

Negotiating change

Satu Bohm, Karin Byström, Petter Nerelius, Linda Thorn

Uppsala University Library

Introduction

Uppsala University Library is one of the major research libraries in Sweden, with a wide range of specialties - old collections, digital repositories and current support to faculty and students. The library provides library services to 9 faculties with 7000 employees and nearly 44000 registered students. The library has 11 different subject libraries in the Subject Libraries Department. In addition, the library has a Cultural Heritage Department, a Library Support department and an Administrative Department. The total number of employees in the library is approximately 200.

In the last 18 months the library has gone through a re-organization program with the aim to make the library more united. The re-organization was done in several steps and the program included empowerment of employees, leadership and processes. Library units were merged and three processes introduced; Media and Collections, Study and Research Support and Information Services. A matrix organization was thus created. The change is among the most comprehensive that the 400-year-old library has undergone.

The reasons for the re-organization can be summed up in four major points: stronger branding of the library, better service to users, better use of employee skills and adapting to doing the same amount of work on a smaller budget. With the new organization the library would work more effectively and use the resources in a better way.

Within the processes, three organizational development projects have been undertaken: the digitization workflow, new working methods in library instruction and management of the virtual reference desk.

Change leadership in the new matrix organization has offered challenges. Different approaches have been tested to find the best ways for collaboration and communication. This paper will describe how the library has developed ways of leading change by involving employees and managers at different levels in the change process. It focuses on change management in a matrix organization based on our own reflections as Process Managers and Program Leader.

Change process model

There are several models that could be used as a framework to understand and analyse organizational change and change leadership. One of them is Kotter's well-known eight-stage change process. In this paper we have been inspired by Kotter's model as a way to structure the analysis rather than as an empirical method. The model has been interpreted in different ways and we have chosen to use the stages as defined by Smith (2011):

- Establish a sense of urgency
- Form a powerful high level coalition to lead and guide the changes
- Create a vision of the organization's future
- Communicate that vision widely, repeatedly and consistently
- Empower people in the organization to act on the vision
- Plan for visible short-term performance improvements
- Consolidate improvements and produce more change
- Institutionalise new approaches

Preparing for change

A vision and the urgent need for change were presented by the management in 2014. Four main reasons for the re-organization were pointed out: stronger branding of the library, better service to users, better use of employee skills and adapting to doing the same amount of work on a smaller budget. The aim of the re-organization was to make the library more united – *one University Library*.

The vision and the four main reasons for re-organization were communicated repeatedly and consistently by the management to all employees at information meetings, through blog posts with discussion forums and e-mail. This helped the organization see the need for change and the importance of acting quickly thus preparing the organization for change. The vision and the urgent need for change needed to be presented not only to library employees and leaders at different levels but also to other stakeholders. However, for a successful continuous change process, we experienced that employees and managers were crucial groups.

The re-organization had an impact on work environment, leadership and processes. A holistic view on all these aspects was necessary for a successful change management process. To make sure that all parts of the re-organization was considered the library management pointed out a group with the mission to coordinate all parts in a change program. A Program Leader was assigned to coordinate the work in the fall of 2015. In January 2016 three Process Managers were added to the group. In this way a coalition to lead and to work with the change processes had been put together.

Starting the change process

In order to get started with change in the processes, three process mapping projects were established in October 2015: the digitization workflow, working methods in library teaching and management of the virtual reference desk. The process began by setting up broad working groups for each mapping with staff from all parts of the library. The groups had the goal to present new workflows and services, and they had a high level of freedom. In this way employees in the organization were empowered to act on the management's vision.

The groups consisted of people who in many cases had not worked together before. For the digitization mapping, staff from all the different parts of the process was included: metadata, conservation, imaging and publishing. In the library teaching mapping group, both experienced and new library teachers were included. In the early stages, the groups needed a clear leader and a clear purpose and goal. At this initial stage, the Program Leader led the working groups and facilitated workshops in all three mapping processes, thus involved in shaping all groups and their future working methods.

At the start it was necessary to create clarity about the role of members in the working group. Since this was a new working method within the library, many group members were unsure about their role and expectations on contribution and participation in the group. The group leader started by presenting the goals and working methods which the group discussed and agreed on. A lesson learned is that we should have discussed on a deeper level how each person in the group could contribute to the goals. If we would have devoted more time to this at the beginning, we would have been able to discover and deal with the uncertainties at an earlier stage.

The groups started by mapping the process area and defining it against related areas. Needs and problems of the stakeholders were analyzed. In this way the group could identify problems that needed to be solved and got a starting point in finding new workflows. The group also took into account goals and regulations that affected the process as well as the number of employees involved. The meetings were designed as workshops with a high degree of creativity and many open discussions.



Mapping in a working group

Through analyzing and describing a snapshot of the current situation in the three processes the working groups created a readiness for the next step in the change process.

To give the groups the best possible conditions to work and to promote creativity it was important for the group leader at this point to create a trusting and safe climate in the groups. This was a success factor in the change process. A challenge for the group leader in the beginning was to establish a new way of working with organizational development at the library. One key concept for success was enough time for discussions and high sensitivity to when there were problems in the group that needed to be resolved, such as disagreement about a proposed solution.

Establishing a joint group leadership

The leader and facilitator for all three working groups was initially the Program Leader. From January 2016, Process Managers were expected to join and lead the already existing working groups.

To shift group leader in the middle of the working process was a challenge which we didn't quite manage to solve. Management wanted to see the Process Managers as leaders for the working groups and the mapping of each process. Process Managers occasionally felt uncertainty about communicating about the process mapping and the results due to uncertainty about ownership over the process mapping work. This somewhat complicated situation was solved by establishing a joint group leadership.

By establishing a strong collaboration between the Program Leader and the Process Managers, there was no clear break in leadership for the groups, which thus could maintain focus on the task. Between the workshops the Program Leader and the Process Managers analyzed the results from the workshops together. The ambition was to create a common understanding of the work and build trust in each other. We also analyzed group processes and thereby increased our awareness of the development of the working groups and our own leadership. Gradually we built trust in each other as leaders and we did not feel that there was a problem who actually led and facilitated the workshops. In addition to being a co-leader, the role of the Process Managers was also to be an observer and to take into account what happened in the group during the workshop. By thinking together, we could develop our leadership and achieve a better result.

Leading change is a challenge even for an experienced leader. The Process Managers all had some leadership experience but had not been responsible for any project of this size previously. Step by step we created a strategy to lead the working groups through the change and created a joint change competency.

Negotiating change

Change management affected not only Process Managers or the Program Leader. Change concerned all leaders and managers in the organization. We had to be extra observant at communication because none of the managers were directly involved in the concrete mapping work and developing of new workflows in the processes.

Negotiations about the changes had to be held at all levels of the organization. All managers and leaders meet regularly for discussions. Problems, options and solutions in the process mapping or related to the re-organization were discussed by leaders and managers regularly.

To gain approval for the changes in the whole organization, all processes also had reference groups where new ideas and proposals were discussed. A total of 60 staff was involved in the reference groups. Information meetings for all employees were also arranged. The reference groups and information meetings played an important role. By continuously receiving information about the work and having the opportunity to comment, the process work was integrated into the organization.

The aim was to reach a broad acceptance of the changes and during the discussions they developed a joint understanding of the need for change and for the chosen solution. This meant that the pace of change was slower than expected from start, but also that the changes at the end were easier to implement. The alternatives presented to the library management were well thought-out and motivated. One lesson learned, however, is that no matter how many discussions are held, everyone will not agree that the change is necessary or correct. A challenge for the leader lies in choosing the right time for a final proposal and decision.

Change resistance

During the discussions in the working groups we discovered that members had interpreted the management's vision and goals differently, and this had consequences for the group's work.

Based on the initial snapshot of the current situation the working groups explored different solutions and scenarios that could help solving the needs of the stakeholders. This was not an easy undertaking since the expected outcome was unclear both for the working groups and for the group leader at this time. During discussions, we discovered that the vision *one library* and the four major points needed to be further broken down within each area. When we began to talk about teaching or virtual reference services in the working groups, there were different opinions about the desired results of the change.

In the group who worked with library teaching, a clearer direction from the management was openly requested. There were different views within the group about how to develop library teaching and it was difficult to reach an agreement at first. There were different opinions on what constitutes good service and quality in teaching and if the librarian should be a subject specialist or a general information literacy specialist. When the Process Manager presented a fictive scenario that could be interpreted as a way to shrink the library teaching group into a smaller teaching team without a permanent workplace it led to strong resistance. But the fictive scenario also turned out to be an opening to a new type of discussions where we were able to point out the different opinions and work on resolving them. We discovered that the way the group had interpreted the vision and four reasons for re-organization had an influence on their readiness for change.

Similarly, there was a discussion in the virtual reference working group that expressed the fear that a proposed change would mean that all staff would rotate between the information desks of all the different subject libraries. This triggered a discussion about staffing of desks, but the problem actually originated in different views on quality and the role of the librarian. When we discovered that we were talking about different things, we could focus on finding a consensus about the purpose of the change.

Clarifying the different views opened up for a deeper discussion about alternatives and the groups could compare pros and cons and find different solutions. To think together about different scenarios was one way to reach consensus and find a solution. In this way we were able to follow up and actively work with the resistance in the working groups.

At the reference group meetings, we also invited to open discussions about scenarios, such as the virtual helpdesk. At information meetings we were able to pick up questions from employees who were not included in any workgroup or reference group. In this way we were able to involve as many employees as possible in the change process. Another important group was the managers who lead the change in daily work and therefore it was important that we reached a consensus on the change. Discussions with managers were primarily held at joint meetings for all leaders and managers but we also met individually or in smaller groups of managers when needed. Despite this, it was difficult to keep all managers informed and included in the change process.

For some employees, we could see that the resistance decreased as soon as a decision was made by the library management. While the issue was still up for discussion, there was an open negotiating position and co-workers wanted to influence the decision as much as possible. However, when the management had stated their point of view, employees that previously opposed to the change accepted and participated actively in the implementation.

Conclusions

In this paper we have described the re-organization program at Uppsala University Library and the implementation of new working methods. We have focused on some perspectives of change management such as group leadership, change resistance and negotiation.

In anchoring change at all levels from highest management to employees we believe negotiation is a key concept. Openness for discussion contributes to a feeling of being included amongst employees as well as management at all levels. Negotiating change also guarantees quality and substantiated decisions from both a user perspective and an organizational perspective. Discussions have also been a way of using a reflective practice around goals, effectiveness, working methods and leadership. Negotiating change is not a fast track to results but we are convinced that anchoring change at all levels is a key concept for long-term success. Another success factor has been a reflective joint change leadership between the Program Leader and the Process Managers.

There is still much work to be done and many changes ahead. The re-organization and the three processes have started a chain reaction of changes, both in the day-to-day work, in collaboration and in decision making. Three implementation projects are still up and running and eventually we will work on evaluation and improvement of the new working methods and services that we have established. It is also important to continue to improve our change competency as leaders and co-workers and we believe that some of the key components for success will be continuous empowerment and trust.

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