

Change management – reengineering of a library concept

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There is nothing permanent but change. We live in a changing world and it is important to identify and to seize the opportunities that are offered.

Trends

What happens within our profession and where are we heading? The most dramatic change in late year is the World Wide Web. Both commercial and so called free information is very much offered through the www and this means that the possibilities to access and to get information has increased dramatically. Whoever with access to the Internet can and will reach an incredible amount of information. Much of it is however of doubtful quality, obstructs the catching of the good information and contributes to information overload.

Information as a competitive means is no longer about owning the information but to manage the information and see to that it is disseminated to and analyzed by the right persons.

Another trend is that the tempo at work is accelerating and even the spare time is more hectic. At work there is considerable less time to read and to digest information. The information you access should therefore be worthwhile the effort – it should be reliable and updated and match the information need.

We live in a society where the information both is easier and more complicated, where things happens fast, not the least within technical development. There ought to be opportunities for persons that have information management as their profession.

Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats

Which strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for our profession can be ascertained out of what happens in today's information society? (This SWOT analysis was made for Swedish conditions, and I have not looked into how the picture is in Finland.)

The Threats

- Closing down corporate libraries continues. Few new are started. The number of librarians in private employment decreases and the firms do not recruit librarians.
- The corporate library business is, not surprisingly, strongly associated with collections of printed books and journals and librarians are seen as persons managing these collections. Management of printed books and journals has lower priority in today's corporations.
- The most interesting information is not found in databases or books and journals but through the network with colleagues, customers and suppliers.
- Our clients access the information themselves, through the Internet and don't need the help from a competent information researcher.
- The competence a librarian possesses is hard to understand. It is not obvious to recruit librarians to business intelligence functions, to intranet development work, to document management etc. Other professions take our place.

The Opportunities

Every threat can however be twisted to an opportunity (as we live in the best of worlds).

- Closing down the corporate library can, if it is handled in the right way and not means throwing out all the services, be a Librarians Lib. To manage printed books and

journals requires large personnel resources. These resources can be devoted to more value adding and fun activities.

- That our clients do the information retrieval themselves is good for us. The concept to be an intermediate to all information does not work nowadays, nor will it work in the future. We can offer core competence for complicated information research, and also to guide our clients to the most effective search methods and sources.
- Our competence to organize information can be used to facilitate the network building and what is required to use human information sources.
- Above all we work in an expansive and potential area where the ability to work smarter with information is a competitive advantage. The information society requires information professionalism.

The Weaknesses

- We are not so good at promoting ourselves and our competence. I mean that we have a sometimes too low profile, and that it can be a sign of that we are uncertain of our competence and not enough proud of it. Most of us work in a world where our business is not the core business of our corporation. Our business might be important but it has seldom the management's focus and attention, moreover it is often questioned. We must therefore fight to gain attention and that is heavy task.
- We focus too much on our clients where we get appreciation and immediate feedback. Sometimes we are too service minded and follow our clients' needs and demands of today instead of being proactive and also bring our business in line with the tomorrow's needs and demands.
- We have difficulties in getting our clients' managers to understand what we do and to proof that the library gives a positive Return of Investment. How to measure it?

The Strengths

Some of our weaknesses are our strengths as well.

- We are service minded and very much focused on to meet our corporation's and clients' information needs. This is a great strengths and a rather unique feature of our profession.
- We are generalists, social competent and we are good at communicating, all properties that are of advantage in a changing world.
- We have a tradition of supporting each other and learning from each other through our professional associations.
- And last but not least, we have a good and well needed competence

Change management

If we take the threats and opportunities seriously we need to undertake changes. It is a lot better to pro-actively lead the change than to be a victim of it.

One important input to what change that should be done and how it can be done is to benchmark with others to get ideas and inspiration. Next step is to lobby and to anchor the wanted change by the closest manager and by other important persons in the organization. The staff must be involved as much as possible in the work to generate ideas and solutions for the future and the ways to get there. This is a delicate work as change often is seen as threats (on good reasons) to own jobs and future careers.

Change management like all other work is a lot easier if it is practiced. Practice gives skills. The business is to be developed continuously and the staff with it. To give the staff opportunities and inspiration to develop is self-evident as well as to demand from the staff that they take responsibility for their own competence development.

To listen is good, but some changes require that you close your ears and follow your own line, and to be confident that this is the best to do.

Reengineering of a library concept - from Tetra Pak Library (information intermediation and library) to Technology Intelligence (information autonomy and external world surveillance)

I was employed in 1989 to build a Tetra Pak Library. After the building phase the services were

- Information retrieval ad hoc on request
- Setting up alerts
- Managing technical reports
- User training
- Collection management (books, reports, journals)
- Journal circulation
- Subscriptions and books purchases
- Interlibrary loans – copies and books.

Now the services are

- Active work in the development projects – information retrieval, information management and some analysis work.
- Guided information research (help to help yourself)
- Setting up alerts
- Electronic information sources with global licenses that are available to all Tetra Pak employees through the intranet.
- Methods for and user training in how to be smart and effective in retrieving, managing and analysis of information.
- End user solutions for purchasing books and interlibrary loans.

There has been a gradual transformation from Tetra Pak Library to Technology Intelligence, but the most radical happened during late nineties when Tetra Pak's Innovation process was established. Since October 1999 Technology Intelligence is part of that process with the mission to develop best practice, tools, methods, support and training for an effective information support and surveillance of the external world. The role as an information intermediate became subordinate to the role as an information consultant and participant in the development work.

The decision that we made in spring 2001 to cease keeping collections of printed journal, books and external reports in favor of electronic information had a great importance, not at least a symbolic one, to reshape the mindset of what a modern corporate "library" could and should accomplish. (More than the frequent changes of names had succeeded to do – Tetra Pak Library, Research Intelligence Library, Technology Intelligence Center, and Technology Intelligence). Personally I think it is sad that the picture of a library and a librarian as a dusty and out of date place and person is firmly established in the head a manager (especially if the manager is an old man).

Of course, to change the picture was not the reason to cease keeping printed collections, but to reallocate the resources. Well attended collections require much personnel resources and as we saw that the usage of the collections decreased, it was natural to instead invest the scarce resources in other more value adding activities.

Information competence

A concept that builds on that Tetra Pak's employees themselves retrieves the information, manage and analyze it, puts of course high demands on their information competence (I prefer the term information competence to information literacy). Internet has done a lot to increase the information competence even if we "old information retrieval foxes" sometimes make fun of the over confidence in the result of writing one term in a search engine on the Internet (and we surely are taken by surprise when it sometimes works!). Education to increase the information competence is also taking place at most universities and we notice that the younger generation is far more information competent. To work with increasing the

information competence with the employees is a natural part of the activities at Technology Intelligence.

At last

The way from Tetra Pak Library to Technology Intelligence has not been the very straight and fast one, neither has it been the result of a conscious ten year plan. The guiding star has however been help to help yourself, to see to that there is an inflow of reliable and relevant information to the corporation, that it is disseminated to and used by the persons needing it, and that these persons work with the information in an effective way. Our own surveillance of the external world has consisted of frequent in-house and external networking, reading and following the news in the information industry. This has helped us to keep a course that we feel fit both the needs of our company and the external development trends in our profession.

For my own career I have taken an important decision – to devote the last nine years before my retirement to my own newly started firm, IC @ Once, helping companies, organizations and libraries to increased Information Competence (IC at Once).

Change takes time – now is always right time to start.