

Talk about change

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Abstract:

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of having conversations with staff regarding organizational change and financial futures.

Design/methodology/approach – This article refers to several relevant works already published.

Findings – The book and articles discussed provide guidelines for preparing for and having staff discussions.

Originality/value – This point of view is based on the author's experiences and actions on related matters.

Keywords: librarianship | finances | library finances | organizational change | library management

Article:

Have the Conversation! That advice has been used for years to influence proactive leadership with techniques related to delegation, negotiation, supervision and training or coaching. In today's turbulent environment, do we have that conversation for matters of change and important organizational initiatives that impact the larger group of employees? After years of economic struggles and changes, even as relief or improvements to financial situations begin to occur, this still represents a change and conversations need to be had.

Hixson (2010) talks about the value of connectivity in an article that he authored encouraging attendance to a major conference in 2010. He was encouraging folks to get connected with each other, not just in a social networking sort of way but as a means of support for each other, braving the issues that were resulting from economic stress and struggles. He addressed

connecting in a broad array of formats and reinforced the value of growing connections with empathy and acceptance. This is an important lesson that libraries can adopt as well, making connections at our conferences and gatherings that produce empathy and acceptance to activities and decisions being made at home.

Connectivity is important at home because our profession is still undergoing tremendous change and making sure that everyone is “on the same page” can be critical. Some organizations, even with multiply ways to communicate and provide information to their employees, still find it difficult to make those connections across the board so that employees feel supported and are shown empathy during periods of change. A new book by Boris Groysberg and Michael Slind discusses the concept of organizational conversation and how leaders can talk “with” employees and not just talk to them (Groysberg and Slind, 2012). In *Talk, Inc.*, they outline four elements of good organizational conversation that inspire conversation both from the top and from the bottom of the organization thus improving connectivity and performance. The four elements are summarized as:

1. Intimacy – communicating with emotional intimacy that supports not just listening but sharing the vision as well and reinforcing the empathy and acceptance of your employee's feelings.
2. Interactivity – learning how to keep the conversation flowing and this is where the power of social technology can help connect to all levels of an organization no matter what department, distance or schedule someone is keeping.
3. Inclusion – giving employees the opportunity to be included in telling the organization's story can be a powerful tool in gaining acceptance to changes that need to be made.
4. Intentionality – conversations still need structure and purpose, this is where the leader must create the frame work and agenda for purposeful conversations.

The concept of this book is for each element mentioned to reinforce the others and many libraries are already good at using social media tools to connect with patrons. But is everyone as good at applying those tools and communication principles internally? The message in *Talk, Inc.* is about having organization conversations that will not only inform our staff but also connect with them in a way that puts them in the conversation that will go beyond the library and into the community.

So in considering change and the conversations that will need to be had, we are back to considering finances and expectations as economic trends start reversing back to growth. In their article, “Leadership in a (permanent) crisis”, Heifetz *et al.* (2009) recognize that a recovered economy does not mean a return to normal as many will expect. They suppose that during a crisis, organizations had to weather the storm and make decisions to stabilize the situation for the

organization. Libraries are a good example, the literature has been filled the last several years with stories related to the impact that budget cuts have had.

But as budgets come back, or as libraries try to create a “new normal” with reduced funding or seek alternative funding sources, the change to the organization must be recognized and communicated in such a way as to demonstrate inclusiveness for the staff that is primarily affected. This is when leadership becomes critical and administrators and organizational leaders must develop the skills necessary to have these conversations and lead results.

Hiefertz, Grashow and Linsky had several suggestions for how leaders can employ new skills. They introduce the idea of “next practices” to support of transition from “best practices” in order to encourage employees to adapt to changes. These leaders do not wait for the crisis to pass, they recognize old expectations are gone and look for ways to reset the organization in order to move on. They mention specifically the need to confront loyalty to legacy practices, which many libraries could be known for, and recognized the value of helping people determine the difference between essential processes and methods to ones that are expendable and can be eliminated.

Another important skill that leaders can embrace is learning how to maintain the right amount of pressure on a change situation. Too much pressure can cause chaos or resurgence against making the change, which becomes very unproductive, but some pressure is needed to create the urgency and energy needed to move forward. They use the “having the conversation” model here to suggest having courageous conversations, which is getting difficult topics on the table so that they can ultimately be addressed instead of overlooked or ignored, they will not go away on their own.

And finally there should be recognition that sometimes an organization needs to experiment and top officials or administrators can encourage leadership throughout the organization by allowing people to experiment and report back safely, with an agreement that ultimately a single solution or path would be followed.

David Lankes in his *Atlas of Librarianship* talks about changes to the profession from “keepers” of information to “connectors” of knowledge. To be successful at that means we need to be having the conversation with our staff and connecting them to changes that are occurring. Even if your organization or situation is seeing improvements financially, things will never be the same. Staff must come to realize that and this is why you need to talk about change.

In summary, we need to create the connections with people in order to demonstrate support for how they will view and feel about changes that occur within the organization. The principles found in the new book *Talk, Inc.* will help guide the concepts of organizational conversations and provide the foundation and guidelines for organizational leaders to have those conversations with their staffs as our profession continues to evolve and change. And Hiefertz, Grashow and Linsky recognize and reflect on new skills that leaders will need to guide their organizations into

new opportunities and taking care of what is next as we pass from financial crisis to what will be the new normal. Preparing for and having these conversations will help strong leaders lead others and build improve organizations.

References

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