Managing Change when *You* are the Change

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Abstract: This article discusses how one librarian managed change when beginning a new job and becoming a manager for the first time. It explores what she learned about workplace culture and fitting in at a new institution. The author also offers a few tips, based on her experience, which may be helpful to new managers.

Keywords: *change management, new manager, management techniques*

Introduction

I began my new job as an assistant professor and manager of the Education and Teaching Library (ETL), a branch of the main library at Oklahoma State University (OSU) two weeks before the winter holidays in December 2015. OSU is a public land grant, co-ed, and research university. The campus had an enrollment of 25, 930 in spring of 2017. The undergraduate population was 21, 117 in that same semester. When I assumed the helm, the library had recently undergone a name change, and I was the first permanent, full-time faculty librarian in my position in three years. Not only did I need to navigate a new organizational culture, and a new role within it, but also my staff and student workers had to adjust to my management style and any policy changes I might institute. I also needed to build rapport with faculty as their library liaison. I knew this would be important for future collaborations. I knew that the approaches I took with faculty would be different from those I used with staff or students. Here are a few things I did to help myself and others transition as I started a new role.

Observation

In my first days on the job, I spent a good portion of my time observing. I tried to stand back and determine what concerns needed my attention most. I watched basic library transactions, like circulation and interlibrary loan. I checked out our library website, and within a few months, made suggestions for its redesign. I watched how my staff members and students interacted with each other. I helped each of my student workers shelve a few books, in part so I could learn the collection, and in part to start informal conversations with them. I asked questions like “What’s your major?” “What do you like about working here?” “Is there anything you would change?” “Do you have any ideas that might help this library be a better place?” I took this feedback and wrote it down. It helped me understand a little bit about the people I was working with as I worked toward making my goals for the

ETL clear. I came in with some specific ideas for the ETL. I wanted it to be a place where students and faculty felt welcomed and could give feedback. I wanted to have customer service as a focus, and I wanted my staff and student workers to enjoy being here. In short, I wanted to combine the best aspects of all my previous work environments. My observation helped me determine what my employees wanted in a work environment and how best to give directions for change.

I also did some observation of faculty. I kept track of who frequented the ETL what they taught, and what their needs were. I asked them to give me feedback about collection development needs in the ETL. I also emailed the head of each department and asked to attend the faculty meetings, which take place at the beginning of each semester. This gave me a chance to introduce myself to faculty and let them know I was willing to help them and their students with research or other library needs.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

After observing for a while, I conducted an informal S.W.O.T. analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to see what challenges lay ahead. I recommend doing this within the first few weeks of employment. Coming into a new situation creates some objectivity that may fade with time. The outcome of a S.W.O.T. analysis should be positive. It should help you as a manager see how your organization is working and where it needs to improve. If you anticipate a problem, it usually makes it easier to handle.

One of our strengths lay in the fact that the library is physically located within the basement of the College of Education. This makes it easier for me to attend faculty meetings, go to classes for instruction sessions, or conduct research consultations.

Another strength was our student workers and their willingness to learn. I knew from observation that some of our students felt they needed more training. It is always an asset when employees are willing to tell the manager what they need.

Since our student workers needed more structured training, we had the opportunity to develop an orientation session, a project that my assistant and I worked on together. We also created a PowerPoint of FAQs and other facts for students to refer to as needed. I bought pizza and students came in for a two hour, paid training session. My goal was for new students to meet the ones who had worked for the library previously. I wanted all of them to be on the same page when school started. Overall, we were successful.

Though there were several weaknesses, a significant one was that the library has a reputation as a children's library. We support the children's and young adult literature classes here on campus, and much of the collection relates to that focus. However, we also have professional books for educators at all levels, and curriculum support materials. I am still working to make sure others understand this.

A second weakness was a vague collection development policy. I put a new, college-focused plan in place that will help me as I continue to build and maintain the collection. Two areas particularly needed to be addressed; our collection of historical children's books, which had outgrown its allotted space, and the professional materials used by teachers for curriculum or classroom management. This summer, our student workers organized the historical collection, and we weeded it for duplicates. I am working to update our professional collection with newer and more relevant materials. Collection development is always an ongoing process.

Threats are difficult to discuss. I feel one perceived threat was the library name change, simply because it was a change. We went from being the Curriculum Materials Library (CML) when I interviewed to being the Education and Teaching Library by the time I started the job. For people who had been here a while, this change was especially difficult, along with trying to explain our new emphasis on serving the entire college. We still have people call and ask if we are the CML almost two years later.

A S.W.O.T. analysis can be done informally or as a more formal assessment. Some important things to remember while conducting a S.W.O.T. analysis:

1. Know what you want to glean from it. What are your goals? Are you trying to understand employee satisfaction, Do you want to change an existing service? Are you dealing with an employee or patron resistance to change? Do you need formal statistics to show how you implemented a change? Figuring out some goals in advance will help you know what to do with your results.
2. Go in with an open mind. Listen to your stakeholders, employees, students, patrons etc. People will usually tell you want they need if you ask enough questions. If you are a librarian, think of it like a good reference interview. You want to understand the problem so you can find a solution.
3. Make changes clear. If you are going to make a change based on your S.W.O.T. analysis, make it clear to your stakeholders why you are doing what you are doing. They are less likely to view the change as a threat if you explain your logic.

Understanding the Culture

After seven years at a small, private university, I transferred to the larger, public university where I currently work. I was also new to the area. I knew almost no one. At my previous institution, I had established friendships with many of the faculty, and I frequently saw them in the library or on campus. The best way to catch people here seemed to be email. That took some getting used to. I have the best professional relationships with those faculty who teach or have taught children's and young adult literature. I have others in a few departments who reach out to me if they have a research question. While the process has moved more slowly than I like, it is a top priority for me to build these relationships. I am still working on it.

Two things that have really helped me understand the culture here were joining a reading group for faculty members, and participating in a library discussion group for managers. These activities allowed me to step outside the world of my branch library, and better connect with my colleagues elsewhere on campus.

Here are a few ways you might integrate into the workplace culture.

1. Ask to attend department meetings. I think of these as anthropological experiences. You can learn about the population and their needs. After the meeting, follow up with individuals. Let them know how the library can make their work easier.
2. Find networking opportunities. Attend a reception, buy the college t-shirt that supports student scholarships, participate in the departmental 5K. Offer to meet a faculty member in the union for coffee. I usually have someone ask me a library-related question at these kinds of events.
3. Say "yes" when you can. Whether you are dealing with an employee or faculty member, or a patron, say yes to their request or need any time you can. Saying yes makes people more

willing to approach you, and if you have to say no, make it clear why. If you are prone to saying yes, people will be more likely to understand a reasonable no.

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing and promotion were top priorities for me. I knew I wanted to reach two groups, the faculty and the students. For students, the best way to do this is word of mouth. I often have students come in asking if they can study here even if they do not major in education. The answer is a resounding "Yes!" I want all students to feel welcome in the library. We have added monthly visits from our pet therapy program, and in conjunction with the main library on our campus, we offer snacks during finals, all as a way to make sure students know we are here.

For faculty outreach, I enlisted the help of the Library Communications Department. They designed a bookmark, which highlighted some of things I could do for the faculty like research consultations, ordering books or other materials for research, and classroom instruction sessions about the library. These are small efforts, but they can be the in-road for expanding our outreach.

Marketing tips:

1. If you have a brand or logo, use it consistently. That way people will know where your information is coming from.
2. Know what you need. Do you need to create an entire marketing campaign for an upcoming event or will an email and word of mouth help you with promotion?
3. Enlist help if you need it. If you do not have a communications or marketing department, find a student or staff member with a creative bent, give them a few guidelines, and let them be creative. Promotion does not have to be difficult.

Conclusion

As librarians, we know change is inevitable; therefore, so is change management. The changes I have made so far have been minor, but I hope positive, for the library, my staff, and myself. I think one of the most important things managers can do is *see* when change needs to happen. What worked last month, last year, or ten years ago, might not work now. Go back to your policies and procedures every year to see if they are still working. Ask for feedback from your stakeholders and listen. Some of the best suggestions for making things run more smoothly have come from my student workers because they are the ones making the processes work. Start small and have an open door for ideas, even tiny changes in procedure could lead to happier, more productive work environment for everyone.

Further Reading

Here are just a few of my favorite professional books. Don’t Make Me Think is a web design book, but it has some good concepts that could be applied to management as well.

Heath, C., & Heath, Dan. (2010). *Switch : How to change things when change is hard* (1st ed.). New York: Broadway Books.

Kinni, T. (2011). *Be our guest: perfecting the art of customer service*. New York: Disney Editions.

Krug, S. (2014). Don't Make Me Think, Revisited: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability (3rd Edition) Berkeley, Calif.: New Riders.