

S Y S T E M S A N D P R O C E D U R E S E X C H A N G E C E N T E R

Flyer 215

Library Reorganization & Restructuring
May 1996

INTRODUCTION

Some critics argue that there is an opportunity for universities to restructure themselves, through the use of digital technology, into vital organizations which will enhance student learning and meet the challenges of the 21st century. Institutions of higher education that seize this opportunity are destined to undergo more change in the next 25 years than they have in the past 200. Indeed, by the year 2020 it is possible to imagine a revolution in the way members of the university community teach and learn, and the way they access, transfer, and communicate information which will profoundly alter the world of higher education.

If universities are about to undergo a tremendous change through the use of digital technologies, then how are research library administrators at higher education institutions restructuring their organizations and providing the leadership, by their example, which will support and furnish direction for this transformation?

As the entity traditionally responsible for serving the information needs of the university, research libraries appear to have little choice but to change dramatically in the next 25 years. Some factors which make change inevitable, beyond the general malaise of higher education, include: declining budgets which have produced pressure for additional productivity and accountability; the potential of digital technology; changing patterns of scholarly communication; and the need to support asynchronous learning.

Certainly libraries are responding to these forces. Responses to the survey, however, indicate that change in most research libraries at this time is incremental rather than dramatic. It is possible, nonetheless, to see patterns emerging particularly relative to resource reallocation and the formation of partnerships with other university units which reflect new emphases and priorities.

SURVEY RESULTS

Fifty-three of the 108 ARL libraries affiliated with institutions of higher education responded to the survey and of those, 17 indicated they had completed, within the last three to five years, or are currently engaged in a

library-wide reorganization. Twice as many, 34 libraries, replied that they had completed, were engaged in, or planning the reorganization of *specific units*. The units which were most often cited as affected were reference, cataloging, acquisition, interlibrary loan, and circulation and reserves.

FORMAL PLANNING PROCESS

Of the 35 positively responding libraries, 71% have a formal planning process in place, on par with 68% of the libraries responding to the August 1995 SPEC Kit 210 *Strategic Planning in ARL Libraries* which reported having been involved in a planning process within the past six years. The overwhelming majority have had a planning process in place for five or less years.

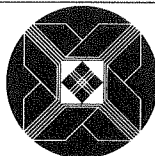
Library administrators, librarians, to a lesser extent library support staff and outside consultants are noted as participants in library planning efforts. There seems to be little involvement by members of the university community outside of the library. Twenty-two libraries (92%) conduct a regular update or review process.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Organizational change in the responding libraries is being driven by a number of factors and for the most part, the same factors influence both library-wide and unit-specific reorganization. Among the respondents 51% attribute their library-wide organizational changes to information technology, while 46% note declining resources as an important force influencing change. Other major factors contributing to the need for change are the availability of networked information noted by 40% of the respondents and new patterns of scholarly communication cited as significant by 34% of the libraries.

OUTCOMES

As part of library-wide restructuring, almost half of the libraries have reallocated personnel with most of the movement from technical services to public services. Seventeen libraries have increased the allocation of funds to support training and staff development. In addition, 17 libraries have reallocated resources to automation and networking units. Nine libraries have entered into partnership with other academic libraries



in connection with their reorganizing activities, and an equal number have applied for grants from outside agencies. Six libraries have hired professionals without an accredited library degree.

In the process of restructuring and in response to decreased resources, 23 libraries have lost an average of 10.5 support staff and 20 libraries report a average decline of 5.5 professional positions, with one respondent reporting as many as 35. The most cited outcomes of library reorganizations have been the combining of units within the libraries, new partnerships with other university units, greater emphasis on networked information, new or expanded user services, elimination of some services, and a decreased emphasis on catalog maintenance and on the collection of print materials.

The majority of libraries had an organization chart of the library both prior to and following the reorganization, though there was a slight decrease in the latter. Interestingly, less than a quarter of the responding libraries have a written document or statement as a result of their reorganization.

An equal number of libraries noted whether or not they regularly evaluate their services. Only two libraries have formal plans for evaluating their restructuring program.

CONCLUSION

The challenge for research libraries during this time of transition is captured in the following quote from the report of one of the responding libraries: "how to maximize, and encourage flexibility, ... while maintaining a structure that will channel energies into

filling the Libraries' objective of providing services to clients. Achieving this balance was seen as a seismic engineering problem: stability for ongoing functionality with the capacity to absorb stress." In other words, current services must be maintained while an infrastructure is being built to support the information needs of the 21st century.

In the early nineties, 44 ARL libraries produced strategic plans (see ARL SPEC Flyer 210) which according to Richard Clement "revitalized thinking, and enabled the library to review services and effect organizational change." With several notable exceptions research library restructuring, hence organizational change, in the mid-nineties appears to be incremental rather than dramatic and transformational. With a variety of forces currently at work, most notably declining resources and the ability of communications technology to deliver information to the desktop, many libraries have been forced to restructure on an ad hoc basis without an opportunity to plan. It is almost as though research libraries are catching their breath before they proceed to realign their resources, organizational structure, and services in order to accommodate the opportunities of the Information Age.

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