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Pan, Denise & [Howard, Zaana](#)
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Distributing Leadership and Cultivating Dialogue with Collaborative EBIP

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Denise Pan

Associate Director of Technical Services and Assistant Professor University of Colorado Denver

Denver, Colorado, United States of America

Email: denise.pan@ucdenver.edu

Working for different types of libraries and areas of librarianship, information literacy is a consistent theme in Denise's career. Previously, she worked with students as a Teen librarian at Contra Costa County Library in California; Elementary School librarian for Denver Public Schools; and Instruction librarian at Johnson & Wales University, Denver Campus. Denise applied her public services perspective to technical services as an Electronic Resources & Serials librarian at Auraria Library, administered by University of Colorado Denver and also serving Metropolitan State College of Denver and Community College of Denver. As the Associate Director of Technical Services at Auraria Library, Denise focuses on improving workflow processes between acquisitions, cataloging, and electronic resources by using technology and applying organizational management theories.

Zaana Howard

Project Executive, Knowledge Exchange

CPA Australia Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Email: ZaanaHoward@gmail.com

Zaana currently works within a knowledge management role, facilitating social learning and knowledge exchange through primarily online mediums. Previously Zaana gained broad experience in the library industry across the corporate, academic and public sectors. She has written papers and presented at various conferences; most recently the VALA – Libraries, Technology and the Future conference in Melbourne and the Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP5) Conference in Sweden. Her research focuses on organization design and aims to develop innovative organizational models for building collaborative work practices and social learning within face to face and online contexts for organizational effectiveness.

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the efficacy of collaborative Evidence Based Information Practice (EBIP) as an organizational effectiveness model.

Design/methodology/approach: Shared leadership, appreciative inquiry and knowledge creation theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for change toward the implementation of a collaborative EBIP workplace model. Collaborative EBIP reiterates the importance of gathering the best available evidence, but it differs by shifting decision making authority from 'library or employer centric' to 'user or employee centric.'

Findings: University of Colorado Denver Auraria Library Technical Services department created a collaborative EBIP environment by flattening workplace hierarchies, distributing problem solving and encouraging reflective dialogue. By doing so, participants are empowered to identify problems, create solutions, and become valued and respected leaders and followers.

Practical implications: In an environment where library budgets are in jeopardy, recruitment opportunities are limited and the workplace is in constant flux, the Auraria Library case study offers an approach that maximizes the capability of the current workforce and promotes agile responsiveness to industry and organizational challenges.

Originality/value: Collaborative EBIP is an organizational model demonstrating a process focusing first on the individual and moving to the collective to develop a responsive and high performing business unit, and in turn, organization.

Keywords: evidence based information practice, leadership, organizational effectiveness, change management, Academic libraries, United States of America

Article type: Research paper

Introduction

Increasingly electronic resources are becoming the mainstream format for academic libraries. According to the Association of Research Libraries Statistics 2007-2008, its 111 academic library respondents expended an average of 51.46% of the library materials budget on electronic resources (Kyrillidou and Bland 2009, 54). This has grown by greater than 20% in just four years, the average being 29.81% in 2003-2004, the first survey year electronic resources were included as a segmentation of library materials expenditure within the survey (Kyrillidou and Young 2005, 50). This trend is reflected locally at the University of Colorado Denver Auraria Library. As of April 2009, 60% of Auraria Library's \$2.6 million USD library materials budget, a higher than average percentage, is spent on electronic resources; encompassing roughly 31,404 full-text e-journals via 277 databases.

In this increasingly digital environment, a critical organizational challenge is how to reorganize a Technical Services department to reflect the emphasis on electronic resources. Library literature demonstrates shifting priorities from print to electronic materials requires rigorous reengineering of work processes. The most prevalent solution discussed is to implement an Electronic Resource Management Systems

(ERMS) (Harvell 2005, Meyer 2005, Sadeh and Ellingsen 2005). Auraria Library followed these examples and purchased and installed an ERMS, however despite best efforts it failed to resolve Auraria Library's workflow issues (Pan, 2009). The library then turned to the advice of workflow analysis experts R2 Consulting. They recommended the library "recognize e-resources as the library's mainstream" and "expand e-resources staff in both number and level" (Lugg and Barnes 2008, 22).

Due to budgetary restrictions Auraria Library was unable to create new positions and instead found best evidence in theoretical frameworks and models to implement R2's recommendations. Combining organizational management theories of shared leadership, appreciative inquiry, and knowledge creation with collaborative Evidence Based Information Practice (EBIP), the Library moved stakeholders to decision making and action taking. Through illustrating the Auraria Library case study of successfully reorganising the Technical Services division, distributing leadership, and measuring outcomes, this paper develops the concept of collaborative EBIP which invites and enables participants to critically problem solve through identifying questions and developing solutions.

Theoretical Framework

The EBIP framework utilises the best available evidence in conjunction with the experiential knowledge of librarians to improve decision making within library organizations (Eldredge 2002). Booth (2003) furthers this by proposing that EBIP encompasses more than simply research derived evidence but also reflective practice. Building upon this foundation, this paper is grounded within the concept of collaborative EBIP, which emphasises the best available evidence and incorporation of the user perspective (Booth and Brice 2004). In collaborative EBIP "evidence based processes are driven not by librarians but rather by stakeholders who assume responsibility for problem definition, methodological implementation, and data analysis activities" (Somerville, Rogers, Mirijamdotter, and Partridge 2007, 144). The purpose is to shift the focus of decision making to a more holistic viewpoint from 'library centric' to 'user centric', or in the case of Auraria Library from 'employer centric' to 'employee centric' (Pan and Howard 2009, 92). In this study, evidence is founded within organizational management theories and the user perspective within the individual and collective knowledge and experience of library staff.

Shared leadership, appreciative inquiry, and knowledge creation provide the theoretical framework for Auraria Library by reconciling workflow challenges within the Technical Services division. The concept of shared leadership originated within the business industry (Janov 1994, Kelley 1992) and later introduced to librarians by Deiss and Sullivan (1998). Shared leadership moves beyond hierarchies and creates leaders throughout the organization. In this construct the roles of leader and follower are not mutually exclusive or static roles. Rather, by giving staff appropriate tools, education, and training, they become "individuals who feel equal to any person taking a leadership role at any given point, individuals committed to the organization's mission and goals, individuals not afraid to participate and to differ constructively" (Deiss and Sullivan 1998, 2). Thereby, staff members are able to flexibly move in and out of leader and follower roles as required. Through building effective followership skills, leadership competencies are also fostered and community naturally develops through the ongoing exchange of roles. Sullivan (2004) continues to offer insight by acknowledging library personnel as assets, recognizing that when libraries maximize the talents and skills of a diverse staff, the organization becomes responsive and innovative. Shared leadership appreciates

that organizational success relies upon individuals, teams, departments, and divisions working in collaboration cross functionally and across hierarchies.

Appreciative inquiry furthers this concept of shared leadership, focusing on individual contribution and commitment for the benefit of the whole. Libraries often approach challenges with a deficit based focus, concentrating on what is wrong, does not work and has not worked in the past, resulting in a negative and demoralizing workplace culture. Appreciative inquiry values past and present successes, through conversations about the “best of what is” currently and “what could be” in the future (Sullivan 2004, 218-219). It provides a foundation for organizational revitalisation and facilitates generative responses to change through addressing the “relationship maintaining aspects of organizations and underlying social, cultural and political contexts” (Somerville 2009, 51). It provides a voice for each individual through the 4D lifecycle of:

1. Discovery: appreciating what is
2. Dream: imagine what might be
3. Design: determine what should be
4. Destiny: create what will be (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, Cooperrider, 2003).

Appreciative inquiry extends the empowerment and influence of shared leadership through individualising the organizational vision and learning, then bringing it together within the whole through shared leadership principles. This leads to staff feeling individually valued within an inclusive culture. A shared sense of ownership creates increased support for activities they assisted in establishing (Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, 2002). Over time, this revolutionized the workplace into a knowledge sharing environment based upon collaboration and dialogue for intentional learning.

Recognizing organizations as communities of knowledge is best captured by the work of Wenger (1998) and Nonaka (2000). Wenger (1998, 2) defines “communities of practice” as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” Communities of practice exist everywhere - at home, school, work, and play - and result in learning, action and outcomes. Through building relationships, communities learn from one another for knowledge exchange and interpretation, encourage innovation, and develop identity. This is resonant within Nonaka’s notion of Ba, a shared space for creating knowledge and developing collegial relationships where the collective may produce a “transcendental perspective ... which integrates information into knowledge, within a context that harbors meaning” (Somerville, Mirijamdotter and Collins 2006, 4).

Nonaka (2000, 1) further argues that firms or companies should be recognized as “knowledge-creating entities” and the ability to “create and utilize such knowledge are the most important source of a firm’s sustainable competitive advantage”. Through the Ba concept of a workplace learning environment, the organization and its employees can grow together by developing knowledge through meaningful interactions that activate prior understanding within individuals and among groups (Howard and Somerville, 2008). The focus is on employees “learning-by-doing” with one another through problem solving and ideation for formulating new knowledge. Nonaka (2000, 3) explains, “In organizational knowledge creation, one plus one could be more than two. It can be also zero, if interactions among individuals work negatively”. Nonaka’s and Wenger’s theories together conceptualise the notion of the workplace as a social entity where collective capability is developed through the

informal knowledge exchange within social interactions (Howard and Somerville, 2008).

In building upon the foundational theories of shared leadership, appreciative inquiry and knowledge creation through community, the authors aim to demonstrate the concept of collaborative EBIP. This model is based upon the collective experience and knowledge of the organization as evidence, harnessed through fostering shared leadership and appreciative inquiry, for organizational learning and development.

Implementing collaborative EBIP

The process of implementing collaborative EBIP was a human centered holistic approach that occurred across all levels of Auraria Library. It commenced with making high level observations and organizational changes and then working closely with departments, teams and individuals to implement new collaborative work practices.

The catalyst for implementing a collaborative EBIP approach at Auraria Library was the creation and implementation of a new three-year strategic plan. This collaborative effort produced a single document succinctly describing the library's core values, goals, and objectives. To support the new strategic direction and with assistance from R2 Consulting, the library reorganized around workflows that supported library priorities, which included the reorganizing of the Technical Services department. Once deployed into teams, personnel referenced the strategic plan, as a tangible framework, during decision-making and priority setting discussions.

Starting at the top – an organizational overview

In July 2008, the new Auraria Library director arrived with the assumption that her employees were knowledgeable participants capable of identifying goals and objectives. However, with nearly 70 people on staff, it would be inconceivable to consult with all members for every decision. In a bold move during her second week in the role, the Director disbanded senior-level administrative and budgetary decision-making groups; and created a 22-member Shared Leadership Team (SLT) comprised of all associate directors, department managers, and staff supervisors. This team was formed with the intention of ensuring more inclusive communication and developing a strategic plan. By broadening the membership beyond senior administrators, each employee had a representative at the table to initiate questions and concerns. SLT members formed smaller task force groups to solicit input from colleagues and direct reports. Bi-weekly meeting outcomes were announced via a library-wide email list, posted on the Library intranet, and discussed at monthly staff meetings. By December 2008, the entire library offered their input and contributed content that created the strategic plan.

In tandem to developing a collaborative evidence-based strategic plan, the Library Director also envisioned that similar collective experience and knowledge could be applied to reorganizing personnel. To help facilitate this process, R2 Consulting was hired to analyze the workflow and organizational structure of Auraria Library during August and September 2008. Approximately 70% of Auraria Library employees from across all departments met with R2 in one on one onsite meetings or phone interviews which contributed to the production of a comprehensive report including 70 recommendations across 7 areas.

Transforming the Technical Services department

This paper focuses on R2 Consulting's recommendations from two areas: E-Resources and Serials, and Staffing and Organization. Since the library materials budget was largely expended on electronic resources and serials, R2 recommended staffing and other resources reflect this reality. To implement organizational change, R2 proposed "institutionalizing a higher degree of participation and leadership" by implementing a 'community-of-practice' design that intentionally flattens the organization by eliminating the associate dean level of administration" (60). Under R2's recommendations the Acquisitions, E-Resources and Serials, Cataloging and Metadata Services departments were combined and one Associate Dean appointed to oversee these functions. Under this unified management the processes "associated with ordering, receiving, invoice processing, MARC cataloging, and other access management could be coordinated into a single workflow...enable[ing] more extensive cross-training\and redirecting staff to where the work is, with less concern about departmental lines" (Lugg and Barnes 2008, 61).

To begin the transformation within Auraria Library Technical Services department, a new Associate Director focused on electronic resources was appointed through internal promotion. With deliberate care, toward establishing a shared leadership model, all members of the department were invited to a team meeting to discuss the reorganization. Procedural changes due to new technologies and formats, and limited staff resources and materials budget were the primary reasons for the restructure. The Associate Director established her role as one of facilitating the process of redefining workflows, making explicit the collaboration and responsibilities of each team member for shared outcomes. As a new member to the organization, the Associate Director lacked institutional memory, which served to promote her reliance upon the team's organizational understanding and knowledge to construct solutions together. Through providing staff members the opportunity to offer reorganization suggestions, the Associate Director encouraged them to participate in shared leadership. These cooperative efforts presented new opportunities to break down traditional silos; work collaboratively and cross-functionally; create more efficient workflows; establish backup training for continuous service; and promote increased communication within the department and library.

Forming functional teams

Workplace democratic ideals such as celebrating individuals' skills, expertise, knowledge and contribution, regardless of title or rank flourish in Sweden, however they are foreign to most American organizations (Somerville, Mirijamdotter, Howard, 2009). When the Library Director redefined Technical Services to include all selection-to-access functions, as suggested by R2, it was the perfect opportunity to implement Scandinavian designs in Colorado. Library staff were reorganized to stimulate collaboration and there by develop knowledge and establish communities of practice in order to realize the benefit of organizational learning beyond individual pursuits.

The reorganization process formed 4 teams within Technical Services, each focused on a separate area of practice – Non-Electronic Receiving and Processing, Monographic Acquisitions, Cataloging and Metadata Services, and Electronic Resources. While the personnel may have changed, the roles and responsibilities of the first three teams remained significantly unchanged. The processes of these traditional print-oriented teams work autonomously from each other. In contrast, the E-Resources team needed to define and develop viable workflow efficiencies. The

activities involved with acquiring, accessing and discovering electronic resources are highly complex and dispersed. Too many exceptions made it difficult for staff to develop smooth procedures and each new purchase required much discussion. Cooperation and communication are essential within any team environment. In a process driven setting such as within electronic resources, it is critical for success.

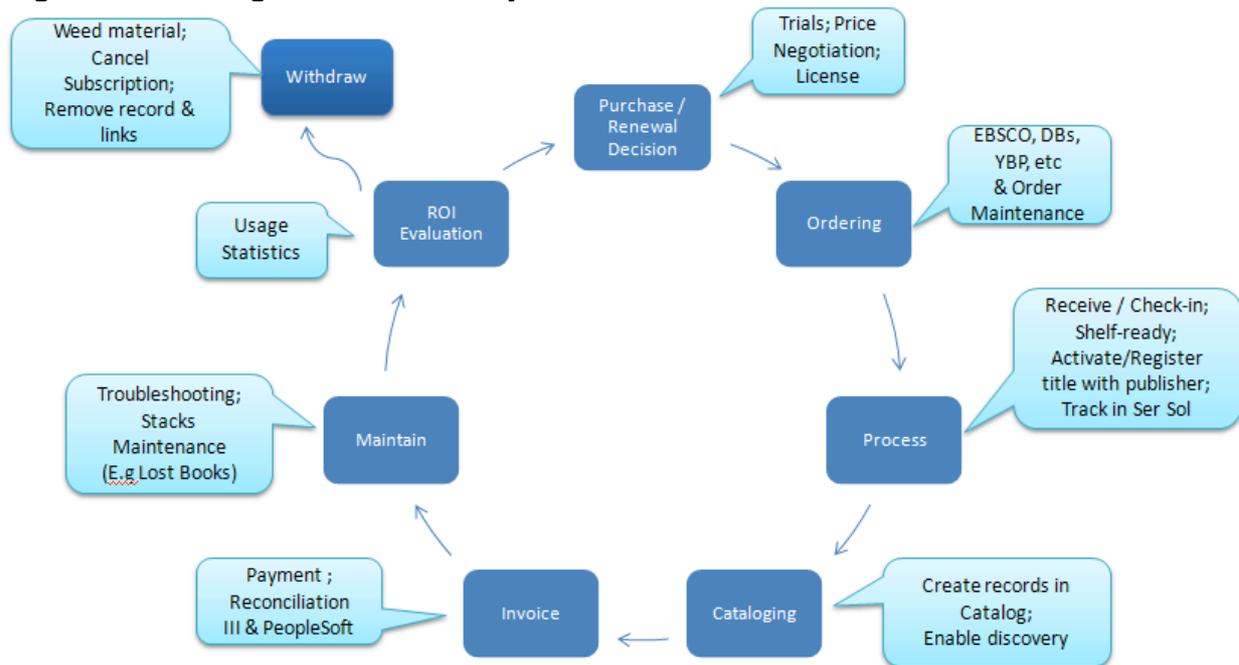
When considering organizational structure, it is often an either or proposition. Do we centralize skills, knowledge, and authority in one person or do we decentralize among many? Centralization enables specialization and development of expertise but limits capacity for scale. Distribution of responsibility requires breaking tasks down into step by step processes for training purposes. Whilst this strategy helps with managing scale, it is difficult to implement in the short term and limits big picture awareness over time. The library reorganization eliminated hierarchies and flattened the organization, providing grounds to include both centralized and decentralized practices. As the supervisor of the E-Resources team, the Associate Director encourages the team to practice centralized administration and distributed decision making. To implement new e-resources, each team member leads their area of specialization, however the entire implementation process is managed collaboratively. The procedure is not considered complete until each person has finished their part.

Putting the individual at the centre

Appreciative inquiry sessions were conducted with each team member individually to establish a framework for shared understanding through the introduction of the Learning Resource Life Cycle (see Figure 1). Moving attention away from reporting hierarchies and organizational charts and redirecting consideration toward this cycle encouraged conversations about departmental and library needs. Individuals' current and potential contributions could be envisioned from new perspectives and discussed in a positive context. Feeling more validated and appreciated, staff members participated with greater enthusiasm and described their capabilities and aspirations more freely. When redefining roles four factors were consistently considered in priority order respectively: library needs, department needs, personal interests, and individual capabilities. Across Auraria Library, similar reorganization efforts were also occurring. The outcome of the appreciative inquiry discovery process taking into account the four criteria resulted in three library personnel transferred into the Technical Services team, and two individuals reassigned to other departments. The movement into or out of the department transpired positively for most but not all. In one instance, regrettably, the reassignment was disappointing but not devastating. The staff member eventually found her niche and is currently thriving.

Once engaged in the department, staff members focused on implementing the strategic plan. Contrary to many organizations where strategic plans are written but quickly forgotten, Auraria Library commenced using the plan to inform day-to-day operations. The Technical Services department explicitly linked the 2009 departmental annual plan and personal evaluation plans to specific strategic goals and objectives. By doing so, goals and objectives became tangible outcomes.

Figure 1. Learning Resource Life Cycle



Professional confidence amongst employees was cultivated and nurtured through the appreciative inquiry process where the vast experiences, skills, capabilities and expertise of employees were validated. This individual recognition, reinforced through the collaborative EBIP framework, encouraged higher engagement and in turn enhanced performance within the workplace. At a department level, this resulted in increased communication, cooperation and collaboration across all horizontal and vertical levels of the Technical Services personnel. This inclusive process of identifying the individual and developing the community has caused a significant culture change. The department is now focused toward collaborative knowledge creation, problem solving and decision making using the collective evidence of the team.

Conclusions

An innovative, forward thinking and learning organization is founded upon shared leadership, organizational engagement and a collaborative culture to enable new workplace practices to emerge naturally and personnel to move forward and grow with them. Successful organizations can be described as ecosystems or, for a Colorado analogy, an Aspen tree grove. Aspen trees are native to Colorado and differ from other trees by growing in communities. Whilst most trees grow from seeds, new aspens are formed from shoots sharing the same root system. Although an individual tree will only live for 150 years, a stand of aspens can exist for thousands of years. Similarly, in a shared leadership environment, individual employees must actively participate in the organizational group, so that everyone can thrive. Prior successful experiences with other workplaces provided evidence to senior management that the leadership structures and silo culture at Auraria Library required transformation. As a result, the theories of shared leadership, appreciative inquiry and knowledge creation provided reliable, valid and applicable frameworks relevant to advancing evidence-based organizational changes.

As previously mentioned, literature did not provide sufficient advice or solutions in regard to addressing the question of workflow issues within a technical resources

department dealing evermore with electronic resources. Instead evidence was gathered through the collective experience and knowledge of the organizational members, which was synthesised and analysed within the context of local environment requirements. This came to the fore through fostering a culture of conversation, learning and collective understandings based upon shared leadership, appreciative inquiry and knowledge creation theories. Innovation and initiative had been largely constrained and discouraged amongst staff members and the hierarchical structure reinforced across several iterations of management. Deep-rooted beliefs in hierarchy, memories of the past, and allegiance to established processes did not have the flexibility to respond to industry changes. However, by initiating the discovery process and using appreciative inquiry, personnel began to re-imagine their present and future roles through reflecting, expressing and gathering their experiences. Allowing time to share at regularly scheduled and ad hoc meetings, and encouraging new thinking and ideas, ultimately produced new knowledge customized for the local situation.

Like the Aspen tree grove, decisions cannot be made in isolation. Rather, when library management applies shared leadership to empower individuals and appreciative inquiry to include appropriate voices in discussion, alternative ideas and insights can be heard and create knowledge. The evidence is demonstrated by producing a positive and productive environment where employees are content with their work and appreciative of their colleagues, and (together) able to accomplish their intended goals.

Shifting the decision making control from a top down library management model to distributed leadership with responsibility across all levels, has transformed the culture in Auraria Library's Technical Services division. It has resulted in a cohesive team where knowledge creation, creative synergies and dialogue are the norm. Amidst dynamically changing circumstances, reliance is no longer hierarchal but at the peer level for information exchange and shared leadership. In addition, accountability and authority is distributed across all levels rather than situated with supervisors. Staff members have gained the capability and confidence to ask questions, produce workflows and assign responsibilities. Collaborative EBIP practices have enabled staff to work collegially with one another to identify problems, find the best evidence, create solutions, and evaluate results. Their agile reactions are essential as technology continues to rapidly change and staff resourcing constrained. Evidenced by the transformation of the Technical Services department, harnessing collective experience for knowledge creation can satisfy contemporary organizational needs for responsiveness and continuous learning.

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