CHANGING AN ORGANISATION'S CULTURE: ENHANCE YOUR LIBRARY'S ABILITY TO CHANGE AND BE INNOVATIVE

Linda S. O'Brien

Associate Librarian
University of Canberra
Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

ABSTRACT

Libraries are facing rapid political, social, economic and technological change. The challenge for today's library manager is to create an organisation which can not only respond to these changes but create change through innovation. Through adaptability and innovation libraries can retain their vitality and effectiveness as service organisations. Organisational culture, that is the organisation's vision, common values and assumptions, and the rituals, symbols and myths which support these, can be managed to allow an organisation to respond to the challenges of the 90s. Through a structured change process involving assessment of the organisation's existing culture, setting a new vision for the organisation and establishing practices to reinforce the new vision an organisation may create a culture which is responsive to change and innovative.
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INTRODUCTION

At the last Library Association of Australia Biennial Conference there was an excellent session entitled Managing innovation - change or be changed. At this session two stimulating papers were delivered, one by Eric Wainwright who warned that 'in the modern era, the most important factor affecting the success of the library is its ability to change, particularly to undertake innovative change which improves the effective delivery of services to its target clientele'. In the second paper of the session John Maxwell, Assistant General Manager (Personnel) with CAPITA Financial Group, urged managers to work toward a new style organisation - an innovative organisation - which is based on staff commitment rather than staff control. What is it that make an organisation more able to cope with change? How can we make our organisations more receptive to innovation? Eric Wainwright's paper tells us that the key lies in planning, organisational structure and organisational climate. This paper focuses on the third aspect 'organisational climate', in particular that component commonly referred to as organisational culture, as a significant key to improving an organisation's ability to respond to change and be innovative. But why do we need an organisation which is responsive to change and innovative?

THE CHALLENGE OF THE 90'S AND BEYOND

Heraclitus (c.540-475 B.C.) claimed that there is nothing permanent but change. Today no one would doubt that rapid political, social, economic and technological change is the rule rather than the exception. Changes brought about by such events as the Dawkins reforms to the higher education sector, the current moves toward award restructuring and enterprise-based unions are all impacting significantly on organisations and libraries are no exception. Technological change has revolutionised library technical processing and is dramatically changing the types of services libraries may now provide. Economic pressures continue to batter most libraries with the consequence of increasing need for libraries to be accountable.

Whilst libraries may once have been the primary providers of information this is no longer the case. It is now common to speak of the information industry in which libraries only figure as one small part. Even so libraries are faced with increasing client demand for existing services and for demand for new services. This is coupled with an increasingly sophisticated clientele with greater expectations and shrinking funds. Employees also have greater expectations of their workplace.

All organisations are being forced to become more productive, to innovate and to provide satisfying work environments if they are to survive and achieve. Kanter likens the current environment of change to the croquet game in Alice in Wonderland. The frustrations of coping with the current rapidly changing climate are clearly portrayed. She suggests that technology can be compared to Alice's mallet. Just as Alice thinks she has mastered the mallet turns into a flamingo and a whole different level of learning and competence is required. In libraries the parallel can be clearly seen. Just as you thought
you had mastered online searching of remote databases along came CD ROM technology requiring a whole new set of learning and competence. The ball is likened to the organisation's employees and clients. As it is about to be hit, the ball turns into a hedgehog and wanders away. The organisation's employees and clients have minds of their own! Just because libraries exist we have no guarantees that our clients will continue to be satisfied with the type and level of services we provide. Just when Alice feels she has mastered 'technology' and has her employees and clients where she wants them, the Red Queen (the government) re-positions the card soldiers which are acting as wickets - the rules of the game have changed!

As the world changes around us our organisations must change if they are to remain responsive and vital. The approaches and strategies of the past will no longer fit today's circumstances. In today's competitive information market the ability to change with the market is only part of the answer. We need to become proactive rather than reactive - to see change as a challenge and an opportunity rather than a threat, to continually foster new ideas and new ways of doing, to create a future which ensures that libraries offer a responsive quality service.

The literature of management reflects the issues raised above. Keiser urges us to re-examine our fundamental assumptions about the way our business is done if we are to respond to the current changes. Barrett believes the challenge is to keep the corporate essence alive by changing it adaptively and creatively. Kanter states that the challenge is 'to build into our organisations the capacity to improve and change direction as conditions change all around us'. No matter how it is described and which terms are used the take-home message is clear. If libraries are to meet the challenge of the 90's and beyond they must create organisations which are not only responsive to change but innovative in seeking to provide a responsive quality service.

THE ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGE

To answer the challenge of the 90's we must create an organisation which can not only respond to change in the external environment but which can create the future through internal change and innovation. Change can be exciting if it is done by us but is threatening if it is done to us. Barrett has covered a new term, 'cambiotics', for the management of change. He sees three ways in which change can be managed:

1. coping with change to survive;
2. capitalising on change to thrive;
3. creating change to triumph.

We must seek to place our libraries in the third category - to be proactive and innovative rather than reactive. Through appropriate leadership, organisational structure and organisational culture this can be achieved. Each of these components are inter-related but can be separated for the purposes of analysis and discussion. Organisational culture is probably the most nebulous, misunderstood but potentially powerful aspect of this group.
'Culture', like art, is difficult to define, but enjoyable to think about. It has become a virtual rite of passage for authors on corporate culture to proffer a new definition or construct a new taxonomy. Green mentions a study which had identified 164 definitions for culture. As is so aptly stated the particular definition of culture offered derives from the author's view of organisational and social theory. The meaning is to a large extent dependent upon the context and use to which the term is put. This paper is not about to create yet another new definition or model. Schein, one of the great writers on organisational psychology and corporate culture provides a comprehensive and authoritative definition. 'Culture can now be defined as:

(a) a pattern of basic assumptions;
(b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group;
(c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration;
(d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore
(e) is to be taught to new members as the
(f) correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems'.

Why Does Organisational Culture Exist?
The organisation's culture provides the rules of behaviour and attitudes, beliefs and assumptions which go beyond that stated within the formal structures and rules. Research into organisational psychology has shown that members of an organisation seek to create 'cultural maps' which will help them define a situation and respond appropriately in an attempt to remove environmental uncertainties. These maps help to define how you should act and think: how you perceive your role and the role of others in the organisation, relationships between the various groups in the organisation and between the organisation and its clients, how to respond to changes imposed from above or 'outside', how to respond to new ideas and so on.

If employees experience uncertainty they become ineffective members of the organisation through their feelings of helplessness and panic. The organisation's culture provides meaning to the members' tasks and a sense of belonging, reducing complexity and enhancing consistency. There is nothing innately good or bad about the strength of an organisation's culture. Culture may facilitate an organisation's ability to respond to change and be innovative as equally as it may block strategic change, acting as 'blinkers' to an organisation's adaptability and flexibility. The 'we've tried that before and it didn't work' or 'they're only a cataloguer/reference librarian so their ideas aren't valid in our area' cultural maps are indicative of such blinkers.

'Teaching' the Organisational Culture
Schein's definition talks about culture being 'taught' to new members. The culture of an organisation is not immediately recognizable and most members of
an organisation would not be able to verbalize the actual culture which is in place. Culture is however embedded by the existing organisation’s members. To enable the management and change of organisational culture it is necessary to have some understanding of the mechanisms by which the culture is embedded.

The primary mechanisms for ‘embedding the culture’, as stated by Schein, heavily emphasize the role of the leader and the examples they set. What leaders take notice of, measure and control, how they respond to organisational crises and how they deliberately coach staff are primary mechanisms. Studies have shown that it is not what leaders say but what they do that is important. Though the librarian may say provision of information services to our clients is the primary mission of the library if they then reduce staffing at service points to increase the bookvote staff will ‘learn’ that the size of the bookstock is more important than provision of information services. Other primary embedding mechanisms are the methods by which reward and status are gained or reprimands earned and the methods and criteria for recruitment, selection and promotion.

Secondary mechanisms which both serve to reinforce and articulate the culture are the structure and design of the organisation and its systems and procedures, the physical design of the building, the formal statements of the organisation’s mission and philosophy and the stories, myths, symbols and legends which form the organisation’s folklore.

Many of the management consultants writing about organisational culture focus on the myths, symbols and legends of an organisation whilst others writers focus on leadership as the key to embedding culture and yet others focus on human resource management aspects such as reward systems and recruitment procedures.

COMPONENTS OF AN ORGANISATION’S CULTURE

In an attempt to better analyse an organisation’s culture in order to describe culture we can break culture down into some component parts. This will also allow us to describe an ‘ideal’ culture, one which supports an effective organisation, assisting it to attain its purpose and goals. Obviously the external environment and the organisation’s mission will dictate the most appropriate culture for the time. In today’s rapidly changing world, however, organisations must be responsive to change and be innovative to succeed so the organisation’s culture must support this. In describing the components of organizational culture, the most appropriate forms to support change and innovation will be discussed.

Vision

One component of an organisation’s culture is the organisation’s view of its mission and goals. This may or may not reflect the formal mission statements or stated philosophies of the organisation. Organisations which are successful at adapting to change and fostering innovation have a vision which:

1. focuses on the future through development of a plan which emphasises a sense of future and a responsibility for creating it;
2. emphasises a commitment to service, quality and a customer orientation. (A recent article entitled Even at Big Blue the corporate culture had to change\textsuperscript{12} tells of IBM's need to change its culture. IBM's reputation of money, power and size is no longer enough for success, the focus must now be on customer solutions and a customer orientation);

3. outward looking, scanning the environment;

4. recognises the need to be adaptable and flexible.

Ever more important than the vision itself is that this must be a \textit{shared} vision. It must be a vision shared by the employees, they must know and 'live' the vision which will provide a sense of purpose and commitment. The external community must also be aware of the organisation's mission and vision. The vision must be communicated to client groups and the employer organisation.

\textbf{Common Values and Assumptions}

Shared common values unite an organisation's culture. These values can support or subvert the stated mission of the organisation. Whilst a particular library's mission may speak of a commitment to service of the clients' needs the organisation's true values may view the clients as a nuisance group who interrupt the 'real' work of the Library. The 'how we do things' becomes more important than the 'why we do things'.

Values which support organisational adaptability and innovation are:

1. a positive view of change which views change as a challenge rather than a threat, and sees change as positive and innovation as necessary for the organisation's survival;

2. a pride and esprit de corps, a culture of excellence rather than mediocrity;

3. a commitment to innovation;

4. an emphasis on openness, communication and the sharing of ideas. Information is not seen as a weapon to be hoarded for power but as a tool to be shared for organisational survival;

5. belief in the value of people and people-potential.

Perhaps one of the most significant areas of shared assumptions and values is that which relates to the value of people within the organisation. Are the staff seen as an expense or an investment? Are they regarded as innately lazy or innately motivated and committed?

Successful organisations which have shown that excellence and ability to innovate and adapt to change highly value their staff. The employees as seen as the major resource and investment in the organisation. There is a belief in people potential and a genuine concern for employees. In return there is a strong commitment from the employees to the organisation and its mission. The organisation fosters a commitment to life-long learning on the assumption that
everyone can always learn. There is a commitment to broad and deep skills training, in 'learning to learn' and training for creativity and innovation. Teamwork and participation are seen as integral to the successful functioning of the organisation. A 'win-win' approach to problem solving is fostered with problems or conflicts being analysed in terms of the needs and objectives of the organisation. Structure, leadership and culture work together to empower individuals and encourage problem-solving and enterprising skills and risk taking - to break through individuals' inner constraints.

Rituels, Symbols and Myths to Support the Vision, Values and Assumptions

'Without expressive events, any culture will die. In the absence of ceremony or ritual, important values have no impact'\textsuperscript{13}

To support the organisation's culture certain rituals, symbols and myths are created which reinforce the underlying values and assumptions. These are the outward manifestations of an organisations culture. These may include myths about the founding or key figures in an organisation which serve to set standards of performance or attitudes to the organisation or show the attainability of success. In their classic work on America's best-run companies Peters and Waterman found that in excellent companies there was a 'dominant use of story, slogan and legend as people tried to explain the characteristics of their own great institutions'.\textsuperscript{14}

At one of Australia's largest universities, the University Librarian could be found on most Saturdays in the library stacks in his white overalls sifting through crates of donations. This communicated a number of messages to a new employee not only about the leader of the organisation but also about its culture. The story was told with pride. It said that the management were 'real people too' who worked hard and cared about the collections of the library.

The rituals, symbols and myths are perhaps the most interesting component of an organisation's culture as they can be more readily identified and described. Rituals, symbols and myths which assist in strengthening and reinforcing the values and vision of a flexible and adaptable organisation include:

1. rewarding appropriate behaviours which help the organisation achieve its goals and objectives through awards, recognition and monetary rewards. This may be a reward on either a group or individual basis. These can serve to raise the esteem of the whole organisation;

2. provide individuals and units with regular feedback about their performance, preferably through development of client feedback channels;

3. reinforce the importance of open and direct and immediate communication. This communication should be up and down as well as across the organisation, and informal as well as formal. Open communication assists in fostering a climate of trust and participation, breaking down compartmentalisation. This is necessary to allow the development of problem-solving coalitions and innovative ideas;

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4. show a reliance on guidelines rather than rules. Rules should be abolished if employees are to develop a customer orientation and act creatively. Similarly systems which are designed to trap errors should be removed wherever possible and replaced with problem-solving control process such as quality circles. Error detection systems and rules encourage inflexible behaviour and discourage creativity and innovation;

5. show a commitment to employees as self seeking learners;

6. promote an environment built upon trust with a win/win approach to problem solving and conflict resolution. Employees must be encouraged to question the status quo and to try new ideas without fear of punishment for failure or punishment for questioning the way things are done. Management and employees who may have developed existing practices must be trained and encouraged to view such suggestions for change constructively rather than as an 'us versus them' situation. Solutions must be sought which meet needs and objectives of the organisation;

7. emphasise the organisation as a whole to break down compartmentalisation through events which bring all employees together and emphasise the mission of the whole rather than the parts. Each unit must also have goals and a measure of autonomy to empower that unit but this must be balanced against the importance of unity. Libraries demonstrate the problems associated with compartmentalisation very clearly through the traditional breakdown of reader services and technical services. This compartmentalisation can create an 'us versus them' situation where the Library's mission is replaced by divisional missions which may be counter to the Library's true purpose.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR ORGANISATION'S CULTURE

To effect a change of an organisation's culture other aspects of the organisation must also change. Culture is intertwined with leadership style, organisational structure, systems and staffing. To successfully change culture it is also necessary to change the role, responsibilities and relationships of managers and employees in the organisation and therefore perhaps the organisation's leaders. Many of the documented examples of successful culture changes occurred after significant changes in the top management team of the organisation. In fact Schein argues that the most important activity of leaders is the creation and management of culture. Certain points however, can be made to assist with the cultural change process independent of other required changes.

The Process

A staged process of culture change is required which is self-renewing if an organisation is to maintain its vitality and effectiveness. The following process is suggested for culture change but at no time should the time and complexity of this process be under-estimated.

* The first necessary step is to create an awareness of the need for change. Information about the external environment and the performance of your organisation as compared with others should be used to mobilise the energy of employees, their awareness of the need for change and the risks
associated with no change. This may in fact be the longest stage of the process as you create a shared awareness that change must occur to ensure organisational effectiveness.

* The second stage of the process is to create a vision of where you would like to be - a strategic vision that clarifies the mission of the organisation and focuses employees' views. It must be a vision which is owned by the employees. One effective way of making this change more measurable and tangible is to create a theme for change. Quality is most often used but in libraries the obvious theme for change is service. Using service as a theme for change, all staff are required to re-align their values and assumptions on the basis of providing the optimal service to the clients. By focusing on the needs and demands of our clients the library's culture will continually evolve with changes in the marketplace. A focus on service is integral to the mission of any library and can be used to instill a sense of purpose and pride in the organisation's members. Leaders should not only articulate this theme for change but demonstrate it - 'Walk your talk - at all levels, at all stages'.

* The third stage, which may in fact begin during stage 2, is to identify the actual culture of the current organisation. All members must be made aware of the meaning and impact of organisational culture and be able to articulate the current culture. This must be a participative process of diagnosis leading to a commitment for action. It is commonly referred to as a culture audit and various tools are available to assist with this process.

* Following the audit of the existing culture this should be matched with the ideal culture required to support the vision and to create a climate of adaptability and flexibility. The values and assumptions which are supportive should be retained and those which undermine the mission of the organisation should be discouraged. Attempts must be made to close the culture gap, to reinforce the positive norms and confront the negative norms.

A number of techniques can be used to close this gap:

1. ensure that management demonstrates a strong commitment to the new culture and backs this up with resources and time. The leader's behaviour will act as a model to staff so they must 'live' the vision not just articulate it;

2. ensure that reward systems consistently reinforce the positive norms and that mechanisms are set in place to confront the negative norms. This should include an appropriate performance appraisal scheme;

3. communicate required norms, values and behaviours and provide timely feedback;

4. review the selection and recruitment process to ensure that new recruits are flexible and adaptable. This process should include an induction program for those selected which communicates the Library's mission, goals, values and expectations;
5. ongoing training and skills development of the organisation's members which emphasize the desired behaviours. This should be part of a staff development program which emphasizes learning and skill building as an ongoing and never-ending process;

6. development of slack in the system to provide time for staff to think creatively and explore new ideas;

7. use of job rotation, job exchanges and visits to other organisations to generate new ideas, broaden perspectives and encourage employees to question existing values and systems;

8. creation of new rituals, symbols and artifacts to embed the required cultural values.

* The last stage, which is in some ways a beginning, is to experiment with this new vision and establish norms, values and assumptions which will support this vision. As you experiment and work towards this vision you must continually clarify policies, goals, strategies and direction. Throughout this process there will be ongoing incremental change as the organisation's culture shifts with the requirements of the external environment and client needs. The change process must be continually reviewed. As the organisation witnesses successful changes employees will be encouraged to undertake further necessary changes.

CONCLUSION

Creating an organisational culture which is responsive to change and innovative is essential if libraries are to meet the challenge of the 90's. This can be best achieved by emphasizing the importance of a service culture and strategically positioning libraries to provide required services. This is a slow and complex process which is only successfully achieved with complementary changes to the organisation's structure, systems and policies. "The challenge, of course, is to manage strategically the organisation's culture, to tap its strengths in order to achieve superior performance, and to identify its weaknesses in time to overcome them before they can cause serious damage."^{19}

About the Author

Linda O'Brien is Associate Librarian at the University of Canberra Library. She was previously Systems Librarian at the James Cook University. Her interests include automated systems, systems analysis, the convergence of information technologies and the impact of technology on human resource management strategies. She is a member of ALIA and an Associate of the Australian Computer Society. She has a Bachelor of Education degree, a Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Science and is currently enrolled in a Master of Public Administration.
NOTES


3 Wainwright. p. 296.


7 Kanter p. 46.

8 Barrett p. 31.


10 Green. p. 8.


19 C. Bettinger. p. 42.
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