Overcoming Barriers in the Planning of a Virtual Library

Recognising organisational and cultural change agents

by Ardis Hanson
The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida

Information Resources Management Association International Conference
May 21-24, 2000; Anchorage, Alaska
The USF Library System

- 5 autonomous libraries
- 3 campuses
- few centralised services
- few inter-library initiatives
- time for a change
Starting the Virtual Library ...

the Planning Committee

- members
- history
the Planning Committee - Issues

- the geographic locations of the Libraries,
- lack of parity in equipment and technologies,
- budget issues,
- ownership by staff across all the Libraries,
- difficulty in selling this as a USF Libraries project,
- unrealistic expectations, and
- resistance by staff and/or management.
Commitment

Project outcome is shown to depend upon the behaviour and resources available during the development process and these depend upon the level of commitment.

*Lytinen & Hirschheim, 1987*

- individual Issues
- system Issues
Commitment & Change

Individual Issues

- knowledge base of staff
- position of self and library
- “800 pound gorilla”
- work load
- project buy-in and/or ownership within the library system itself
Commitment & Change

Systems Issues

- hesitation in accepting a new “way of doing things”
- lack of standard formats across libraries,
- unrealistic priorities & expectations, and
- support from administration.
Building Individual Commitment

Seeking employee input and participation is believed to aid in commitment to projects since it instills a sense of ownership of the goals and objectives being pursued.  

*Manz, Bastien, Hostager, & Shapiro, 1989*

- discussion of barriers pre-design
- design phase
Building Organisational Commitment

An organisational commitment to the project and a commitment to change are key factors in determining the success of a project.

_Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja 1997_

- departmental disenfranchisement
- inter-library involvement in decision-making
- library directors
- university support
Strategies to build commitment

- Planing phase
  - identification of barriers
  - use of focus groups
  - survey of peer institutions
  - “actions” areas in planning document

- Implementation
  - team-based organisation
  - representation from each library
  - staff education and training,
  - financial resources, and
  - management of the change process.
Outcomes

- System-wide
  - team-based structure
  - university support

- “Community-in-practice”
  - valuation of work roles
  - “peripheral” learning
  - participation in innovative implementations
Ongoing Issues

- teams
- “virtual” vs. “physical” libraries
- evaluation and assessment
- staff training and education
- technology