

## Planning for Information Fluency on Campus:

### Introducing Changes within a Complex and Ambiguous Organizational Structure

I. Colleges and universities are complex and ambiguous organizational structures that are resistant to change. They tend to function by lateral rather than vertical systems of coordination. That is, rather than operating by hierarchical authority or by rules and policies, they operate by “(1) formal and informal meetings for developing plans, solving problems, and making decisions; (2) task forces that bring together representatives from different areas and specialties to work together on a specific problem or project; (3) coordinating roles that work through persuasion and information negotiation rather than through authority or rules; and (4) matrix structures in which people have more than one boss,” or more than one reporting structure (B&D 62).

II. I have recently been close to two major structural changes at Wheaton College, both related to our mission of providing a high quality liberal arts education to residential students of traditional college age. That mission has meant re-thinking curriculum and pedagogy in the light of major changes in twenty-first century technology and global outlook.

Curriculum review, passed 91-3, emphasizes connections across disciplines and the infusion of issues of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and a global perspective across the curriculum; also, information fluency across the curriculum.

Integration of Library and Information Services, recently complete after a two-year process, puts the traditional three divisions of library, academic computing, and administrative computing under the single umbrella of “Library and Information Services,” and redistributes workload into five new categories: Research and Instruction, Resources and Access, Technology Infrastructure, Technology Support, and Administration and Education.

III. You will need to work with the appropriate people on your campus to make changes.

A. All changes at work involve mission, structural design, and evaluation:

--what work needs to be done: Mission (Rick Detweiler warns against “mission mush”)

--how to divide the work: Expertise (including respect for the expertise of others)

--how to coordinate the work of different people and units after it has been divided: Communication (including courtesy and patience)

--how to know when you have succeeded: Evaluation (as a formative principle, not merely summative)

B. Re-thinking library and information services is at the core of modern change. Research as far back as 1990 shows that “the introduction of new technology affects what people do at work, which in turn alters the relationships between individuals and groups. Technical change implies structural change, but existing structures often impair an organization’s ability to adapt.” One result is that “organizations that operate in rapidly

changing, turbulent, and uncertain environments are likely to need much more complex and flexible structures.” (Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, Reframing Organizations [San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1991] 68, 78)

II. You will encounter obstacles to change.

A, Change in general makes people nervous, but especially this kind of change. Unlike change that signals a clear break from one state to a foreseeable other, change that introduces a new vision for the future occurs over a process. (Not “undergraduate to graduate,” or “single to married,” or “childless to parent,” but rather more like building a house or taking a long journey.)

B. Look for resistance to change based on

Time: not enough of it to do what is necessary to make changes

Turf: fear of giving up some advantage, or losing some of the indicators of status or value.

Tradition: different cultures may be differently willing to experiment or try new things.