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Overcoming Change: Creating a Workflow with a Change Management Process

Sarah Richelle Johnson
Emporia State University, sjohns37@emporia.edu

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Overcoming Change: Creating a Workflow with a Change Management Process

Abstract

In technical services, workflows are critical for ensuring that resources are made available for patrons in a consistent and efficient manner. When a library undergoes major changes, it is critical to ensure that processes are going to be maintained or altered to meet the new needs of the library. From 2018 to 2019, William Allen White Library, at Emporia State University tackled multiple transitions in their technical services department by creating a change management process that walked them through the development of a new workflow. The article discusses the changes they made, the challenges they faced, the process that they tailored to meet their unique needs, and the goal of their workflow.

Keywords

Technical Services, Organizational Change, Workflow

Introduction

Technical services departments have been undergoing continual transformations over the past decade for a number of reasons, including advances in technology, budget cuts, shifts in cataloging standards, and an aging work force. While most libraries have had to overcome at least one of these hurdles in recent years, developing new workflows in the face of two or more changes can be daunting, and will most likely become prevalent over the next few years. According to Household Data Annual Averages by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), nearly 12% of librarians are over the age of 65, with roughly 24% in the 55 to 64 year old age bracket. As a result, over 63,000 librarians are either at retirement age currently or will be within the next 10 years. With this in mind, it is important for libraries to maintain, or adopt a flexible culture that can handle rapid transformations during new projects.

Background

In May of 2018, the William Allen White Library (WAWL) at Emporia State University began the process of overcoming multiple transitions in their Technical Services (T.S.) department. Changes included hiring a new cataloging and metadata librarian to upgrade the position formerly held by a classified employee, and transitioning from Warehouse Management System's (WMS) integrated library system (ILS) to Innovative Interfaces Incorporated's (III) Sierra. Simultaneously, the library was seeking a new business assistant to replace a recently retired employee. This position also performs acquisitions functions in T.S. by utilizing fund codes and working with vendors, such as Gobi, which are both new additions to the library, as well. The final transition begun by the library was the move from Dewey Decimal to Library of Congress Classification. However, this would be a gradual shift, without the need to immediately rearrange books or shelving.

With all of these changes beginning at once, many problems became evident. First, the new staff were coming on board at the time of the new ILS implementation. This meant that there was a lot of work for them while they were getting oriented to the library and the campus. Therefore, they missed critical training opportunities that would orient them to the system. This was particularly evident with the fund codes, as they were not finalized at the time of implementation. Getting the fund codes setup and utilized became confusing.

Because of the new system and the new staff, there was no workflow in place to facilitate the movement of new books from their arrival in the library to their placement in patrons' hands. This left gaps in processing that needed filled as quickly as possible. A lack of knowledge management added to the confusion. Without documentation referring to local cataloging standards, the cataloger took time to browse the stacks and learn as much as she could. However, access to WMS was eliminated and local standards could not be viewed in records until access to Sierra was available. It took almost two weeks from the cataloger's start date before cataloging could commence in the new ILS. Once access was available, however, data clean up became another priority. Thousands of records migrated to the new ILS with incorrect location codes, duplicated item records, obsolete links from other institutions, and subject headings in foreign languages, such as German and Swedish. Additionally, thousands of items were missing from the database. Despite these issues, the new semester would be starting in three months and the pressure was building to get a solution in place.

The solution

With process and data quality issues present at the start, our first step was to create a new workflow to ensure that books would make it from the mailroom to the patrons quickly and flawlessly. The workflow would affect nearly all of our changes, as the new hires would understand their roles, and the ILS modules and new vendor and fund codes would get use.

While the workflow was going to focus on monographs, the results could dictate how it could be adapted to meet the needs of serials and electronic resource acquisition. The workflow would also be unique to our needs, meaning it would be flexible and open to manipulation, as nearly every T.S. process was in flux.

To develop the workflow, the team created a change management process to keep us on track. The business sector has been using change management processes for over twenty years as a way to help organizations and employees adapt to change and reach an end goal. In recent years, they have become popular tools in libraries as they navigate technological advancements and staffing adjustments. While a variety of processes exist, such as Kotter's (1996) eight-step process to change, none of them seemed right for our situation (See Appendix A). However, this is a normal finding. In their study of Kotter's popular process, Pollack and Pollack (2015) find that "...some adaptation was required to suit the process to the needs of the organization" (p.63). Likewise, Sidorko (2008) postulates, "While many models may provide a sound basis for successful change (and certainly Kotter's is included here), no single model can provide a one-size-fits-all solution to organizational change" (p.316).

We liked Kotter's eight steps because of its linear process of eliminating eight common errors in most change efforts. Our organization, though, felt too small and intimate for his framework, and our department would not need each step. We also liked what Horney, Eckenrod, McKinney, and Prescott's (2014) AGILE Model® offers (See Appendix B). It focuses on bringing people, technology and processes together while maintaining a flexible organization that continually anticipates change, generates confidence, initiates action, liberates thinking and evaluates results (p.41). With many possibilities available to us, flexibility was important. However, we could not find literature on this model other than the authors' descriptions, so we were not confident relying on it. Rather than adopting either process, we created our own eight-step change management process that took a little from each model and altered it (See Appendix C).

The Process

The first step in WAWL's change management process is what Kotter describes as a "sense of urgency" which he explains is a "visible crisis [that] can be enormously helpful in catching peoples' attention and pushing up urgency levels" (p.45). Although staff members already knew that changes were taking place in the T.S. department, it was not until the data migration started and the long vacant cataloging position was filled that the urgency was felt.

With this first step accomplished as soon as the data migration finished, we were ready to tackle step two in the change management process, which aligned with the AGILE Model®. As a way to anticipate and prepare for change, we monitored practices and gathered departmental history through informal interviews. The data was used to develop a broad picture of the department and to envision potential workflow options. Based on the observations, we developed a draft of the workflow, which is step three in the process.

The draft focused on a book's journey from the mailroom to the shelf using the new ILS and both new and existing staff. This draft, an agile document in and of itself, created a sense of confidence, which is key in the AGILE Model®. By connecting staff members with their roles in the workflow and linking them to the overarching goal, we generated a confidence that allowed all of the involved parties to engage in discussions that created a finalized workflow.

While the group discussions align with the AGILE Model® as methods of engagement, they were also our representation of Kotter's Guiding Coalition, and step four in WAWL's change management process. The ideal coalition, according to Kotter, includes someone in a position of power, representatives with expertise, members who are credible, and enough leadership to push through any roadblocks. Our group did not quite meet Kotter's recommendations, as we did not

have any positions of power directly involved in the conversations or final decisions, nor was anyone able to push through immediate roadblocks (p.57). Rather, we had to contact the WAWL Dean for assistance after periods without forward movement, which hindered our implementation time. One of the most time consuming barriers that the Dean helped resolve involved importing invoices into the ILS. She reaffirmed job responsibilities so that the appropriate parties in T.S. would do the job efficiently. Our conversations, occurring primarily between the cataloger, the business assistant, and other members of the T.S. department, eventually succeeded in creating a finalized workflow.

With the workflow finalized, it was time to move on to step five in the planning and implementation process. This included sharing the vision and plans to a wider audience. We did not communicate the vision and plan as extensively as Kotter recommends, as our staff size was small and changes were being made behind the scenes. Kotter suggests using a variety of forums, such as "...group meetings, memos, newspapers, posters, informal one-on-one talks", as well as repeating the message often (p.93-95). While his advice is valid, patrons would have never noticed changes had been made in technical services, and the cost of communicating widely would not have been worth the return. Instead, we shared the workflow with other team members and addressed their questions and concerns.

We naturally fell into step six of the process once we shared the workflow. It was time to take action. We were instantly able to fix a bottleneck in the receiving of books, and this kind of immediate success is what Kotter identifies as a "Short Term Win" (p.121-122), and what the AGILE Model® calls "Initiate Action" (p.42). Essentially, when we focused on taking the types of actions identified by the AGILE Model®, such as, "...responding to challenging situations, problems and opportunities", and committing "...to a timely course of action which considers alternatives..", we were able to achieve Kotter's short-term wins. These wins, as another part of step six, provided proof that our workflow was already meeting our needs.

Step seven in our process included re-evaluating the workflow after it had been in place for several weeks. We checked in with members of staff to receive feedback. Based on their input, we made changes to ensure that the workflow would meet their needs, as well as ours, and would run smoothly. This is similar to the "Evaluate Results" frame in the AGILE Model®, which is described as "identif[y]ing what needs to be done and proactively tak[ing] appropriate action" (p.42).

The final step in our process is one that we are still working on: continue moving forward. While the process seems to suggest that we will never be finished, we actually see it as a step that will allow us to keep developing our workflow, as necessary, to meet the desired outcome. Kotter's process has a finite ending with his final step, "anchoring new approaches in the culture" (p.145). While we would like to assume that there would be an end to the development process, constant changes in libraries make one wonder if you could ever anchor changes before a new one came along. For that reason, we will leave our process open for further improvement.

Conclusion

With the new workflow in place for about ten months, we have found that we would not recommend undertaking so many changes at once. While the workflow helped get us on track, we are still experiencing delays from moving to a new ILS, such as data clean up. In addition to delays from navigating to a new system, making additional changes brought increased difficulty. Training on the system occurred before the new staff members were hired, which meant that the new Business Assistant missed important information that was critical to the acquisitions role. This played a part in the slow implementation of the acquisitions module and the importing of invoices, which was a feature available through the new vendor, Gobi. Additionally, the new staff members' focus was on navigating their new surroundings, including the campus and the library, and not solely on navigating the new ILS. Finally, the library was also implementing new fund codes, which were numerous and complicated. Inputting them into the new system was time-intensive and learning how to use them in conjunction with the Acquisitions module is still a work in progress. A year in to both the new workflow and the change management process, the outcome suggests that too much change implemented over a short amount of time increases the risk for confusion and delays in execution. To overcome the growing pains caused by so much change, a change management process was helpful, although selecting one from those already in existence and used frequently can be difficult. Tailoring a process to meet the unique needs of the WAWL was mostly effective, and a year later we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

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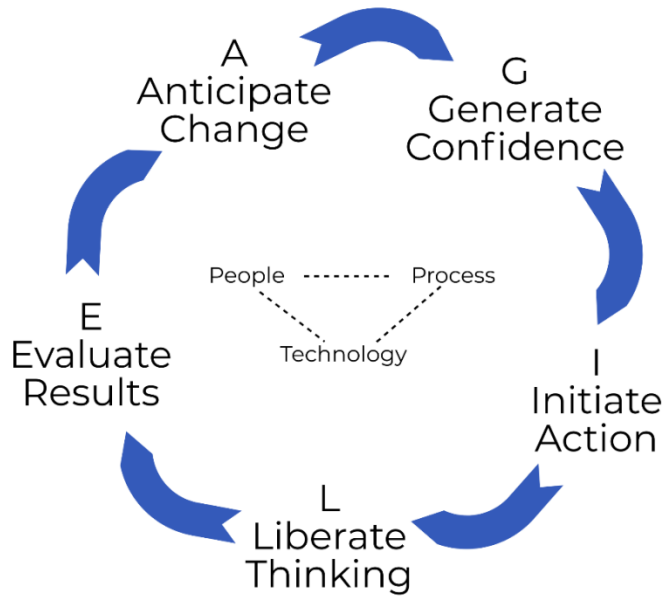
Appendix A

Kotter's 8 Steps to Change (Kotter, 1996, p. 21)

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Create a guiding coalition
3. Develop a vision and strategy
4. Communicate the change vision
5. Empower broad-based action
6. Generate short-term wins
7. Consolidate gains and produce more change
8. Anchor new approaches in the culture

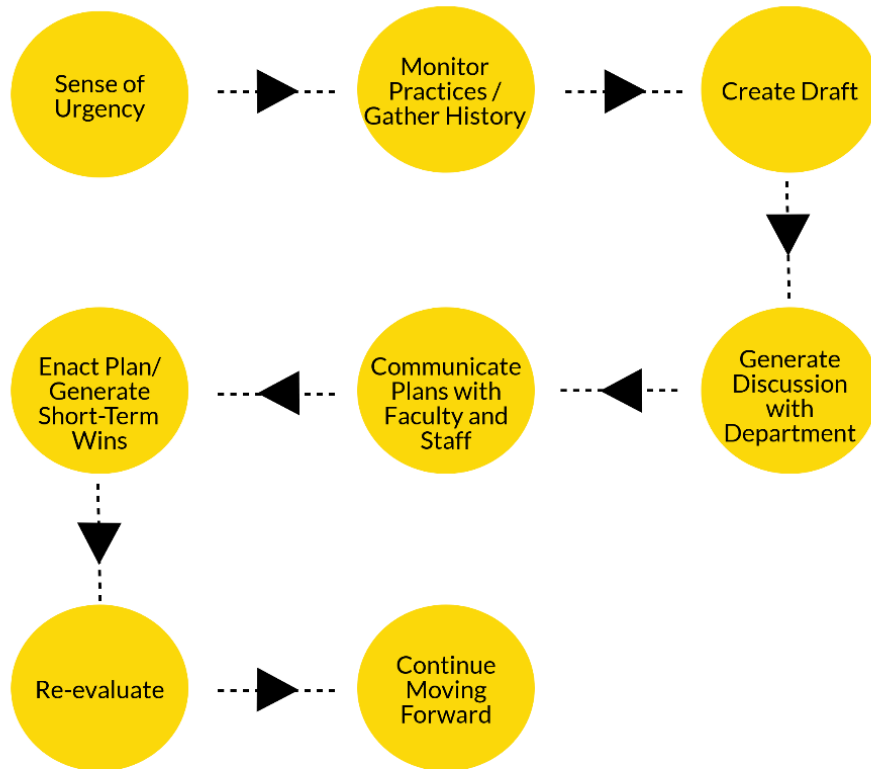
Appendix B

AGILE Model® (Horney, Eckenrod, McKinney & Prescott, 2014, p. 41)



Appendix C

William Allen White change management process



Appendix D
The workflow

