Cultivating Careers:
Professional Development for Campus IT

Cynthia Golden, Editor

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Part 1:
The Organizational
Perspective

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Organizational Strategies for Fostering a Culture of Learning

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A Vision of Organizational Learning

When we think of leadership within information services organizations, we often focus on the technology: implementing it and managing it. Since it is logical to assume that getting the work done is our ultimate goal, a focus on the tasks of work makes sense to us. The constant activity of our daily lives reinforces the view that getting the work done should be our focus. However, if we truly understand what the work is about, we immediately understand that most "work" is accomplished through people. It is the dedication, motivation, knowledge, and skill sets of individuals that make a tremendous difference in the organization. Marcus Buckingham pointed out in his keynote speech at the EDUCAUSE Annual Conference in 2004 that the American Management Association's motto "Getting Work Done Through People" is exactly backwards—our goal really is to "Get People Done Through Work."[1]

Our professional literature leads us to consider the infrastructures needed within an information services organization for us to be effective. It is common to discuss the organizational infrastructure in the sense of how to organize the work and the technical infrastructure in relation to the technology used. As IT organizations have matured, the focus on the service infrastructure of the organization has increased, including its link to user services, project management, and process improvement[2] through such programs as Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL). Our purpose here is to outline a fourth infrastructure to join organizational, technical, and service as a focus of leadership attention: the organizational learning infrastructure. Research reported in the professional

literature of management, psychology, and other disciplines strongly supports the effectiveness of programs that focus on the development of the employee's collaborative skill set.[3] This research as applied to information services organizations has potential to improve effectiveness.[4] The previous chapter outlined the importance of programs to enhance professional development in these areas. In this chapter, we explain actions by one university to improve IT staff education on our underlying values and the use of facilitation within an information services organization.

The concept of organizational development (OD) is often used to represent the ability of an organization to continuously improve. French and Bell provided an academic and comprehensive definition of OD as "a long-term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve an organization's visioning, empowerment, learning, and problem-solving processes, through an ongoing, collaborative management of organization culture…using the consultant/facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioral science…."[5] On a day-to-day level, a shorthand definition of OD is "an ongoing, thoughtfully planned effort by all members of an organization to improve how that organization operates, serves its stakeholders, fulfills its mission, and approaches its vision."[6]

OD is a discipline built on both academic research and real-world practice in the applications of research findings, all focused on improving the effectiveness of individuals, groups, and organizations. It encompasses a wide range of topics, including organizational behavior, group dynamics, facilitation, continuous improvement, learning organizations, organizational learning, and appreciative inquiry. Many universities recognize the value of OD and are institutionalizing such practices. The National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI) has more than 60 member institutions focused on the use of continuous improvement (http://www.ncci-cu.org/). A recent work in the library literature focuses on the expanding use of OD in university libraries.[7]

Elements of an Organizational Learning Infrastructure

This chapter outlines the experience of Information Services at the University of Kansas (KU), which includes IT units and libraries, in building an organizational learning infrastructure as a basis for continuous organizational development. Many organizations have adopted organizational effectiveness efforts (for example, team management, facilitation, workflow improvement) without completely realizing the OD research foundation underlying these activities. At KU, we set out

to develop a permanent infrastructure, based on the research and literature in this area, focused on the need to develop individual and collective learning skill sets. Organizational learning, as we have used it, is defined as enhancing the capability for learning within the organization.[8] In its current form, the organizational learning infrastructure includes the following elements: the incorporation of values into leadership development, the development of facilitation and other OD capacities, and the development of a mentoring capacity. Our discussion includes these elements as well as the creation of the Organizational Development Group, which enabled Information Services at KU to maintain focus on these issues.

Leadership for Organizational Development

To advance organizational learning, Information Services established an OD community of practice in 2001. Thirteen interested administrators, faculty, and staff from throughout Information Services units and from the KU Department of Human Resources Professional Development unit (KUHRPD, the official campus-wide OD unit) met to discuss the possible formation of such a group and its purpose(s). After exploration, Information Services leadership and the group decided on a dual purpose: to create and nurture a group of facilitators for use within Information Services and KU, and to explore and build capacity for understanding and applying OD concepts, practices, and tools within Information Services and KU. The group became known as the Information Services Organizational Development Group (OD Group).

Now more than four years old, the OD Group has grown to approximately 30 members. It meets several times a year in facilitated discussions led by volunteers from the group or with expert outside presenters. Some of the subjects explored by the group include:

▶ Facilitation
▶ Use of 360˚ feedback
▶ Generational differences in the workplace
▶ Models for managing change
▶ How to create a culture of assessment
▶ Appreciative inquiry
▶ Time and project management
▶ Organizational values (and how to elicit and use them)
▶ Positive psychology in the workplace

Members of the group regularly share information on OD activities from professional organizations and other campus units. The group sometimes serves as a sounding board for the vice provost for information services as organizational change challenges arise (such as budget reductions).

The OD Group has facilitated bringing the practice of organizational learning into the operations of the units. The group strives to provide expertise and consultation to the organization's leaders and managers. The goal is for leaders to ensure that Information Services has an effective environment for organizational learning and that each employee has the opportunity to develop his or her skills and to apply them in the collaborative work of the organization. As Information Services moves forward with building the organizational learning infrastructure, the OD Group will continue to play an important role in assisting the operational managers in ensuring effective group practice.

Values: A Critical Part of Leadership Development

A critical element in building organizational learning capacity is the development of division and departmental leaders and key managers. At KU, Information Services has 32 individuals who comprise the leadership group. This group includes individuals who hold leadership positions down to the assistant director level and other staff who play important leadership support roles (for example, human resources, budget, and external relations managers). The leadership group meets once a month to focus on issues important for the organization as a whole.

Leadership development is a critical component of building an organizational learning infrastructure, since these individuals ultimately ensure that a capacity to learn is developed and nurtured among staff. Joint understanding of the organizational values that form the basis of a learning environment was seen as the first step. Information Services therefore made the development of values a key component of the strategic planning process. The work started in groups focusing on values as behaviors in action. Facilitators helped the work groups identify the behaviors important to them within the work environment. The results of those discussions were collected into a document and discussed with the leadership group and volunteer representatives from the units. Ultimately, these volunteers and OD Group members brought the full measure of their ideas to the written description of the organization's values. A critical piece in the presentation of the values was linking them to the university and Information Services mission statements (Figure 1) and providing specific links to behaviors that represented our values (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Relationship Between Mission Statements

The University of Kansas Mission
as a major comprehensive research and teaching university, is to serve as a center for learning, scholarship, and creative endeavor.

Our Information Services Mission
is to collaborate with scholars, learners, leaders, managers, and each other to facilitate access to information and the innovative use of technology in support of learning, scholarship, and creative endeavor.

Our Values Support Our Mission

Support for Scholarly Work and Learning We support the academic community by providing access to information and knowledge. We are effective stewards of information resources and collections, ensuring accessibility for future generations of scholars. We provide instruction on information-seeking skills and technology use.	**Innovative Applications of Technology** We provide creative leadership in planning, discovering, and implementing appropriate technologies to support teaching, research, and service. We focus on what will create excellence, rather than simply what is new or different.
Quality Service We strive to understand, meet, and foresee the needs of our clients and colleagues. We provide high-quality programs and services, and continually seek client feedback and ways to improve. We seek to exceed expectations whenever possible.	**Organizational Learning** We strive to create a work environment that supports and facilitates growth and learning at the personal, team, and community levels. In this way, we are better able to serve our clients, plan and manage change, and grow together as a service organization.
Valuing the Person and the Professional We foster an environment where both professional projects and personal endeavors are valued and balanced in a thoughtful and caring way. We celebrate the unique qualities, talents, and commitments that each individual brings to our organization.	**Integrity and Growth** We communicate openly and honestly with clients and colleagues; promote respect; embrace change; encourage professional growth; empower one another to take risks; and seek excellence from ourselves and each other.

Figure 2. Examples of Behaviors That Represent Values

Realizing the Information Services Vision: What it takes...

Our Clients

Meet their needs (through services)
- *Quality/process focus*
- *Communication*

Foresee their needs (through research and development)
- *Innovation*

Continuously improve/evaluate our services
- *Two-way communication*

Our Selves

- Exhibit *adaptability* to rapid change, shifting priorities
- Take the *initiative*
- Demonstrate *integrity*
- Promote *respect*
- Celebrate *diversity*
- Maximize *productivity*
- Maintain *personal/ professional balance*
- Grow *professionally*
- Be *excellent* at what we do

Our University Community

Maintain *strategic vision* by
- monitoring changing needs within the KU environment
- maintaining awareness of Kansas initiatives and needs
- observing national best practices
- keeping an eye on the big picture
- conducting peer assessments and environmental scans

Seek ways to contribute time, talent, and resources

Our Teams

Use great *management* skills
- *Decision-making and problem solving*
- *Delegation/follow-up*
- *Planning, organizing, implementing*

Employ great *leadership* ability
- Maintain *action orientation*
- Focus on *employee development*
- *Empower* others to take risks
- *Strive* to meet clients' needs and expectations
- Make *interpersonal* relationships a priority
- Maintain *strategic* vision

Communicate clearly and effectively
- Give, solicit, and receive *constructive feedback*
- *Coach* and *be coached*

Promote *teamwork*
- Be a *highly effective* team member
- Address and *manage group conflict*
- *Learn* as a team
- Develop *cross-team cooperation*
- Seek creative ways to *make work fun*

With the values established, Information Services launched an educational program to provide focused experience with what they meant to the leadership group. Given that we could not focus on everything at once, the OD Group and the leadership group discussed the areas most in need of development. Senior leaders also identified the most common elements within the organization that limited our effectiveness. Coordinated by the vice provost for information services, four areas were chosen for attention: improving meeting effectiveness, encouraging risk taking, moving past whining (which became known as Whine Stoppers), and understanding models for implementing organizational change. The consensus of leaders, managers, and staff involved in developing this list was that if the organization could make progress in these four areas, increased organizational effectiveness would follow.

After identification of these topics, teams from the OD Group, assisted by experts from KUHRPD and appropriate university faculty members, developed curricula and presented educational programs in the regular leadership meetings. Table 1 outlines the values, areas chosen for improvement, and curriculum content.

In addition to focusing on values, leaders were asked to develop individual skill sets that would enable them to lead within our collaborative organization. The programs in facilitation and mentoring provided opportunities for these individuals to improve their skill sets.

Facilitation as a Critical Component of Organizational Learning

Collaboration is increasingly important in information services organizations. Ensuring the effectiveness of collaborative processes is a major factor in successful operations and employee productivity.[9] Process facilitators, who are knowledgeable in the stages of group development and experienced in managing group dynamics, can offer a wide array of tools and processes to maximize group effectiveness and efficiency.[10] The word *facilitate* means "to make easy." With every collaborative group, the leader needs to assist the group in two ways: task and process. The facilitator guides the process, thus freeing the group to focus on the task. Most group leaders have task knowledge, so generally do not need much assistance in that area. However, many group leaders would like assistance in organizing meeting processes, building good group cohesion, and using tools for decision making and other purposes. Facilitators can advise the group leader on such matters and assist during collaborative processes. Facilita-

Table 1. Educational Programs Developed to Address Four Key Values Areas		
Value	**Topic**	**Elements of the Curriculum**
Organizational Learning	Meeting Management	▸ Tips for improving meetings: agendas; roles; using the parking lot not to get sidetracked; establishing ground rules; engaging in return-on-time-invested analysis ▸ Key activities for meeting planners: plan objectives; inform participants; structure and facilitate discussions—control and summarize; record actions and next steps
Organizational Learning	The Change Process	▸ Change is a transition process ▸ People respond differently to change ▸ Change includes loss ▸ What do people feel during the transition? ▸ Gaining commitment to the new reality ▸ Role of managers ▸ The grieving cycle ▸ Meaning and its role in the past and moving forward
Valuing the Person and the Professional	Whine Stoppers	▸ Definitions of whining versus productive criticism ▸ Why do people whine? ▸ Effects on the group ▸ How to move whiners to action/problem solving
Integrity and Growth	Risk Taking	▸ Risk taking defined as goal-oriented creative behavior when the outcome is unclear ▸ Examples of individuals and group risk-taking behavior; table of risk-taking skills; background readings; suggested group practices

tion is more an art than a science. Facilitation skills can be taught, but deciding when and how to employ certain group interventions requires a keen sense of timing and sensitivity on the part of the facilitator. Such abilities seem innate to those who make good facilitators.

Given that we did not have the resources to use external expertise, we chose to develop our own staff as facilitators. The facilitation program includes 11 employees who regularly work in one unit but also facilitate for other Information Services units. Volunteer facilitators were evaluated against the following set of skills as basic prequalifiers:

▶ **Empathic listening**—the ability to listen to individuals and a group at a variety of levels and respond with sensitivity
▶ **Process focus**—the ability to focus only on the process of the group and suppress personal desires for a particular outcome
▶ **Personal organization**—the ability to organize and manage one's personal time and space for maximum efficiency and effectiveness
▶ **Conceptual framework**—the ability to capture a variety of complex ideas at the core of a discussion and synthesize them for the group
▶ **Flexibility**—the ability to change plans and move in an unforeseen direction when the situation demands
▶ **Collaborative learning**—the ability to work with others cooperatively, sharing resources and knowledge
▶ **Sense of timing**—the ability to know when to broach certain topics and when to intervene in potentially sensitive situations

A training program was developed and implemented in collaboration with KUHRPD and two staff members from Information Services. The trainers, experienced in both training and facilitation, developed a program combining conceptual as well as hands-on opportunities for learning in which participants practiced using the tools and processes employed in facilitation. The two-day facilitator training covered the following topics:

▶ Introducing the history, philosophy, and practice of facilitation
▶ Reviewing the role of the facilitator
▶ Outlining the characteristics of a good facilitator
▶ Explaining the purpose and setting the meeting ground rules
▶ Establishing the "parking lot"
▶ Negotiating the deliverables
▶ Designing the meeting process

- ▶ Exploring the facilitator tool kit
- ▶ Describing various tools, processes, and techniques of facilitation
- ▶ Reading the group—group dynamics and communication
- ▶ Doing group interventions—when and how
- ▶ Using flipcharts, PowerPoint, handouts
- ▶ Practicing hands-on facilitation—participants choose a facilitation tool to practice with the training participants and receive feedback from the group
- ▶ Using meeting evaluation tools

Following training, these new facilitators were paired with experienced facilitators and given opportunities to practice with several campus work teams. This group of volunteer facilitators and their trainers, known as the Facilitators Network, meets monthly to share experiences and discover new tools to include in their facilitation toolkit. The facilitators also have provided information to unit managers on the benefits of using facilitation (see <http://www.informationservices.ku.edu/facilitators/>). The use of the facilitators has increased slowly as leaders and managers experience the process and its results. In addition, the facilitators themselves have contributed to more effective group processes by using their facilitation skills in the groups in which they regularly participate.

One of our unit leaders recently pointed out another advantage: After a facilitator from another unit began to participate in meetings of his unit, the unit leader found that the facilitator was not only helping the unit with effective group processes but also learning about the unit. The facilitators thus are improving their ability to contribute to the big picture within Information Services thanks to the information and knowledge they gain by working in other parts of the organization. The facilitators have developed skill sets useful in direct facilitation, can contribute more to the collaborative work within their own units, and work successfully in other areas of Information Services. These advantages point to results that justify the resources invested.

Mentoring as a Key to Individual Learning

Mentoring programs offer an established, proven best practice to enhance organizational and individual learning. Given the variety of units and classifications of staff at KU, we chose to experiment with different types of mentoring programs. This section presents two programs: a one-to-one program offered to the professional librarians as part of the university faculty mentoring program, and a group mentoring program offered to managerial staff.

At KU, the provost's office requires each not-yet-tenured library faculty member to have an assigned mentor (as are not-yet-tenured faculty in all departments and schools). The mentor serves a variety of purposes, but in essence is another resource person that the newer faculty member can turn to for advice and coaching on career and job issues, including the promotion and tenure process. In recent years, the KU Libraries has investigated best practices in mentoring and strengthened its mentoring program.

In 2002, the dean of libraries appointed a task group to recommend ways to improve the existing, rather informal mentoring program in the libraries. The group engaged in a process to learn more about mentoring programs at other research libraries with faculty status (a particularly good one at Louisiana State University was found), completed a literature search for relevant research, talked with colleagues at other institutions, and assessed the needs of the libraries' faculty.[11] The dean and the library faculty governance group accepted the task group's recommendations, and the revamped mentoring program debuted with a daylong retreat facilitated by an outside consultant with special expertise in library mentoring programs. Initial mentor-mentee assignments were made by a four-person Mentoring Committee that recruited a pool of potential mentors for about a dozen untenured librarians and helped match mentee interests and needs with mentor interests and strengths.

During the first year of operation, the Mentoring Committee guided the program, met or communicated frequently with mentors and mentees, and made recommendations for improving the program. Improvements included giving supervisors, administrators, and the mentee more say in the selection of mentors; asking mentors and mentees to spend some time each year assessing how the relationship was working and whether it should continue; and identifying additional ways to stimulate discussions, both individual and group, between mentors and mentees. Plans for the third year of the program include an all-day session with our original outside facilitator to review our progress, explore ideas for further improvement, and improve coaching skills (see <http://www.lib.ku.edu/public/mentoring/>).

Another approach to mentoring, group mentoring, builds collaboration between mentors and mentees without the commitments required in one-on-one relationships. In 2002, KU began a group mentoring program for women within Information Services with the purpose of growing the professional skills of middle-level women

managers (see <http://www.informationservices.ku.edu/mentoring/>). The goal is to provide support for women professionals and empower them to progress in their chosen career paths with a focus on what they found useful. Mentoring activities have included open group discussions, educational presentations from faculty and staff experts, and individual mentoring meetings. The group meetings have provided the opportunity for the mentees to receive a diversity of views from the mentors and from their own peers. These meetings developed a lateral network of relationships for the participants that have decreased the time spent by the mentors but increased the range of coaching available to the mentees. Participants have found that the mentoring activities provide an important source of trust, strong relationships, and interpersonal support.[12] Mentors are encouraged to take an educational approach to providing guidance and to share insights from their experiences. Mentees are encouraged to ask for the opportunities they need to grow their professional skills and to learn strategies for management of professional projects, employee issues, and interpersonal work relationships. The program is based on a curriculum focused on leadership and management skill sets, compiled with the assistance of KUHRPD.

Resources to Develop the Organizational Learning Infrastructure

A focus on employee development has always been essential for any organization. In recent years we have been particularly challenged to find resources for professional development (PD) as major technology projects have taken a large share of the overall budget, and PD can be one of the first items cut.[13] As Paul Gandel and Cynthia Golden explained in a recent *EDUCAUSE Quarterly* article, however, there are many ways to design and implement PD programs that do not require a large investment of financial resources.[14] One of the least expensive ways to fund a program is to take full advantage of the resources on your campus.

As KU began to develop the organizational learning infrastructure, clearly a major increase in monetary commitments was not realistic. Although we increased PD resources, much of the increase went to additional technical training and education in new technologies, which we considered a high priority. Therefore, we needed to find other ways of providing resources. Two strategies proved critical to our success: a partnership with the KU Human Resources Department Professional Development staff, and soliciting participation from faculty experts. We found common ground with the HR organizational development staff in their willingness to share their

professional knowledge and offer customized programs for Information Services. They appreciated our willingness to learn and take a "train the trainers" approach to our programs so that the contact hours for their experts were reduced. This also provided great learning opportunities for members of the Information Services staff.

A somewhat unusual approach to resource allocation was our relationship with faculty experts. Mostly they were happy to donate their time as consultants because it gave them the opportunity to see their expertise applied in a functional setting. We also found that doing something meaningful for them in return turned out to be easy and fairly inexpensive. One of the most popular gestures was supplying a small grant for their travel in exchange for consultant time. We found this far less expensive than hiring outside consultants, and it had the additional benefit of developing faculty members' knowledge of Information Services work and our knowledge of their needs. We believe the future holds great promise for building on expertise found within the collaborative networks of the university, adding strength to our professional networks.

Conclusion

Our efforts to build an infrastructure within Information Services at KU to enhance employee learning and the organization as a whole has been a key factor in our organizational success. Building a consensus on values as a base to the infrastructure was an important first step. Educating leaders and managers about the day-to-day meaning of those values through the changing of individual behaviors began to alter the perspective of all employees. Using facilitation techniques improved group collaboration and allowed staff who became facilitators to improve their skill sets and learn about other units. The provision of mentoring programs has expanded thinking about PD and provided coaching for employee improvement.

Taking advantage of the resources readily available on the campus allowed us to build our programs in a cost-effective manner. The creation of the OD Group provided sustained leadership for the improvement and continued evaluation of the program. We hope our experiences focusing on these important human resource areas will serve as a catalyst to other information services organizations in higher education.

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