

# SAILING OFF THE MAP: MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE LIBRARY INSTRUCTION ENVIRONMENT

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Culture and leadership, when one examines them closely, are two sides of the same coin, and neither can be really understood by itself. In fact, there is a possibility...that the *only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.*

Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985), p. 2

Uncertainty and change are frequent watchwords in higher education. Instruction librarians face challenges in a landscape of change, including mandates for assessment, scarce resources, and new technologies. In this environment, organizational culture can be a strategic asset or a barrier to change. Library instruction program managers face particular challenges when it comes to organizational culture. Information literacy programs are often in an odd position within the library and the university because of multiple stakeholders and decentralized leadership. Leadership and change management strategies, therefore, are often informal and highly dependent upon the existing organizational culture. We conducted case studies of organizational culture in two library instruction programs in order to explore the potential of cultural strategies to improve leadership, support change, and build institutional capacity for learning and growth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Edgar Schein (1985, p. 6) defines organizational culture as the “basic *assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an

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organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment.” Schein argues that an understanding of organizational culture is vital for leaders because culture management is what leaders basically do. Librarians have borrowed extensively from the organizational culture literature. Shaughnessy (1988) and Davies, Kilpatrick and Oliver (1992) describe how an understanding of organizational culture can be applied to libraries, especially in the context of change management. Sannwald (2000) and Martin (2006) outline different typologies of organizational culture.

While there are several different models of organizational culture, we chose to use the Competing Values Framework (CVF) outlined by Cameron and Quinn (2006). According to the CVF, organizations reflect one or more of the following cultural types, each of which reflect competing values:

**Clan Culture:** An organization that focuses on internal maintenance with flexibility, concern for people, and sensitivity to customers.

**Adhocracy Culture:** An organization that focuses on external positioning with a high degree of flexibility and individuality.

**Hierarchy Culture:** An organization that focuses on internal maintenance with a need for stability and control.

**Market Culture:** An organization that focuses on external positioning with a need for stability and control (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 67).

Kaarst-Brown et al. (2004) suggest that the CVF provides a useful tool for libraries because it has been validated in a number of settings. Faerman (1993) outlines how the CVF can be used by managers to develop more effective leadership styles. Varner (1996,

p. 93) argues that the CVF is a useful self-study tool for libraries because it does not assume organizational failings, it is practical, and it provides a basis for creating a “learning organization.” For these same reasons, it is a useful model for library instruction programs. Instruction managers are often faced with competing cultures within a library and within the larger academic community. The usefulness of the CVF as a first step in self-reflection and action research also fit within our methodological goals.

## METHODOLOGY

We began our case study by administering Cameron and Quinn’s Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). The OCAI consists of six questions with four alternatives. Participants divide 100 points among these four alternatives, giving a higher number of points to the alternative that best describes their organization. Participants answer each set of questions twice, to rate their current organization and how they want it to look in five years. Results from the survey are graphed, forming a visual representation of the “Now” and “Preferred” cultures. There is no right or wrong culture. Most organizations will include more than one cultural type, but one is usually dominant. In our study, participants were asked to answer the questions in relationship to the culture of library instruction at their institution.

Next, we used group discussions to build upon the OCAI. We provided participants with basic definitions of the four major cultural types and visual representation of the survey results. We used open-ended questions to learn more about each individual’s interpretation of the results.

## LIBRARY A: CASE STUDY

Library A is a land grant university with 16,000 FTE. The Reference Department includes nine librarians and one library assistant. We asked all of the librarians involved in

instruction (10 in the Reference Department and 10 teaching librarians from other departments) to complete the survey. If they were not members of the Reference Department, we asked which “culture” they were rating. All ten members of the Reference staff completed the survey, although one person did not rate their preferred culture. Three staff members rated the Library as a whole and one rated another department.

The results of the OCAI indicate a strong Clan culture with a moderate Adhocracy influence (see Figure 1). The “Now” and “Preferred” results are markedly similar, suggesting that Reference librarians are content with their current organizational culture. Figure 2 represents the results for those rating the Library as a whole, indicating a greater focus on Clan culture, both “Now” and “Preferred”. The Library culture as a whole is perceived as more hierarchical.

Group discussions helped clarify these results, especially for the Reference Department. Participants defined Clan as a shared philosophy toward instruction and an environment in which everyone supports one another. Indeed, this was seen as the cultural identity of the Instruction Program in particular. Participants felt that the Clan dimension should increase or stay the same, with more informal communication, short meetings, and team teaching.

Participants defined Adhocracy as “fun,” with an emphasis on innovation and experimentation. There was a general consensus that change is inevitable in the current library environment because of technology, new students, and curricular innovations. Adhocracy, with its emphasis on flexibility and risk-taking, is the only way to address such change. The group is not scared, but excited about this: “Adhocracy will get you further, especially with instruction.” Adhocracy, furthermore, is sustained by the vitality of the clan; teamwork helps mitigate the stresses of innovation. Participants wanted to sustain Adhocracy by valuing “idea people” and implementers as equally important for innovation.

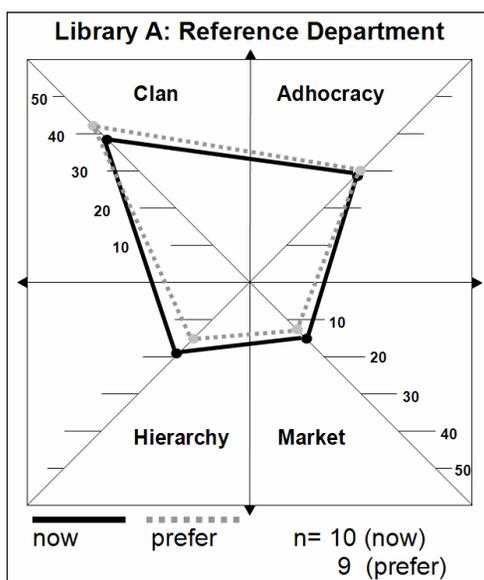


Figure 1

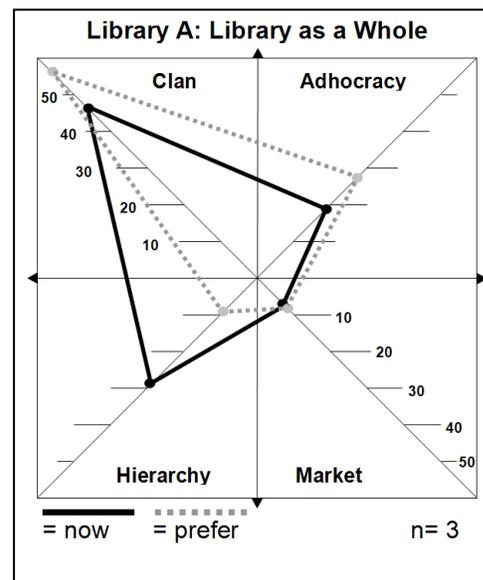


Figure 2

Market culture was the most contentious area of discussion. Participants initially perceived the word as negative, with its emphasis on business and competition. Further discussion revealed qualities of Market culture that are important to balance Clan and Adhocracy, such as the importance of assessment as a way to communicate the impact of instruction and to inform decisions about resource allocation. After clarifying what Market culture meant for them, participants recognized the need for its increase, especially in terms of marketing library instruction and creating measurable goals. Librarians did not want to account for every action, but assessment could balance the “gut instinct” part of Adhocracy.

Hierarchy Culture also produced initial negative reactions, but discussion revealed a desire for leaders to set goals and direction: “I hate hierarchy, BUT, it is important to have policies in place.” Participants expressed the need for leaders to provide for smooth operations. An increase in Hierarchy might include more regular meetings for the Reference Department and creating clear procedures.

According to participants, the culture of the Reference Department for Library A has undergone significant changes in the last five years. The previous culture was more hierarchical and risk-averse. The culture is now open, sharing, and has fun with change. This shift is partially due to personnel changes, but it is largely a function of leadership. The current Department head cultivates a culture of “yes,” a common theme in the discussion sessions. The Clan culture was also noted when reflecting upon the value of studying organizational culture. The process was comfortable and everyone talked during the discussion groups. The OCAI tool provided a nice starting point, but it did not ossify perceptions of the culture. The discussion helped clarify definitions of Hierarchy and Market, for example, and participants ultimately made recommendations that countered the original survey results. Many thought that this process would also be helpful in thinking about the search for a new Library director, currently underway at Library A.

The Library A case study revealed a number of challenges for the current culture. Adhocracy is difficult to sustain. The Clan components of the culture help, but instruction can get sloppy with too much experimentation and growth. The group recognized the need to slightly increase the stability and control dimension (especially Hierarchy) in order to balance Adhocracy. The group especially wants to see more structure from their leaders, to support their looser team and individual efforts.

### LIBRARY B: CASE STUDY

Library B is also a land grant university, with 26,400 FTE. The Reference Department includes 21 librarians and five staff. At Library B, we asked all librarians with instructional duties (40) to participate in the study. Rather than asking about department affiliation, we thought that differences might emerge by separating responses between those who teach more or less than 10 sessions per year. We received 13 responses, although only 12 included both the “Now” and “Preferred” ratings. Five respondents taught more than 10 sessions per year and eight taught less than 10.

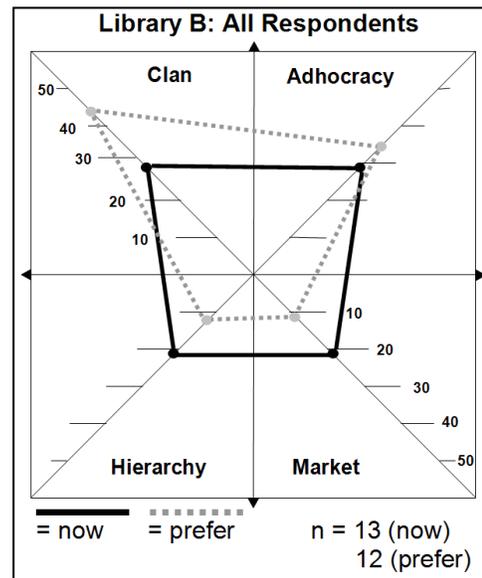


Figure 3

There was a noticeable difference between the respondents who taught more than 10 sessions per year and those who taught less than that figure. Those who taught more ranked the current culture high in Clan and Hierarchy. Their preference was for an even stronger Clan culture and a decline in Hierarchy. The group who taught fewer sessions rated the current culture highest in Adhocracy. Their preference was for even more Adhocracy and Clan. Most participants attributed the differences between these two groups as a reflection of those who emphasize subject teaching (the “less than 10” group) and those who teach general education classes, such as English composition (the “more than 10” group).

Discussion participants wanted to see the results for all of the Library B respondents (see Figure 3). The combined cultural profile was weighted more evenly between all of the types. When presented with this information, most discussion participants agreed that it fairly represented the library culture as a whole. Participants noted that the Library, given a fairly large staff, likely had elements of all four cultures. Many agreed, for example, that the administration was more Hierarchy and Market oriented, while pockets of Clan and Adhocracy existed in different subcultures. At Library B, individuals had a hard time identifying an “instruction culture” because of the size and nature of the organization. Thus, the following often reflects the Library as a whole.

Library B librarians defined Clan culture as a willingness to help each other. Several individuals saw this as one of the strengths of the overall culture at Library B. They noted that while there might be competition on campus for resources, this was not an element of day-to-day interactions in the Reference Department. Nearly everyone said that they would like to see the Clan aspect of the culture increase, especially for instruction. Some felt that they were not part of the “instruction team” and that the distance between the “general education librarians” and “subject librarians” needed to be bridged. Participants wanted to have a larger, informal

conversation about instruction goals as one way of building a stronger instructional team. There was a considerable degree of ambivalence, however, in how to carry out a larger conversation. Many participants noted that librarians attend too many meetings at Library B, so they don't necessarily want additional meetings. They wanted to figure out a way to have the "right" kinds of meetings, to promote teamwork and shared decision-making.

In the Adhocracy area, there was a strong split between those who felt the organization supported innovation and risk-taking and those who did not. Again, most discussion participants were talking about the Library as a whole, not necessarily instruction. Some individuals felt that people were "squashed" when it came to innovation; others noted that the tenure process limited risk-taking because of a fear of failure. Others felt that they had been supported in their efforts to innovate, although time and money were often limited.

Despite disagreements about the level of Adhocracy, participants all defined it in terms of the independent subject specialist. Nearly everyone agreed that, as subject librarians, they had a great deal of autonomy, promoting a valuable culture of expertise at Library B. Participants also suggested that this might be the cause of some tension in instruction because of the perception that those teaching general education courses were less autonomous and the teaching was more formulaic. This countered the larger culture's strong identification with autonomy.

All of the Library B participants wanted to see Adhocracy increase, especially in terms of more time to try new things. They also wanted to see team leaders take a risk and say "no" to campus faculty requesting more face-to-face instruction for general education classes. Librarians were also insistent, however, that support for innovation should not be about "the latest of everything" or using technology just because it exists.

There was a strong negative feeling about Hierarchy at Library B. While many recognized the need for structure, there were concerns about communication and shared decision-making. Some felt that committee membership and participation in decision-making follows the formal organizational structure rather than building on the talent and expertise of individuals. In this way, the culture wanted to see a move to a more team-based approach that draws from both Clan, with its emphasis on teamwork, and Adhocracy, with its emphasis on expertise.

There was also a strong negative feeling about the Market culture at Library B. Many felt that there was a "keeping up with the Jones's" mentality. Others noted, however, the importance of being competitive on campus and of being able to make a strong case for resources in the higher education environment. In terms of instruction, several librarians wanted the Instruction Coordinator to lead assessment efforts to market the value of instruction to the Library and wider campus. They also wanted to know what was working with instruction, in order to use scarce resources more effectively.

While there was less consensus, possibly reflecting strong subcultures at Library B, two strong organizational values emerged

in all of the discussions: autonomy/expertise and cooperation, associated with the Adhocracy and Clan cultures, respectively. Participants identified both of these values as strengths and dimensions they would like to see increase. Indeed, through the discussion process, it became clear that managers at Library B need to be cognizant of these strong values in order to build on the strengths of the culture. Respect for expertise, in fact, will likely promote a stronger Clan culture. Building teams on the basis of expertise will likely promote greater collaboration. Expertise should be explicitly recognized and the contributions of individual librarians should be visible in final products or decisions. In many ways, this also provides a valuable lesson for librarians dealing with faculty more generally, as autonomy and expertise are also hallmarks of larger faculty culture. The strong sense of autonomy at Library B, and in faculty culture more generally, can be especially challenging for instruction leaders. It requires a special kind of consultation in order to reach a common vision, given the distinct preference for independence.

## CONCLUSION

The Competing Values Framework provides a useful tool to study organizational culture in the library instruction environment. The clear visual representation of each cultural profile provided a common ground to begin discussion. We also found that the cultural profiles were not enough. Discussions enabled each culture to clarify its values and goals. Indeed, while both cultures tended toward the Clan and Adhocracy orientations, these took on different meanings at each institution. At Library A, Adhocracy meant taking risks and trying new things because of external drivers of change. At Library B, librarians placed a stronger emphasis on independence and autonomy as the driver of quality innovation.

There is real, practical value in approaching library instruction from a cultural perspective. The CVF provides concrete and scalable techniques for librarians to apply to their individual institutions. Combining the OCAI with group discussions enabled librarians to reach consensus on their values and cultural preferences and communicate their needs to leaders and managers. Organizations can use the very process of studying culture, in its reflective, participatory aspect, to begin to create the culture they desire. At Library A and Library B, the desired cultural profiles were nearly identical. Yet discussion revealed that the general cultural types meant different things to each group of librarians. The Instruction Coordinators in each institution must, therefore, use different leadership and management strategies to institute or sustain change.

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