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## Vertical Teams: Building Morale and Creating Change

I recently had this question from [Kelly](#):

*I can really relate to [your post](#) as our organization has undergone upheaval after upheaval and is looking at another round of multiple changes. Some of the upheavals really could have been done better with an evolutionary approach. However, how does one implement new technology that includes new functionality without disruption?*

*For example, our portal has been evolutionary -- if anything it's been impeded by an incremental post (but I'll leave that for a blog post!). However, MPOW is in the process of implementing a new telephony system that will include all employees -- not just call center agents. This software adds VOIP, headsets, presence awareness and messaging for all employees. These are disruptive features that will require quite a bit of training. I know that if it could have been done incrementally -- it would be better accepted. Yet -- how can one do this in this example?*

Great question and one that, in my opinion, illustrates that no matter how hard we try to integrate change into our regular organizational structure we will at some point always face moments of disruptive change. Disruptive change is not always bad! The situation you describe, moving to VOIP telephony, will be good in the long run. There may be growing pains, certainly, but the end result should prove the effort worthwhile.

But moving to a [VOIP](#) system is not something that is planned overnight, and it is this sort of big move that can benefit from having a structure already in place that allows an organization to implement change smoothly and with as little stress placed upon customers and staff as possible.

You want to build change into your organizational structure. Constant, smooth change – evolutionary and not revolutionary -- better allows the organization to move forward without the seismic fits and starts so commonly associated with the major upheavals of discontinuous change. But this type of change is not easy to institutionalize. In order for this smooth change to become a hallmark of your organization you need to build it into every stage of your planning structure. By building this type of change into the organization's structure you will be better situated to deal with the occasional disruptive change that is bound to come along.

There are many ways to integrate change into an organization's structure, but my favorite way to is to create an environment where customers and staff are involved in facilitating change and maintaining the ability to change at all levels. This is something that Laura Savastinuk and I have been thinking a lot about, and we discuss it in our upcoming book on Library 2.0. It's about taking the steps necessary to implement services while, at the same time, establishing a regular process for reviewing and evaluating the worth of those services.

This institutionalized change follows a three-step cycle;

- Brainstorming for new and modified services
- Planning for services and success
- Evaluating those services on a regular basis

All three stages require that staff from all levels within the library participate. They also call for customer participation or input. The key factor in the success of this plan is the use of vertical teams.

Vertical teams, very simply put, are team structures that include staff from all levels of an organization – from frontline to the director level, and everyone in between. Vertical teams, like vertical communications, serve to flatten the organization, reinforce the sense of worth for staff from all levels of the company, and instill a sense of responsibility that everyone feels towards everyone else.

Once someone from every level is on board, planning for a new VOIP will be a much more open and inclusive project. Having frontline staff play a role in the planning and roll-out phases, as

well as the training and post-roll-out evaluative phase, will mean that all staff will be discussing and thinking about the new service. This doesn't mean that everyone will be on board, but it does mean that none of the process should be "out of the blue" or dangerously disruptive. Staff from every level will be a stakeholder in the process and will play a role in the project's success or failure. Sometimes incremental change is simply not feasible, and the more open and inclusive your planning process can be the greater the reward in the end.

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