Change Management in Theological Libraries

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T*he* term change management became popular in American business circles in the 1990s with books like *Leading Change* (Kotter 1996) and *Who Moved My Cheese* (Johnson 1998). All kinds of organizations, including libraries, have used change management principles to help organizations that seem stuck in their ways adapt to changing circumstances. This chapter has four sections. First, it describes the main features of change management and distinguishes this approach from other management approaches that address change in organizations. In brief, change management is a multistep process requiring a guiding vision, leaders with sufficient power to effect change, the encouragement of taking risks, and eventual consolidation of progress as a new normal for an organization. Second, the chapter briefly critiques change management. Third, the chapter provides some examples of change management as applied in public and academic libraries. Finally, the author offers

suggestions for how a change management approach might be helpful to theological librarians.

What is Change Management?

To begin, this section describes the origin and distinctive ideas of the change management approach. Its roots lie in psychologist Kurt Lewin's (1951) model about how change happens in organizations. He describes three stages. First, an organization must unfreeze. Second, the organization makes intentional changes. Finally, as the changes become established in organizational habit, the organization regains a new and more productive equilibrium. The organization then refreezes in a new form. Lewin's key insight was that there is difficult psychological work to be done for an organization to realize that operating as it has habitually done is not meeting organizational goals and that, therefore, the organization must change.

As envisioned by John P. Kotter, change management is concerned with large-scale changes in organizations. Change management recognizes that techniques that work fine for managing small projects or modest changes in workflows do not conceptually address the complexity and stress that large-scale change produces in individuals working in organizations. As Kotter argued, successful change is "associated with a multistep process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all of the sources of inertia" (1996, 20). Notice that although this approach is called change management, important facets of change management require vision, access to resources, and power. If one considers "management" as primarily concerned with the competent execution of predictable tasks and "leadership" as concerned with large-scale changes and organizational vision, then a better name for this approach might be *change leadership*, in keeping with the title of Kotter's book *Leading Change* (1996).

Kotter (1995; 1996) proposes that lasting organizational change typically involves a sequence of eight stages. First, members of an organization must acquire a sense of urgency. Unless staff feel the need to change, large-scale change will not happen. Second, a small group must become committed to leading the change. Third, this cadre of leaders needs to cast a guiding vision for the results of change. Fourth, leaders must relentlessly communicate the new

vision and model changed behaviors themselves. Fifth, action must be taken to remove institutional obstacles and encourage experimentation. Sixth, leaders must figure out how small signs of change can become visible to staff in the short term. These "wins" demonstrate that change is possible and desirable. Staff that played key roles in creating these wins should be visibly rewarded. Seventh, based on short-term wins, leaders consolidate gains and inspire more change that is consistent with the guiding vision. Finally, staff's changed behaviors and attitudes are solidified as part of the organization's culture. As envisioned by Kotter, implementing all eight steps is necessary. Skipping any step will delay or derail progress toward the desired change. While some stages of the process are iterative (first, there are several small gains, later larger ones), Kotter understands the change process as having an intentional beginning (creating a compelling sense of the need for change), a middle stage (steps two through seven), and an ending (the consolidation of gains as the new operational normal for an organization).

Kotter notes specific threats that may derail the change process at each stage. For example, during stage three, enough time must be taken so that all leaders agree on the new organizational vision: "Vision is never created in a single meeting. The activity takes months, sometimes years" (Kotter 1996, 81). To cite another example, during stage five, one threat to the encouragement of experimentation is the active resistance of managers who either oppose or do not understand the desired change (Kotter 1996, 115).

Other change management proponents have their own steps or terminology for describing the process. For instance, in Beverly Patwell's book *Leading Meaningful Change: Capturing the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of the People You Lead, Work With, and Serve* (2020, chapter 4) the four stages of the change process are called alignment, integration, action, and renewal. The seven steps of the process are called as follows: understand the need, enlist collaborators, envisage a new solution, motivate people, communicate the vision, act to create the vision, and consolidate gains.

Regardless of how the specifics of a given change management approach are arranged, the main conceptual point that distinguishes change management approaches from other approaches to management is that change management asserts the value of large-scale change, in contrast to some management approaches that argue that sustained improved performance comes incrementally from building on existing strengths (such as Elia, Veldheer, and Turner 2019).

Change Management Critiqued

Having laid out the basic ideas of change management, this section notes similarities with other approaches and offers some criticism. As an approach to leadership of organizations, change management is similar to adaptive leadership as articulated by Ronald Heifetz (1994) and colleagues (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009). Adaptive leadership distinguishes between technical problems (which can be solved by tweaking processes) and adaptive challenges, the latter of which require deep organizational change. If a theological library needed to begin buying ebooks as well as print books, that change would be technical. If a theological library's mission was redesigned from only supporting the information needs of academic users to becoming a center for helping recent immigrants navigate government services and the legal system, such a change would require adaptive work in Heifetz's sense or would require a change management approach like Kotter's, because the changes required are qualitatively more complex than purchasing books in two different formats.

Both the change management and the adaptive leadership approaches focus on making decisions about significant changes in the direction of an organization (mission or vision) or profound changes in the methods used within an organization (a school decides to teach only online, and thus the library needs to be transformed from a library of print books to a library of electronic resources). Proponents of both the change management and the adaptive leadership approaches believe that gifted, charismatic, relentless leaders can create the conditions needed to overcome resistance to change—which is utterly normal. Such leaders marshal resources, remove obstacles, and ultimately transform an organization.

Change management approaches like Kotter's can be criticized for three reasons. First, while change management acknowledges the reality of organizational culture, there is little or no explicit attention given to the ways that gender, class, and race impact the work of persons within an organization. Neglecting these social factors may lead those promoting change to misunderstand some of the reasons why staff or other stakeholders resist change. Such neglect may lead to enacting a new vision that unintentionally reproduces existing inequalities. Second, Kotter's approach focuses on barriers to change within an organization, such as organizational culture and employee habits. He spends little time talking about how changes

might be resisted by those served by the organization, such as library patrons. Third, Boff and Cardwell (2020a, 2020b) found in their study of change at academic libraries that change sometimes was far less linear and sequential than Kotter's eight stages, especially when the change had to do with reorganization (2020b, 87).

Despite these criticisms, a virtue of the change management approach is that it suggests a clear set of steps for library managers to undertake in order to unfreeze an organization and make a change. By contrast, the model developed by Gunapala, Montague, Reynolds, and Vo-Tran (2020) of a library nested within a complex organization such as a university excels at showing the interplay of forces arrayed for and against change (such as stakeholder perceptions and advances in information technology). Still, such a model offers little practical assistance to a library manager who seeks to undertake large-scale change.

Getting Down to Cases: Change Management in Library Settings

Despite the criticisms noted in the previous section, library leaders have successfully used change management approaches in various settings. This section reports on how change management approaches were used in some public and academic library settings. Düren (2013) describes how change management informed transformational changes in German libraries, ranging from library mergers to the implementation of a radio frequency identification (RFID) system in an academic library with more than 750,000 print volumes. Wandi (2019) reported how Copenhagen's public library system implemented a new strategic vision. She noted that "trust is a particularly important element in implementing transformational changes because the fear of losing one's job or not being able to see [one's] self in new roles can be overwhelming" (Wandi 2019, 919). Boff and Cardwell (2020b) curated and analyzed change stories from twenty North American academic libraries. The kinds of changes discussed include cultural change, strategic planning, technological change, revising staff roles, and reorganizing units and lines of authority. In many cases, these libraries employed outside consultants to facilitate large-scale changes. Boff and Cardwell found that

Kotter's framework usefully described typical issues and sequences in the change process but concluded that "the use of and reliance upon a single model, whether for analysis or active use in the change process, is not enough," and that leaders require "additional expertise and resources, particularly when it comes to influencing human behavior" (Boff and Cardwell, 2020b, 291).

The Usefulness of Change Management in Theological Libraries

As the examples in the previous section report, change management approaches have been used effectively in library settings to produce large-scale changes. This section offers suggestions about the usefulness of change management in theological and religious studies library settings. In theological libraries with limited resources of personnel or funding, some change management techniques may not seem feasible. For instance, Kotter assumes leaders can reward staff for embracing a reforming vision. Doling out these rewards serves to motivate others to become allies of change. Few leaders of theological libraries can provide bonuses or promotions to early adopters of innovations. Indeed, if new costs are associated with implementing large-scale change, such projects may not be feasible in theological libraries serving struggling schools.

However, as Joshi (1998) noted in a review of Kotter's book (1996), the key ideas of change management are scalable; that is, they apply to making both small and large changes to goals or services. To successfully introduce even modest changes in a library setting, a leader should articulate reasons for the change, garner resources, inspire staff, and celebrate incremental achievements. The change management approach warns librarians against thinking that a vision for change is obviously better than current practices. In theological libraries hoping to make improvements in services, a change management approach is helpful because it pushes the librarians seeking change to take seriously the power of habit and routine in library operations. Envisioning and implementing new goals and workflows requires overcoming these inertial forces. The change management approach also pushes managers of theological libraries to overcome an emphasis on everyday library operations or frustration about the

ability of library staff to change. In response to these real barriers, the change management approach challenges library managers to understand themselves as persons with positional power, valuable ideas, and leadership skills—in other words, as leaders who have agency and who can nudge the librarians, they lead out of habits that no longer serve the needs of their patrons.

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