CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

A Prestigious Library Breaks Through a Longstanding Stalemate Organization-Wide Redesign and Change Implementation

This client had been attempting to improve customer and employee satisfaction for four years. We worked with them to build collaboration and agreement among leaders and staff. We designed and implemented organization-wide restructuring, including new roles and responsibilities reflecting a new culture, along with the staffing, team development, evaluation, and rewards processes needed to support it. Our work developed their capacity to conceptualize and manage the change required to substantially improve employees' orientation and morale. They are now three years into implementation.

The Library started to redesign their organization in 1996. There were no compelling external reasons for change, no burning platform: customers were pleased, and finances were good. However, senior leaders wanted to increase the library's recognition both within the University and the academic library community. Library staff wanted a better working environment; they were dissatisfied with decision-making and communication.

By the time we began consulting with them, the library had already been working at the project for three years, having worked with three other consultants. They had learned that senior leaders and staff had different objectives, which they believed represented both different values and competing outcomes. They had agreed on a new organizational structure but had been stuck for six months about how to implement it. Everyone was frustrated.

We helped them understand that the underlying reason for little progress on implementation was that no one really liked the design or believed it was actually sustainable. Senior leaders and staff were still polarized about the purpose and focus of the redesign: to increase the library's external recognition or to improve the work environment? It hadn't occurred to them that they could have both. The project team regularly set unrealistic time frames, missed deadlines, and had little credibility with both leaders and staff.

We partnered with the library director, the HR manager, and the project leader – together and separately. We introduced key frameworks that helped them understand why they were stuck, and what we could do to start making progress. The frameworks related to organizational change, organization design, decision-making, and project management – frameworks the leaders found useful throughout their work.

We helped leaders and staff appreciate each others' values and perspectives and developed a way for leaders to get input from staff before finalizing their decisions. Using that approach, they were able to build a compelling values-based vision along with strategic directions supported by both leaders and staff. These served to guide the subsequent development of organizational structure, capabilities, processes and rewards.

We re-organized the project management structure based on clear roles and boundaries between groups. We developed a model that revolutionized their decision-making process: first on the redesign project and eventually throughout the library. We revised the project plan based on a realistic assessment of how much project work could be done while still running the library – sequencing the work like a relay race with effective hand-offs, and setting more realistic timeframes for the work.

One of the most important accomplishments was reaching consensus on a new structure among all the key leaders and the structure design sub-group – a critical success factor. Through the process of developing options, getting input from library staff and

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reaching a decision, we built capacity for effective communication and decision-making and for developing structures and processes. This accomplishment created the momentum and confidence to complete the project.

We accomplished our goals through integrated action in a number of critical areas:

- **Strategy:** Establishing clear strategic directions, vision, mission, and values owned by leaders and staff

- **Structure:** Implementing a new organization structure that clarified roles and responsibilities and was flexible enough to incorporate new technology-based initiatives within its logic; establishing coordinating groups for each division, to improve coordination with the division, and give leaders a resource for two-way communication

- **Process:** Using decision-making, communication and team development processes that have become "the way of doing business," for example:

  o **Decisions** are made by people who will be affected by the decisions
  o **Communication:** Information is shared more widely, more frequently and more systematically – new bi-weekly information forums are well attended by staff and leaders and people are volunteering to present their projects; people are talking with each other more both formally and informally.
  o **Team Development:** The new divisions and teams were launched using a repeatable process to establish that team's mission, vision, values, operating principles, results and objectives, and measures of success; team leaders are using this process to renew their teams and to relaunch when they hire new members.

- **Infrastructure:** Moving staff members' offices to support improved intra- and inter-team communication

- **Measurement and Rewards:** Implementing values-based awards and a new approach to goal setting and performance evaluation

- **People:** Staffing the new structure using newly developed roles and responsibilities for members and leaders; developing new goal setting and evaluation processes; increasing skills throughout the library in meeting design and facilitation, working with groups, project management, and managing organizational change

- **Leadership:** The leadership team is larger and more inclusive; the role of leadership has greater legitimacy; the relationship between staff and leaders has improved; leaders are spending more time together managing the library as a whole and less time doing behind the scenes management

As with any project of this scale and complexity, the first pass wasn't perfect, but the library developed processes and relationships which enable them to continue refining the design and continue to improve the overall results for the library. One important indicator of success has been greater than average budget increases for library operations and special projects relative to other parts of the University.

Another lasting result has come from the emphasis we placed on skills transfer. The library continues to benefit from increased skills in facilitation, designing and managing organizational change, working in teams, managing projects, and designing and managing meetings.

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