LLAMA President's Message

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By now, I'm sure you know that we, along with our colleagues in the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) and in the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA), are considering joining forces to create an entirely new division. (If you haven't been keeping track, you can get up to speed here: connect.ala.org/all.) The Steering Committee and Working Groups for the project have been busy so far this fall, and one of the topics we continue to circle back to is that of change management.

Change management was selected as one of LLAMA's 14 Foundational Competencies for Library Leaders and Managers after gathering feedback from members about the most important competencies for success. As we define it, leaders who exhibit this competency "provide an environment open to innovation and collaboration by ensuring continuous two-way communication, flexibility, and willingness to learn from mistakes made, and by providing the training necessary to make the change happen."

I have two favorite resources on this topic. One is *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* by William Bridges[1], currently in its fourth edition. Instead of focusing on the operational aspects of managing a change or project, Bridges looks at the psychological aspects of the transition from one state to the next. This process begins with the difficult task of letting go of old ways and identities and dealing with the loss of the known. Next is the "neutral zone," a time when the old is gone, but the new hasn't entirely taken hold, or may not even be fully finalized yet. Finally, coming out of the transition, people develop a new sense of identity and energy as the new beginning takes hold. The "neutral zone" part of the process is by far the most difficult, and the less comfortable a person is with abstracts and unknowns, the more difficult it will be, since that phase requires people to give something up without necessarily being able to see what will replace it. Our new division project has a substantial "neutral zone" in its future. While we are working to define what that new division will represent and how it will

work, there will be abundant questions for which we will not have answers when we ask you to decide whether or not to move forward.

That's where my other favorite change management resource comes in. David Rock's "SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others"[2] looks at people's emotional reactions as largely driven by trying to increase reward or reduce threat in one or more of five different domains: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. With respect to change, when people feels a sense of threat in one of these areas, they will not be able to effectively analyze, reason, or make decisions until that threat has been addressed. However, if we can anticipate their concerns in these domains and acknowledge or address them as we plan how we communicate with them, we can help them get past that initial emotional response more quickly.

For instance, if a person cares a lot about connectedness, then the prospect of being part of a new division where the ways in which members will find their people are as-yet undefined may be perceived as a threat. And if a person cares a lot about certainty, then the whole concept of the "neutral zone" may be overwhelming. We know we won't have all the answers, so how can we help to make this change less threatening? One way is by simply acknowledging the concern and expressing empathy to let people know we understand what they're feeling. One of the products of the feedback the Steering Committee has collected from members is a clear understanding of the kinds of concerns that people have, and the Communications Working Group is facilitating some virtual discussions that will help us explore those concerns with members. Another is by sharing potential solutions, even if we haven't made a decision yet. As the Operations and Activities Working Groups ramp up, they will be articulating some of these potential solutions and gathering more member feedback.

One of the challenges of being a leader in this kind of project is that you're likely to have been thinking about and working on it for considerably longer than the majority of people who will be affected by it. That means you've had the advantage of plenty of time to process your own threat responses and get comfortable with the unknowns. Having these models in mind as you are managing a major change will help you overcome the blind spots that come with this advantage, and give people the support they need to get as excited about the change as you are.

Notes

1 William Bridges and Susan Mitchell Bridges, *Managing transitions: making the most of change* (New York: Da Capo, 2016).

3 Rock, David, "SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others," *NeuroLeadership Journal* 1 (2008), accessed October 10, 2018 http://www.your-brain-at-work.com:80/files/NLJ_SCARFUS.pdf.

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