
5. Lencionci, P. (2012). *The Advantage: Why organizational health trumps everything in business*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 107.
9. Forbes Coaches Council (2019). "What makes a good leader? Key difference between management and leadership." Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/11/20/what-makes-a-good-leader-key-differences-between-management-and-leadership/#309e53dadaf5>.