

Management for change in acquisitions in academic libraries

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Abstract

Academic libraries worldwide have been utilizing the Internet to enhance collections, expand services and improve operations. Internet resources and services, such as e-mail, online public access catalogs, publishers' catalogs, electronic resources, multimedia encyclopedias, and dictionaries are becoming common and useful collection-building tools in many libraries, especially academic libraries. This paper discusses the essential elements of management for change in academic libraries, the ways in which acquisitions managers can exhibit leadership in this environment, and how acquisitions librarians can cope with this change. The paper examines the various Internet tools that are being used in the electronic environment for the selection and ordering of books online. The paper also presents an overview of how the use of the Internet has changed the traditional concept of selection and ordering processes in academic libraries.

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Introduction

Library sources, services, and operations have been tremendously influenced by rapid technological innovations over the years. The way information is disseminated, captured, collected, stored, and transferred has provided a new impetus to library functions and operations. The Internet has virtually provided a new dimension to every area of library operations. Academic libraries worldwide have been utilizing the Internet to enhance collections, expand services and improve operations. The Internet has transformed acquisitions work as well, especially its selection and ordering functions. The Internet has, in fact, become a useful tool that enables acquisitions librarians to obtain required information to decide what is appropriate for collection building; to communicate with one another through communication networks; and to store, retrieve, and manipulate the information, at will within the laws and statutes of each country (e.g. copyright).

This paper discusses the essential elements of management for change – conceptualization, preparation, task force creation, and planning – in an academic library set-up, the ways in which acquisitions managers can exhibit leadership (management of staff) in this environment, and how acquisitions librarians can cope with this change (implementation and evaluation). The paper examines the various Internet applications that are being used in the electronic environment for obtaining bibliographic information for the selection and ordering of books online. The paper also presents an overview of how the use of the Internet in acquisitions in academic libraries has changed the traditional concept of selection and ordering of materials. Advantages and disadvantages of the Internet for the acquisitions process are also briefly discussed.

Traditional acquisitions

In typical academic libraries, acquisitions librarians identify bibliographic information of titles for purchase by consulting a variety of selection sources manually, such as faculty recommendations, publishers' brochures and catalogs, vendors' catalogs, prepublication



announcements, trade publications such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Choice*, and book reviews. After the acquisitions librarian has decided to purchase the title, the titles are turned over to the ordering staff. The ordering staff prepare the orders, which are airmailed to the selected vendors. The ordering staff also maintain records of each order submitted to vendors. The ordering staff receive each publication item ordered and supplied by vendors, checking them against the order records maintained. The invoices are paid in respect of the materials received. Also, the ordering staff prepare claim issues in respect of the orders against whom the materials were not supplied by vendors.

Management for change

The amount, diversity, and speed of information available through state-of-the-art technological developments have forced academic libraries to change the mode of library services and operations for the benefit of library users. A just approach to the management for change enables library administrators to retain the long-range vision of the library. To manage the change effectively, talents and abilities of managers are required. On the one hand, change brings growth and experience, but on the other hand, staff resist when threatened with a change. It is ironic that when staff are secure, they yearn for change; but when staff have too much change, they yearn for stability.

The challenge for managers, therefore, is how to control and implement the change process (Curzon, 1989; Diedrichs, 1996). However, by understanding the process of management for change, we can significantly reduce negative experiences and improve the chance of successful change. For the purposes of effective management, change process should be viewed as a logical stream. When the change process is viewed logically, it can be divided into a sequence of events, discussed below. This sequence takes the acquisitions manager from the point of preparing the department for change to the point of evaluating how successful the change has been:

(1) *Conceptualization*. The first and most important phase of all the phases in the

management for change is the conceptualization, which enables the acquisitions manager to assess the nature and desirability of the change and to envision its direction. In this phase the acquisitions manager sets directions and examines alternatives and consequences. The tasks, such as why change is necessary, why it should occur, and what conflicting forces may affect it, should be considered. The acquisitions manager should also develop the awareness about the change, i.e. the change is external or internal, or it is an imposed change upon the department or initiated by the organization. To develop an understanding about the change, questions, such as: "What is the nature of the change?" "What is the pattern of change?"; and "What is the target of change?" should be examined in detail.

(2) *Preparing the department*. The second important key element of management for change is assessing the department's ability to effect change. The acquisitions manager must diagnose the organization's capability to deliver the kinds of changes being proposed keeping in view the requirements of the library as well as library users. Successful change needs openness, honest communication, and receptivity. The change in acquisitions can be managed with the full cooperation of staff. The acquisitions manager should listen to and respect the staff, maintain a healthy balance between task and staff, be fair with everyone, be trustworthy and open, and be committed and supportive.

(3) *Task force creation*. The acquisitions manager should pull together the best task force, consisting of the best possible group of staff available in the organization, to design the change. Studies have shown that the work product of a group is always superior to the work product of one person. The creative power and problem-solving capabilities of a well-working group is always considerable. Before selection of the task force, points such as the size of the group, nature of the group, and selection of a leader should be discussed.

(4) *Planning*. Good planning reveals the depth of commitment and departmental skills of

a manager and is essential for smooth implementation of the change. Several steps in the planning process, including the development of the vision of the change process, creating options to achieve the vision, writing the goals and objectives of the change process, and developing the plan for change, containing background, design, implementation plan, budget, and schedule, should be considered. Careful and controlled planning ensures successful management for change. Quality planning brings out all the necessary dimensions of the management for change and forestalls many future difficulties.

- (5) *Management of staff.* One of the greatest challenges acquisitions managers face is leading their staff during times of change. The successful integration of change into a library department rests upon the manager's ability to manage staff involved in the change process. In order to effectively manage staff, a manager must understand the feelings that a person experiences when confronted with change. It is widely believed that the primary reason for resistance is that the individual feels threatened. Anger, resentment, or depression on the part of staff should not be treated as an abnormality. In order to gain the staff support and minimize resistance, several meetings with the staff should be held discussing the change.
- (6) *Implementation.* Implementation is the process that moves the acquisitions department from the current state to the desired changed state. It is the phase in which the concepts and the plan for change are brought into being. During the implementation, the design of the change must be integrated into the department's existing structure and processes. The implementation of changes should be done at a suitable time when there are no other changes being implemented in the library so that the changes will not affect the workload of staff and quality of the change will not have any adverse impact. At the time of implementation of changes, budget cuts, unwilling transfers, negotiations, and work actions should be avoided to have the smooth implementation of changes.

- (7) *Evaluation.* Evaluation of the implemented changes is necessary to find out if the change did what it was supposed to have done. If it did not, then the problems or the pressures that created the change will emerge again. Besides, evaluation phase fosters learning; it is an opportunity to go back and see how we did.

Internet applications

The Internet is providing access to a growing array of information resources and has the potential of providing unprecedented connectivity among users, libraries, and other information agencies. In addition to the basic Internet tools of electronic mail (e-mail), electronic mailing list, Telnet, File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and electronic bulletin board (EBB), associated services and facilities, such as the World Wide Web (WWW), WWW browsers, wide area information server (WAIS), and various related tools such as homepages, etc. have been very helpful in carrying out library activities (Hura, 1999; Hunt, 1999). The potential benefits of using the Internet for acquisitions (Gold, 2000; Hollis, 1998) can also be demonstrated through the use of e-mail, electronic data interchange (EDI), the use of online library and publishers' catalogs for bibliographic checking and for ordering books online, and electronic publishing.

'... Databases, such as OCLC's FirstSearch, Dawson's EnterBooks, or Amazon.com, can be accessed over the Internet for checking bibliographic information to ensure that order records are of a high standard and contain sufficient information for the supplier to identify the book...'

E-mail is being used for sending orders and for receiving recommendations for purchase from academics and readers. E-mail is also used to send electronic reports as to the status of publication, printing delays, and price increases from the supplier and vendor to the library. EDI in acquisitions involves the direct communication of messages such as orders, acknowledgments, status reports,

claims and invoices from computer to computer without human involvement and omits the need for paper records of transactions. As a matter of fact, EDI increases efficiency as it eliminates the duplication of data entry and transcription errors and allows for faster transactions.

The Internet is being used to access publishers' catalogs and library catalogs which greatly aid the acquisitions librarian. Book selection is enhanced by the ability to check online bibliographic databases for information. Databases, such as OCLC's FirstSearch, Dawson's EnterBooks, or Amazon.com, can be accessed over the Internet for checking bibliographic information to ensure that order records are of a high standard and contain sufficient information for the supplier to identify the book. Publishers' catalogs online are useful in checking what will be published in the near future. Acquisitions librarians can thus determine immediately whether a title is in print. This currency of information is not possible in printed sources. Catalogs may also be used to download bibliographic record onto disk in MARC format and then transfer the record directly into the library catalog.

Publishers' or book databases, such as EnterBooks or Amazon.com, have the facility for online selection and online ordering, which means that the book can be ordered immediately. This is beneficial to libraries as it is an efficient and fast means of obtaining material. However, many academic libraries' automated systems are not compatible with the publishers' databases. Thus, librarians may well see details of a book in an online publishers' catalog, but will continue to order on their own system. This involves entering book details both on the Internet and in an automated system, which leads to less efficiency in work practices with duplication of effort. However, academic libraries, which are developing new systems, are using the Internet to download their orders from suppliers to their local systems, making ordering through the Internet a reality. Library staff place the orders on the suppliers' systems and transfer them to the libraries' system the next day.

Publishers' Web sites are also useful in obtaining additional information relating to books, which is not available through any other source. Web sites will also help in

finding out whether the book is available online and that there is no print version. By paying the charges, the books may be downloaded or printed out to text. In addition, certain Web sites provide details on second hand or out-of-print books.

Use of Internet in acquisitions in academic libraries

Academic libraries are using the Internet in acquisitions to provide more comprehensive information services to their users, with access to worldwide resources, which are not attainable through other methods. The use of the Internet in acquisitions, especially for selection and ordering functions, in academic libraries is discussed below.

Selection

The King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) Library has established direct communication with the academic faculty through the extensive library Web site by making available book recommendation form (Arabic and English) to be submitted by faculty for acquisition of books. Other forms available on the library Web site are: information query, interlibrary loan request, and book renewal.

E-mail is very effective in transferring information from one colleague to another. Bibliographic information of a book title received from a colleague can be selected for ordering. Besides, there are numerous selection Web sites on the Internet (see, for example, [1-4]), which are being used by the academic libraries worldwide for selection of materials.

Ordering

Through e-mail, orders are sent to vendors, received within minutes, verified and processed, and finally completed with an electronic receipt from the vendor. Orders are shipped within a week, unless unavailable from the warehouse where they are back-ordered for three to six weeks. Thus, e-mail saves a great deal of time and money (in paperwork, phone charges, and airmail charges). The ordering function of acquisitions in academic libraries is also being performed through the use of different Internet sites (see, for example, [1,2]).

Advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet for acquisitions

There are several advantages and disadvantages (Gold, 2000; Hollis, 1998) in using the Internet for acquisitions work. Currency of information was deemed to be the most important advantage. Currency is good with the main sources but often depends on whoever updates the information on the server. The information in printed format is by its very nature liable to be out-of-date by the time it is published. There is a wide range of information available on the Internet, indicating that the Internet has the potential for being a far more efficient method of obtaining information, some of which was not previously very easily attainable. The other advantage of using the Internet is the speed of obtaining information which is mitigated by the slowness of some Internet searches, although the faster the link between computers, the better will be the response time.

Automated library acquisitions systems have increased efficiency levels over manual systems, but it is only newer systems which have the capability for EDI. Despite the automation of most acquisitions processes, orders often still require some manual handling in printing and posting. Most new systems should be capable of providing these services within the next few years and will probably have Web interfaces as well.

'... Expertise in subject searches would enable librarians to know the benefits and disadvantages between the most well-known search engines and indexes, rather than remaining with one site because they know how to use it...'

As for disadvantages, acquisition librarians usually do not have the time in their normal working day to become familiar with the Internet and thus time is required outside of their "normal work" to enable them to develop expertise in searching the Internet. Professional development is important; otherwise librarians could find themselves left behind while users become more knowledgeable. It is recognized that sources of information on the Internet are either good or bad. There is no quality control as it is possible to access a lot of useless information but it is difficult to establish what information is reliable. Librarians need to develop skills to assess the quality of Web sites

both for themselves and for teaching skills to readers. Expertise in subject searches would enable librarians to know the benefits and disadvantages between the most well-known search engines and indexes, rather than remaining with one site because they know how to use it.

One of the major concerns of the librarians is the way in which information is being organized on the Internet. An improvement in this regard will further boost the use of the Internet. Additionally, greater security is required on the Internet before academic libraries would consider releasing financial details regarding their acquisitions' budgets and spending. It is not feasible to risk the library's funds without proper security.

Conclusion

An acquisitions manager, comfortable with leading and managing, is required to effect management for change. Acquisitions managers must begin management for change with an ethical framework that creates a supportive, cooperative, and harmonious department. Managers must proceed with the compromise and consensus with the staff over the process of management for change in acquisitions. An effective acquisitions manager is one who shapes the destiny of the department if the change has been managed with control and foresight.

The Internet is an important medium for access to information by academic libraries to increase the efficiency that has never been possible hitherto. Bibliographic information can be obtained easily through the Internet, which is necessary before ordering books. The use of e-mail and EDI will further increase and when the Internet security problems, such as computer hacking and virus, are addressed satisfactorily, the benefits of ordering books online can be better realized. The Internet looks set to become an integral part of academic libraries as it erases distance and time, bringing intellectual resources. Libraries must endeavor to create a balance between access of information on the Internet and providing printed copies of scholarly works. The future for academic libraries ideally consists of a combination between access and holdings. Internet has provided an opportunity to academic libraries to move towards access and away from holdings.

Notes

- 1 Dawson's EnterBooks www.enterBooks.com
- 2 Amazon.com www.Amazon.com
- 3 Global Books In Print on Internet www.globalbooksinprint.com
- 4 Publishers' sites, e.g. www.elsevier.com

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