

Reorganizing a Library Department: A Case Study in Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

Identifying opportunities for professional advancement can be difficult to navigate for library employees. Clear paths for moving up in an organization are not always evident. Sometimes you have to make your own path. Considering the needs of those you currently lead while motivating and supporting them in order to acclimate them to change is essential. A literature review of Transformational Leadership and a case study of a reorganization proposed and adopted at Binghamton University Libraries will be used to demonstrate how to achieve success by leveraging talent to better meet the needs of an organization.

Introduction

Managers and supervisors within libraries often find themselves charged with the task of transforming their organizations with little instruction as to where to begin. At the same time, these leaders are often positioned within their organizations in such a way that the organizational culture prevents access to necessary ongoing support for change. They find themselves unable to reorganize and revitalize their teams based on their assessment of talent and ability. Being paralyzed with a perceived structural inability to change the players as necessary by balancing skill sets to form effective, functional and innovative departments can undermine their best intentions.

While managers and supervisors often struggle to align their workflows with the appropriate talent already available within their organizations, long time employees find themselves unable to identify clearly outlined opportunities for advancement. Employees are limited by a lack of platforms from which to demonstrate their abilities and highlight their strengths. New hires have the added challenge of being trained to complete specific tasks by leaders who have little to offer in terms of vision for their future. Individual transformations are hampered by the lack of flexibility within many libraries to promote and position talent to where it can be most effectively utilized to showcase their abilities, in turn adding value to their jobs. Employees, when empowered to innovate, can contribute to the positive transformation of the organization — moving it toward a culture of flexibility and adaptability which is better suited to meet the ever evolving needs of its patrons.

Managers need to persistently analyze the talent within their organizations and to seek opportunities to highlight these talents. Identifying these opportunities and assigning them effectively creates leverage to positively impact the structure of their work environment. Armed with a vision and a needs assessment of the organization, strategic realignment can be achieved. Stakeholders such as a library's administration must participate in the process from the top down and should include buy-in from the employees who are being positioned for promotion and reorganization. Leaders must also consider that within their workplace some employees are geared to change through advancement, others are content to perform effectively and do not desire promotion or advancement via change. Respecting these employees and the role they serve on a team is important when considering reorganization. Understanding that both types of employees are assets to the library, one must identify who wants to climb the proverbial ladder, and honor those who do not — recognizing them for their dedication and service to the library.

Clearly outlining the path of advancement can enhance a sense of purpose and provide benchmarks for an employee's personal goal setting. Providing employees tools and communication channels to allow them to present ideas, innovations, and workflow efficiencies can influence their manager and subsequent supervisors to take their projects, their library, and themselves to the next level of success — whether it be promotion or to simply do their job better. Encouraging employees to take full advantage of these opportunities to showcase their work and talents builds trust, buy-in, loyalty and productivity.

Transformational leadership and its related leadership philosophies can provide guidance to the middle manager looking to implement change from within the organization. Delivering the message up the organizational chain to administrative stakeholders is critical to that mission in order for the work toward reorganization and revitalization to begin. In addition, giving consideration to the employees they serve, and the opportunities that can enhance their workplace experience, are in the best interest of the holistic well-being of the organization.

Literature Review

Leadership

Managers have a variety of styles from which to choose when developing their individual approach to leadership. These leadership theories are often similar, combining facets of popular styles such as transactional leadership, servant leadership, and charismatic leadership. In order to provide context, it is necessary to define these styles in a general way in order to point out where they intersect with transformational leadership — the focus of this paper. Loosely defined, transactional leadership refers to a style in which expectations of an exchange relationship between the leader and follower are clearly expressed by the leader.¹ Servant leadership tends to place the focus on the follower's needs: emphasis is placed on emulation of the leader's service orientation to the follower.² Charismatic leaders use their personality to motivate and inspire followers based on the power of their persuasive techniques.³

Considering the environment where one works, the type of people who are leading and the tasks at hand will determine which mix of styles works best. In reviewing the literature, transformational leadership stands out among the other styles as being an effective, balanced option for reaching the goal of providing opportunity for employees while increasing productivity and overall job satisfaction among workers. Transformational leadership embodies many of the most valuable characteristics of the styles already mentioned that are required for changing one's environment on a continuum from the individual to the organizational level.⁴

Transformational Leadership

“Transformational leaders act as mentors to their followers by encouraging learning, achievement, and individual development. They provide meaning, act as role models, provide challenges, evoke emotions, and foster a climate of trust.”⁵ Transformational leaders who use charismatic leadership principles invoke both emotion and loyalty from their employees and create purpose and vision among their followers. These leaders clearly demonstrate how their employees can align with the mission and desired culture of the organization for the individual and organizational benefit.⁶ Emphasis on encouraging employees to participate in collaborative teamwork can produce a feeling of value as employees are empowered to experience success through sharing of unexpected discoveries, creative insight, inspiration, and intellectual enrichment.⁷ Through this, organizational community is built. Harms and Credé⁸ go on to describe the necessity of charisma through the demonstration of individual consideration using empathy. They promote emotion management, self-awareness and a solid sense of purpose and meaning as necessary for the facilitation of transformational leadership. According to Harms and Credé,⁹ putting the needs of others before one's own personal needs is an appealing and inspirational method of gaining trust and alliances with employees at all levels within the organization.

Transformational leadership provides a framework for creating purpose within an organization. Used effectively, this leadership style can bring together the goals of the organization with the values of each individual employee. This process enhances an employee's ability to envision themselves as a valued individual, as an important member of a team, and as an essential piece of the organizational puzzle. When synthesized by a transformational leader, this process, while acknowledging the individual, shifts the employee's focus away from their singular self-concept to a broader, inclusive understanding of the organization that they work within and how their individual work impacts it.¹⁰

Bass & Riggio¹¹ distill transformational leadership down to an outline of 4 basic ideas: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Building on Bass' original framework, Gelard, et al.,¹² interprets the first concept, idealized influence, as the idea that leaders create a feeling of admiration and respect among their followers by influencing the follower to identify with them in a way that encourages the follower to emulate the leader. Furthermore, inspirational motivation is created when a leader provides vision and purpose that increases enthusiasm and optimism among employees to enhance their internal value through challenging and meaningful work. Intellectual stimulation

must be employed to promote and prompt new and innovate ways of thinking as a means to create self-efficacy and empowerment from which to encourage effective problem solving. Gelard, et al., conclude their analysis of Bass and Riggio's framework with this definition of individualized consideration: "this factor in fact pays special attention to the needs and also capabilities of each individual to help them achieve their goal by being and acting as a mentor for them. By creating a relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge, subordinates and individuals will be guided to find their potential abilities and hence act accordingly. In this process individual differences in terms of their needs and talents are recognized. The tasks are given regarding individuals' abilities."¹³ Individualized consideration is one of the very few intersections of servant leadership and transformational leadership as they are utilized in organizational performance.¹⁴ The components of transformational leadership which a leader must familiarize themselves with in order to be successful stem from their emotional intelligence as well as their personal charisma. Emotional intelligence is an essential element of leadership because it drives the emotions of those being led in the right direction by the leader.¹⁵

The concepts of transformational leadership are best and most easily applied to organizations that perform qualitative over quantitative work. Quantitative organizational cultures more often benefit from a more transactional leadership style, one that may be more authoritative as these organizations tend to reward employees on performance measures with bonuses or incentives. These rewards are earned by filling quotas or meeting strict deadlines and sales projections.¹⁶ Qualitative organizations such as libraries thrive under the guidelines of transformational leadership because of their traditional service models and emphasis on social and learning outcomes. This is not to say that transactional leadership is not beneficial to qualitative environments. There are circumstances that will require a transactional emphasis.¹⁷ On a spectrum however, libraries lean heavily toward being open to the balance provided by transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is highly successful in qualitative work environments because it relies on the development of people and their emotional investment in both themselves and the organization rather than on incentives which libraries are not typically designed to provide. With objectives deeply rooted in increasing the perceived value of the individual in order to increase productivity which benefits the organization, transformational leadership positions the leader to create buy-in among staff that is necessary in order to achieve desired results.¹⁸

Leadership in Libraries

Where then, does transformational leadership fit into libraries? This is an age where it is perceived that libraries are racing the clock to obsolescence, creating meaning in a profession filled with stereotypes. As information management evolves libraries face new challenges to meet their every-changing user demographic in a meaningful way.¹⁹ Library leaders must be looking for opportunities to shift the user's long-standing perceptions of libraries while at the same time quickly adjusting the workplace to adequately meet their demands.²⁰ Not only are user expectations diverse and ever changing, but so are the expectations of workers. As the

workplace structure changes, workers must continue to feel supported while trying to maintain work-life balance.²¹ Leaders should expect that their employees will “change as their career unfolds, reshaping what they consider important in life and work; likewise, the ideal self becomes more protean as life goes on.”²² Leaders who consider personal development as a natural progression that impacts professional development will maximize employee performance by taking into account the transformation of skill sets, commitment, and tolerance for change.²³

Studies show that library leaders are expected to demonstrate strong communication skills, dedication to the organization and caring for their colleagues.²⁴ Transformational leaders in libraries can benefit from training during their MLIS studies; however, not all library leaders are librarians. Library leaders are developed via their previous experiences outside the library and their ongoing leadership experience inside the library. Through professional development including formal and informal training, self-study and practice, transformational leaders learn to identify their opportunities, their strengths and weaknesses and work collaboratively with the organization to map out their plan for change.²⁵

In carefully balancing the workload, it must be universally understood that as new expectations, tasks, and workflows are implemented, others must be put aside.²⁶ As the organization and access to information evolve, specialized skills are often acquired as the need arises. Often, technologies designed specifically for libraries need significant customization to fit the needs of the library it is being implemented in. Sometimes, technologies unrelated to libraries are being implemented to bridge the gap where there are none yet developed. This presents a unique challenge to the transformational leader who must secure employee buy-in to constantly adapt to the new technology or workflow. Libraries must constantly evaluate these technologies and motivate their employees to assist in developing and maximizing these tools to best serve the changing needs of library patrons. Library employees must be able to collaborate with their leader to prioritize the work effectively and allow for the sunsetting of some workflows.²⁷ Being conscientious about eliminating obsolete work in order to compensate for new, innovative work is transformational for the employee because of the individual consideration it requires. Presenting employees with the rationale for change is motivational while demonstrating the measurable benefits of the change is inspiring and creates trust in the leader and self-efficacy in the employee.²⁸

Staff Development

Bringing staff in line with the strategic goal of any library organization is central to the transformational leadership process.²⁹ Performing an environmental scan to determine any gaps in the process of meeting the organization’s mission and vision is critical.³⁰ Identifying gaps allows the transformational leader to begin the work of helping employees to realize their full potential through targeted professional development opportunities.³¹ In addition, the organizational scan helps to match individuals with opportunities based on their talents and abilities.

In keeping with two of Bass' original transformational leadership concepts (individual consideration and intellectual stimulation), the leader can focus staff development on activities that enhance and improve an employee's self-concept while at the same time promoting and motivating learning for improved outcomes.³² For the transformational leader, understanding that the library organization is ever-evolving should necessitate careful planning for the ongoing training and enrichment that staff need to perform effectively in a climate of dramatic change.³³

Utilizing professional development opportunities as a means to empower employees by promoting self-efficacy aligns staff development with the concept of idealized influence.³⁴ Leaders who earn the respect of those they lead inspire them to emulate behaviors that the leader expects in order to meet the goals of the organization. When leaders begin to invest time in creating development opportunities for employees, employees will likely begin to identify these opportunities for themselves based on their desire to please both themselves, and their leader.³⁵ Doing so leaves a positive impression of the employee that makes way for additional opportunities.³⁶

According to Rohlander,³⁷ leaders should be consistently and actively pursuing more efficient ways of working. Inspirational motivation can help with staff development when seeking to set goals to achieve improvements which represent change — and often, resolve any resistance to change.³⁸ In order to overcome resistance and begin the process of inspiring their workforce, the leader must outline well-defined, achievable goals which have been developed in cooperation with the employee.³⁹ Involving the employee from the beginning of the goal setting process ensures that the goals are kept reasonable and are set within the reality of the employee's experience. Being realistic with goal setting keeps goals within the realm of possibility for the employee.⁴⁰ Celebrating successes as goals are met, motivate both the leader and the employee to invest more time, and more energy in seeking out goals which promote the pursuit of workflow efficiencies.⁴¹

Case Study

Background

Binghamton University Libraries is no stranger to coping with transition. Retirements, resignations, new employees, new patrons, and new initiatives have all produced an organizational demand for becoming more responsive to change. The university itself has emphasized the need for the library to effectively respond to its changing environment as it continues to grow and expand. It is expected that by 2020, Binghamton University will be home to 20,000 students — up from 11,000 in 2010.⁴² Supporting this increase has required that the library maximize space, increase hours, and absorb the additional work required. The expansion requires the need for the library to adequately respond to a faculty and staff that is growing proportionally to the growth of the student body. In an organization stretching to reach its goals, maintain services and support its staff through these transitions, the library has served its employees well by staying cognizant of their needs.

As the university began implementing its plan for expansion, it launched a professional development initiative in the fall of 2013 geared primarily toward supporting supervisors and cultivating emerging leaders on campus. The Leadership Development Program was created to help participants deliver the type of leadership necessary at a growing premier university.⁴³ The program was meant to ensure that a high quality of employee performance and service could be delivered to Binghamton University students by university faculty and staff. Leadership training through the program was designed to help the participants establish personal and professional goals, and to engage in training and dialogue with other leaders about the ways effective leadership can impact the overall environment of the workplace. Taught during three workshops, and based upon the concepts of transformational leadership, participants created personal leadership plans to put to use in their departments. Outside of the workshops, participants were expected to implement aspects of their plan, work in cooperation with an assigned campus mentor, and report their experiences back to peers and the program's staff. It was through this program that that the initial idea for re-organizing the Reader Services Department (see fig. 1.) which consisted of circulation, reserves and interlibrary loan, began in earnest. At the time, Reader Services, Access Services and Interlibrary Loan—Borrowing were considered stand-alone departments parallel to Reader Services.

A unique opportunity within the library presented itself at the same time that the Leadership Development Program was being rolled out to campus. After careful analysis of the human resources available, the library reallocated the Head of Reader Services from a professional position to a tenure track faculty librarian position — a change which took effect in 2014 and which significantly changed the dynamics of the department. Where there had never been a librarian, there now was one, thereby measurably impacting the organization by increasing visibility and participation in policy formation and decision making within the library. This change precipitated the hiring of a new resource sharing librarian after the organization determined that resource sharing, which had been a split operation between Reader Services which traditionally handled interlibrary loan lending, and Technical Services which handled interlibrary loan borrowing, should be combined within one department. The new department, now known as Reader Services and Resource Sharing (see fig. 2), required having to move the workspace of several employees. Although the location changed, it remained consistent with its customary practices with little change to process — change occurred only in the terms of relocation and very basic reporting structure. Transition happened, but transformation had yet to be achieved.

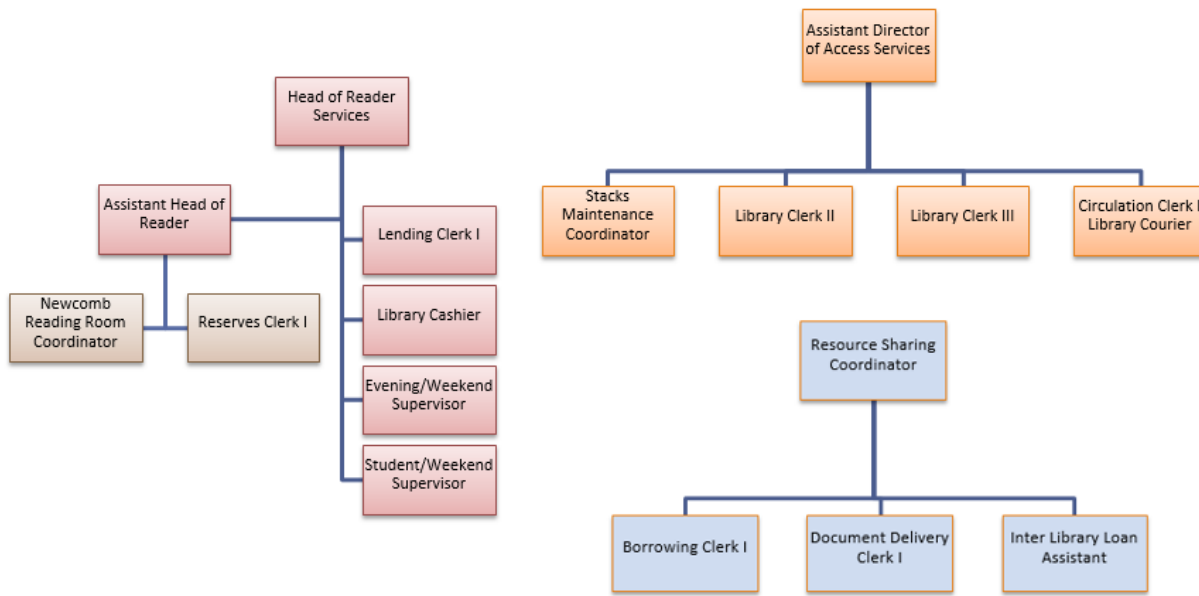


Fig. 1: Organization structure with Reader Services, Resource Sharing and Access Services as three separate departments.

Very shortly following the inclusion of Resource Sharing into the Reader Services Department, the libraries' dean — whose vision it had been to join interlibrary loan lending and borrowing— announced his departure from the university. In the months that followed, responsibilities increased for mid-level managers across the organization. Reader Services and Resource Sharing employees became very busy as a result of having to assume new responsibilities in order to maintain service standards. Although very busy, the absence of a dean provided opportunities to rely on staff in ways which were outside of their day to day job descriptions but which highlighted or brought out talents previously overlooked. Instead of being a hardship, this was considered by the Head of Reader Services and Resource Sharing to be very enlightening. As a result, the idea of reorganization within the department, which had been initially considered during the Leadership Development Program continued to gain momentum; however, there were still a few components missing that were yet to be identified.

In the year that followed, the libraries changed their overall approach to their relationship with campus as necessitated by the interim dean — not a librarian, but a faculty member in an academic department on campus. Her focus on outreach and library promotion were novel and provided insight into the engagement of the larger campus community. Placing emphasis on looking outward helped to further develop the reorganization plan for Reader Services and Resource Sharing by helping the department reconsider its identity and how it wished to present itself to the university.

It was becoming evident that while Reader Services and Resource Sharing was full of talent, the distribution of talent and labor was not effective in creating a synthesis within the department. Some employees had a lot to do, some had not enough to fill their day. Some

worked on interesting projects, and some were left out. Supervision was stretched thin, ideas were left on the table or often not fully developed due to lack of available time and human resources. The department's reporting structure had become very flat with most employees reporting directly to the head of the department. Supporting too many supervisees began to negatively impact morale and created resistance to change. This is typical when individual attention cannot be paid to employees who may need support through transition or who may need encouragement to participate in professional development at a higher level.⁴⁴

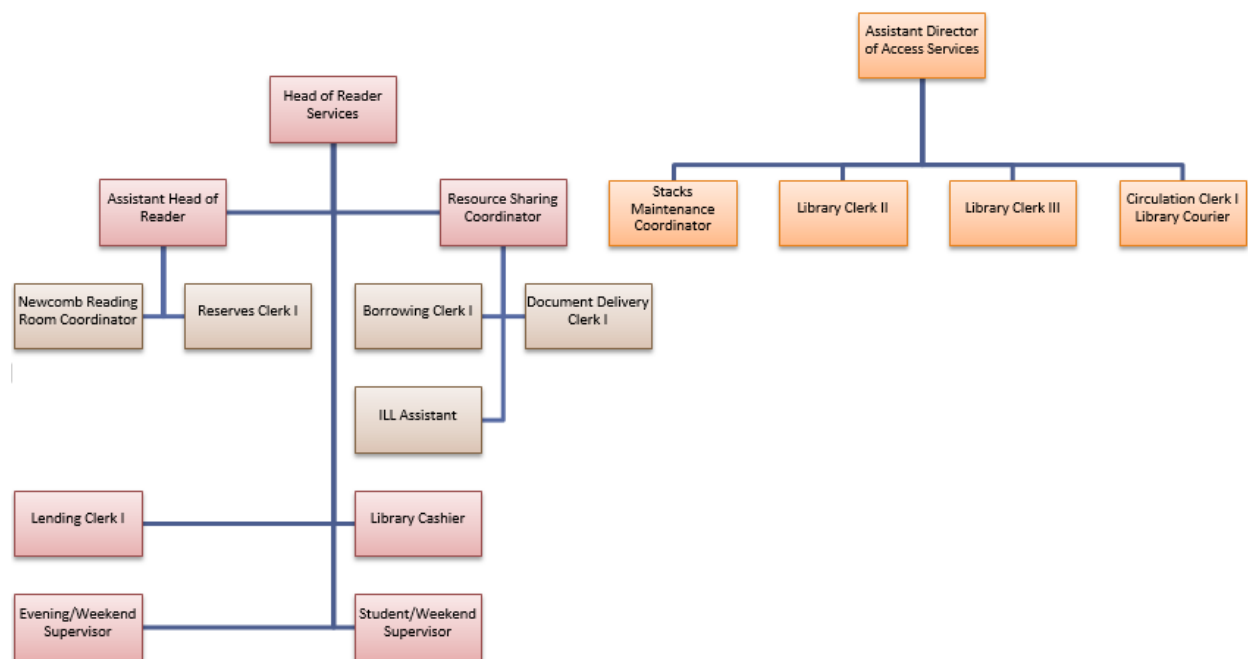


Fig 2. Organizational Structure for two separate departments: Reader Services and Access Services

The retirement of the Director of Access Services who had been responsible for overseeing stacks maintenance and the Libraries' remote storage facility, was a defining event which moved yet another department under the Reader Services and Resource Sharing umbrella. As a result of this, reorganization was critical to the successful operation of the department. To accomplish this it was necessary to conduct an analysis of the work, an inventory of the talents and abilities of the staff, an examination of individual behaviors and a unified vision for sustainability and the future.

Reorganization

Needs Assessment

With a new dean on the horizon, the time was right for assessing the needs of the Reader Services and Resource Sharing department. From the standpoint of consistency, the department was performing well and maintaining operations. In the areas of efficiency, innovation, equal distribution of labor, communication, and collaboration between units: (circulation, reserves, interlibrary loan), there was room for improvement. Increasing visibility for the department was also an identified need as Reader Services and Resource Sharing was looking to position itself as an innovative and successful example of a department within the organization.

The strengths of the department provided an excellent foundation to rebuild upon. Historical, institutional knowledge existed among several long-serving employees. Tried and true processes were maintaining services. Knowing what had been tried, what had been successful and what had failed was useful in planning for the future. Patron satisfaction was not compromised as customer service standards were impeccable.

Weaknesses presented themselves as deeply entrenched internal organizational behavior— which was to follow orders, maintain balance and transition only when instructed to do so. Rather than actively participating in the planning process, department employees were more likely to keep ideas to themselves, and follow directions without providing constructive feedback. Directives were often top down, and although ideas existed at all levels throughout the organization, not all could effectively find their way to the top.

Clear channels for communication and for presenting ideas for consideration were not evident. Risk was associated with communication missteps that were perceived to have negative effects. Speaking up was not encouraged because one might inadvertently skip a link in the communication chain leading to reprimand or the shelving of the idea. Employees were also unable to determine where they could apply their talent to best benefit the organization as committee seats were few in number, hard to identify and participation in ongoing projects was selective and infrequently changed.

Where there are weakness, there are opportunities. Looking to first impact the culture of the department, Reader Services and Resource Sharing sought to improve communication among its members, provide adequate supervisory support, seek regular productive input and give a collaborative consideration to new ideas and the implementation of innovation. Much of this could be achieved by positioning key employees, charged with leading specific teams with common goals to focus on small successes in their areas. Using these successes to highlight the valuable assets of employees was influential in shifting the culture from one which was singular and siloed to one which was creative and collaborative.

A threat to the success of reorganization was the delicate introduction of a new department as a team player with and contributor to other library departments. Creating buy-in as a partner with departments was essential to that mission, and took time to develop. Though

there was potential for employees to resist change, crossing the line was possible when approached with the tool of emotional intelligence. Working to understand the culture and individual responsibilities of employees within those departments helped to maintain boundaries while inspiring relationships and useful collaborations.

Implementation

Following the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, job descriptions were reviewed to determine if there were elements that could be eliminated in order to create new responsibilities. Many job descriptions had not been updated over several years to reflect work that had already been assumed by employees, and that they were often not being given credit for. Creating an inventory of tasks being performed, and tasks needing to be performed were compared to the most current set of descriptions in order to determine where the department was lacking, what tasks were overlapping, and what tasks required cross-training to create redundancies where needed. Job descriptions were balanced, to a large extent, in order to cover gaps in workflows, the division of labor, and take advantage of talents and skill sets. Where gaps could not be filled by existing employees, new positions were proposed. Funding new positions is not always feasible, and in the case of Reader Services and Resource Sharing justifications had to be made to create stakeholder buy in at the administrative level. A clear mission and purpose was presented to administration that emphasized the benefits to the organization. This approach created an enthusiasm and generated buy-in via inspirational motivation. Strategies for marketing job descriptions to enhance and diversify applicant pools for these new jobs were employed to highlight the need for creative thinkers, non-traditional skill sets and emotional intelligence.

Specific roles within the department were developed or enhanced to create promotional opportunities for several employees within the department. Supervisory duties were distributed equally and in such a way that no supervisor was responsible for more than four employees. This was the most effective way to support staff through the transition. It allowed supervisors to pay individual attention to supervisees and focus on ideas and suggestions at the most granular level possible. In keeping with Bass and Riggio's philosophy on leadership and organizational culture, creating smaller more refined teams allows staff "to affect its leadership as much as its leadership affects the culture."⁴⁵ This influence effectively allowed staff to participate in the reshaping of their environment.

Given the personal agency to freely contribute in their areas of concentration (see fig. 3), circulation, reserves, interlibrary loan, stack maintenance and remote storage, staff were able to refine their skill sets and more closely examine where improvements and innovation could be introduced. Each unit was asked to create a mission statement which best represented them, further investing them in their identity. These mission statements were then forged into one, overarching mission statement that created a sense of unity upon which to build collegial relationships between units. Building on the mission statement and its purpose as outlined by its employees, each unit allowed the department to identify intersecting workflows, points of friction between units, and begin to map out strategic plans. This process promoted intellectual

stimulation — an incentive which created a sense of value for the employees and helped to motivate and inspire them to continue to contribute to these initiatives.

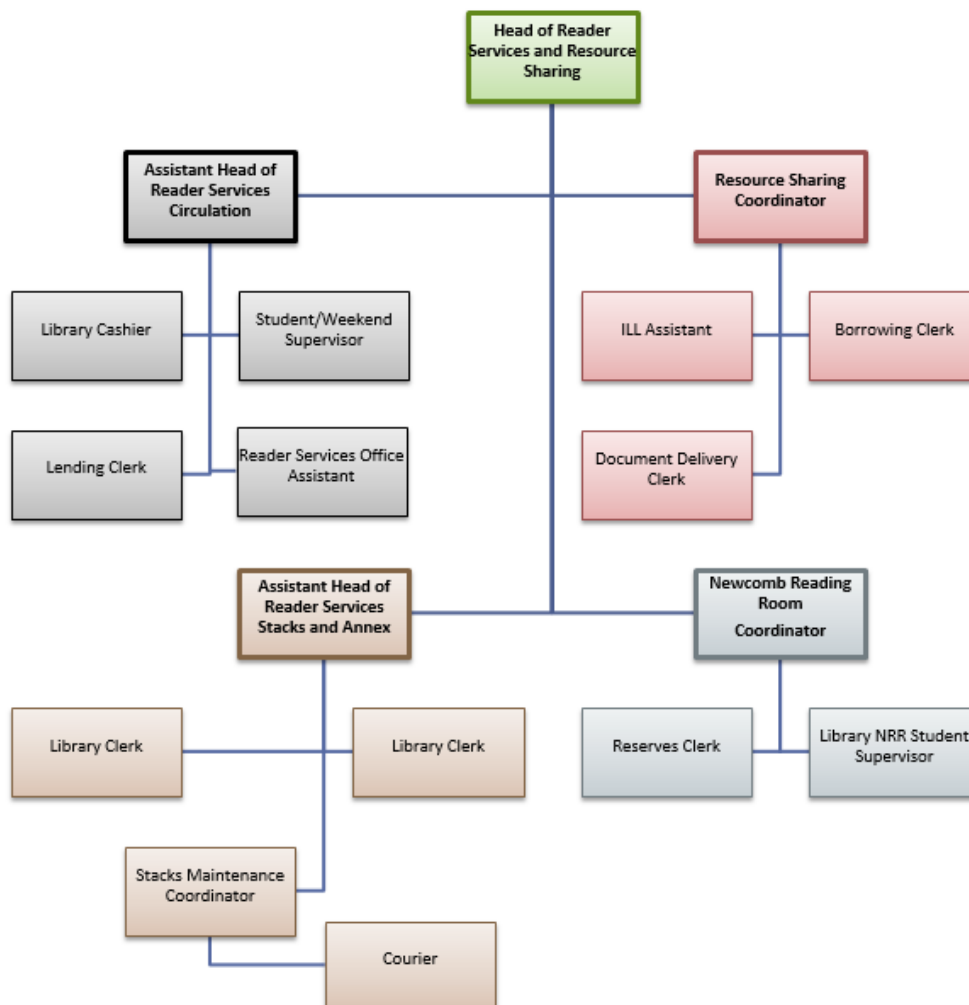


Fig 3. Organizational chart following reorganization incorporating Reader Services, Resource Sharing and Access Services.

Implementing innovation within each individual unit provided opportunities to test new ideas on a small scale, sharing and celebrating successes. As trust was built between leader and follower, opportunities developed to begin networking outside of the department. Collaborations between the Reader Services and Resource Sharing and Collections, Technical Services and Systems began to present themselves. Department employees were deployed in greater numbers to serve on library wide committees in order to bring Reader Services

perspectives to committees in ways that would encouraged organizational culture shifts through increased communication, collegiality and strong partnerships.

Conclusion

The reorganization was made with a vision for the future, and a sustainable plan for ongoing transformation. Significant emphasis was placed on the continual identification of opportunities for participation within the organization and professional development outside of it. Empowering employees to take advantage of these opportunities has been essential to the holistic well being of the department. Enhancing skill sets, sparking creative and innovative thinking, and inspiring ongoing learning pays big dividends as employee satisfaction, participation, value and self-concept improve. Employee commitment increases as opportunities for recognition and advancement present themselves.

Transformational leadership is an evolving process that requires that the leader and follower consistently assess and adjust according to their needs. As the organization shifts its mission to meet the expectations of its patrons, a department must adapt to support that cultural shift. Keeping employees flexible on a changing continuum which connects them to an evolving mission should be central to the work of the leader.

Transformational leadership has provided the necessary guidance for the Reader Services and Resource Sharing department at Binghamton University. Adopting this framework has enabled employees to actively participate in defining their roles within the organization, play up their strengths, safely identify their weaknesses and work toward their goals effectively. Regular performance assessments are made by the supervisor so that constructive criticism can be provided. Employees are also encouraged to do self-assessments and participate in individual and organizational goal setting initiatives. Creating action plans at both the individual and organizational levels can ensure success during reorganization.

By considering the individual employee's abilities, the needs of the department and its functions as well as the organizational culture, the Libraries' has successfully navigated transition by employing the concepts of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation. Moving forward, the Binghamton University Libraries' Reader Services and Resource Sharing department will continue to cultivate talent to match with upcoming opportunities. The department will continue to grow by deploying talent to the appropriate points within the Libraries' that maximize individual potential resulting in maximum productivity for the organization.

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⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 70.

⁸ Harms and Credé, "Emotional Intelligence and Transformational and Transactional Leadership", 7

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¹⁰ Ibid., 38-39.

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¹² Gelard, Parvaneh, Zahra Boroumand and Ali Mohammadi. "Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Management." *International Journal of Information Science and Management* 12, no. 2 (2014): 71

¹³ Ibid., 71-72

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