Melting pot of library and IT culture in a new Turkish university: a journey towards multi anything

Gulcin Cribb,
Director Information Services Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey
Gulcin.cribb@ozyegin.edu.tr

Abstract:

This paper will discuss the creation of a converged organisation consisting of information technology and library professionals at a newly established, private and not-for-profit university in Turkey. During the planning and implementation phases, the challenges encountered included cultural, professional, sectoral and generational differences. Some of the opportunities were: - creation of a brand new organisation, planning and delivering information services jointly with a team drawn from both Information Technology (IT) and library, and managing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) projects with a hybrid team whose members came from a wide range of backgrounds.

Techniques such as policy development, internal marketing, cross-sectoral team building, staff development, project management framework and coaching were employed as part of the process to create the converged organisation. The paper will argue that the process and outcomes are part of a long and multi-faceted journey and will discuss future plans for the University and the Information Services team.

As this is the first converged library and IT structure in a university in Turkey, the process did not involve the traditional change management strategies usually employed in organisations which have been in existence for some time. Strategies usually adopted in start-up organisations were found to be more appropriate in the case of Ozyegin University, as the establishment and development of the university as a whole were undertaken in an entrepreneurial way common to start-up organisations

Keywords: library-information technology convergence, library-information technology integration, organisational change, organisational culture

Introduction

The converged library- Information Technology (IT) organisational model has been operating in North American, UK and Australian universities for over a decade now. The concept of convergence, models of convergence and levels of convergence vary from university to university and differ according to the stages of convergence. Convergence is a journey, it has a life cycle, just like a marriage, comprising various stages such as meeting, flirting, and engagement, and marriage, honeymoon, getting settled and growing together. There have been a number of divorces or de-convergences in between and sometimes second or third marriages. The types of universities where converged models are in use also vary widely from large research universities, to smaller ones like 4- year liberal arts institutions.

The rationale for convergence has been widely documented in the literature. Major reasons for convergence as reported by various writers include the following:

- Growing convergence of information and technology and its use and access by the campus community are often cited as the most common reasons for convergence of IT and Library
- Improved service levels to the university's main stakeholders, mainly the students and faculty
- Greater organisational flexibility to maximise resources (staff, budgets, physical spaces, facilities)
- Reducing the number of service entry points
- Planning , delivering and evaluating new technologies jointly
- Sharing and using information about end users in order to plan and deliver enhanced services
- Exponential growth in new information technologies and changes in electronic publishing
- Changes in the demographics of our target population, their expectations from the university and their use of information technologies
- Changes in teaching and learning and increased use of information technologies and resources whilst implementing new approaches to learning

- Changes in research and the increased importance of eScience and eScholarship
- Increased and critical importance of copyright and intellectual property issues connected with the creation and use of electronic information, services and facilities

However, in some cases the main motive of the parent organisation for convergence may be a political and financial one involving budget cuts and re-organisation of administrative areas, sometimes as a result of the departure of one of the senior staff in either the Library or the IT area. As discussed below and stated by a number of those who have written on the topic in the last decade, financial and political drivers alone for convergence can lead to significant challenges which may have serious implications for cultural and collaboration aspects of convergence rather than the organisational aspects. Cultural and collaborative aspects of convergence are probably the most significant factors as they involve people, processes and change management.

Models of convergence

Types of convergence and rationale for convergence universities vary from university to university. Convergence can be broadly categorised into two:

1. Administrative or organisational convergence is probably more common where both the Library Director and the IT Director report to the same senior officer who may be the CEO (Vice-Chancellor or the President) or the Provost or Deputy CEO, such as Deputy Vice-Chancellor and so on. There are often many other functional and support services type units, such as Human Resources, Student Services, Finance or Marketing reporting to the same person as well.
2. Operational convergence deals with integrated planning, resource use and service provision. Operational Convergence started to become more common in the mid to late 1990s, when expectations and demand for improved customer service, quality assurance, transparency and accountability, increased demand for and use of electronic information resources, services and facilities and increased competition for space and creation of new learning spaces became widespread amongst universities predominantly in North America, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Ferguson, Spencer and Metz (2004) discussed four key dimensions for convergence which should be considered by the parent organisations when planning and implementing convergence. These key dimensions are administrative, physical, collaborative (or operational) and cultural. It is critical to understand the nature of these dimensions in order to achieve a productive integration and where the opportunities, challenges and threats may occur during the process. The cultural dimension in particular plays a critical role right from the beginning, as it involves people; not only the staff of library and IT, but more importantly the customers and senior administration.

Most converged organisational models involved organisational convergence, rather than operational convergence in the early stages of the convergence trend. Whether convergence is appropriate or not depends on a number of factors and the organisational environment. Much has been written and debated about what the critical factors are for convergence, in various fora, mainly at Educause conferences and in journals such as EDUCAUSE Review, CILIP publications, Ariadne and so on. The CAUSE paper titled *Integrated Computing and Library Services: an Administrative Planning and Implementation Guide for Information Resources* by Hirshon,is probably the first, and the most comprehensive and objective paper on the subject. It is interesting to note that it has not dated as much as one would have expected even though it is now over 10 years old. Hirshon's (1998) research revealed that over 80% of the mergers between library and IT departments have occurred since 1993. In 1998, he listed 90 merged institutions in the appendix of his report. Bolin (2005) on the other hand, studied 50 land grant universities in the US, one in each state, and came to the conclusion that 88% of these institutions have the traditional organisation pattern where the Library reports to the provost and the IT department reports either to the provost or to some other senior administrator. Bolin (2005) claimed that converged organisational models are more common amongst smaller institutions and that when the convergence occurs the chief librarian is usually the top administrator.

In the US, a group named MISO (Merged Information Services Organisations) was established to create a special interest group for converged organisations in association with CLIR (Council on Library and Information Resources). Members of MISO (liberal arts institutions with merged library/IT service organisations) first met in 2002 (there were 25 of them at the time). MISO conducts a web-based quantitative survey to measure how students, faculty and staff use and evaluate the services and resources of college and universities with converged library and IT units. MISO website listed 35 schools (www.misosurvey.org) who participated in the 2005-2009 survey.

In the UK, Lewis and Sexton (2000) discuss the Sheffield experience where after much soul searching the decision to merge did not proceed; however two departments began collaborating on a number of areas much more than they did in the past. According to Lewis and Sexton (2000), "*some 50% of institutions had achieved a degree of converged or merged management by 1998"*. However this trend has slowed down in the last decade in the UK. Akeroyd (2007), presenting a stock-take of converged organisational structures in the UK concluded by saying that "*there is no such thing as a perfect structure and, as missions change, new structures will be required".* It is interesting to note that operational integration of functions such as the single point Helpdesk is an area becoming more common in recent years even if the library and IT departments are not converged.

In Australia, converged organisational structure has been in existence at a number of universities since the early to mid 1990s. Griffith University and Queensland University of Technology were two of the early adopters, with the University of Melbourne following in the late 90s. Some others converged and later on divorced. At the University of Queensland, the Library and IT department along with many other support units reported to the same pro-vice- chancellor who happened to be the former university librarian for a few years in the early 90s. However this was an administrative merger and did not continue after the retirement of the pro-vice- chancellor.

Libraries, IT departments and organisational culture

Sectoral, professional, generational and cultural differences are significant factors to consider when planning and implementing Library-IT convergence. Both libraries and IT departments have a number of sub-groups responsible for various specialised areas. These sub-groups differ from university to university. In some cases they operate as separate departments, in others they are not so discreet due to matrix type organisational structures. In some US universities, academic computing and administrative computing are two separate areas, sometimes reporting to different senior administrators. In other cases, educational technology and audio-visual support are separate departments. In some universities there are decentralised IT units within faculties and administrative units like libraries and student services which provide a wide range of ICT support to the faculty or unit, ranging from hardware, network, applications development, web development, learning management system, student information system, laboratories and discipline specific applications. In such cases, centralised IT units are usually responsible for the network, security, telephony and some ERP applications, while decentralised units handle the rest. (Waggener, 2007)

Both IT departments and libraries have been undergoing significant changes over the last decade. Perhaps libraries had to transform a lot more quickly and in more significant ways than the IT departments did, as the pressure to change in order to provide electronic information resources, services and facilities was quite sudden and came from all directions. The service orientation ethos in libraries, as part of the library culture going back decades, may sometimes cause conflict with IT departments when library requests may appear to interfere with IT department work plans or appear to be too liberal in terms of provision of access to information systems. In fact Lewis and Sexton (2000) summarise this conflict, in the context of the Sheffield experience, by stating that "*The library is not just another client of the computing service – it's a partner in the delivery of information and knowledge-based services. By the same token, the library cannot expect the computing service to drop everything just because the library has a problem."*

It is only in recent years that IT departments began adopting the ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) framework which has made significant improvements to the way IT departments organise themselves in terms of service design and planning, change management, value for money, communication and customer service. The ITIL framework has been a catalyst to introduce and accelerate service management in some of the converged organisations as it presents a viable and convincing framework for improved customer service in a collaborative fashion.

IT departments in universities are usually made up of three broad functional areas which are:

- Engineers or system administrators working with hardware, networks, security, telecommunications, data centres
- Applications developers who develop software, design information systems, adapt open-source applications, create and manage new releases, do business analysis and write code
- ICT support teams who interact with customers, solve their IT issues as 1st and 2nd level support staff

Libraries are often organised into two broad significant groupings. These are:

- Customer service teams which may include faculty liaison, reference or consultancy, circulation, document delivery, information literacy, services involving special collections, marketing and communication activities
- Information management and access teams which usually include back office type activities such as purchasing, cataloguing, processing, licence agreements, maintenance of printed and electronic collections, digitisation activities, systems and web-based work, archives and copyright

These sub-groups, both in libraries and IT departments have developed their own cultures over the years, as they became increasingly specialised in their own areas, such as cataloguing, acquisitions, system administration, programming and so on. The recent technological changes and organisational changes occurring in universities have started shaking some of the long held views, assumptions and ways of doing things which is defined as "culture" by organisational psychologists. New teams had to be created, new alliances had to be formed and more collaboration and communication had to happen in order to keep up with these changes. Both IT departments and libraries had to rethink their priorities and align and realign themselves according to the changing strategic vision, mission and goals of their parent organisations. Successful organisations are those that can easily change and reinvent themselves in order to not only cope with the changing external conditions, but also to grow, to increase their market share and to be ahead of their competitors.

Organisational culture and convergence

Having discussed the nature of convergence, various models, dimensions and rationale for convergence, it is important now to take a look at organisational change and various dimensions of culture to help with the development of useful strategies for convergence.

Schein defines culture as:

"A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." (Schein, 1992, p.12)

The assumptions shared by members of groups such as libraries and IT departments include a number of underlying values, artefacts, learnings, experiences, traditions, symbols and so on. Even though both the library and IT departments are part of the one big organisation that is the university, each department, as a sub-group of the larger group, develops its own culture. Different cultures make different assumptions about others based on their own values. How do librarians see IT staff and vice versa? The assumptions each group has about the other are significant factors for collaboration to develop, to succeed and exist in such a way that in the end there is only one culture, not two. Either that, or there is a good deal of synergy, mutual understanding, collaboration, good will and respect for each other's culture. Brady (1998), in an interview, made some broad generalisations about IT people and librarians:

"There is a huge cultural difference. I see librarians as working more with certainties, while IT involves unpredictability, uncertainty and to some extent trial and error. Most IT people will admit to an incomplete understanding of their craft, and there is maybe a greater need to rely on the expert knowledge of others"

In an increasingly complex environment in the 21st century, librarians are expected to learn to live with ambiguity, to think more strategically and to refer to the expertise of others to find solutions by working in multi-skilled teams, often with non-librarians. So, living with unpredictability is not and should not be the sole domain of IT professionals. One of the top 10 assumptions listed in the 2007 ACRL Environmental Scan (2008) is that "*the skill set for librarians will continue to evolve in response to the changing needs and expectations of the populations they serve, and the professional background of library staff will become increasingly diverse"*. It is critical for librarians to possess high level technological skills and knowledge and to be comfortable with continuous change, so that they are able to assess and adopt the latest technological changes in order to meet the expectations of the current populations of students and staff.

Rather than focusing on the certainty versus uncertainty trait alone, it would be more useful to examine a range of dimensions such as those Hofstede (2001) created when researching differences amongst national and organisational cultures. Hofstede did quite a lot of research about national and organisational cultures which is used widely by those doing international business. Hofstede's five dimensions (Hofstede's website http://stuwww.uvt.nl/~csmeets/) for national cultures are:

1. *Power distance, the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally*
2. *Individualism versus collectivism that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.*
3. *Masculinity versus its opposite, femininity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders*
4. *Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity;*
5. *Long-term versus short-term orientation:*

Hofstede's (2001) six independent dimensions of practices for organisational cultures are:

- process-oriented versus results-oriented,
- job-oriented versus employee-oriented,
- professional versus parochial,
- open systems versus closed systems,
- tightly versus loosely controlled,
- Pragmatic versus normative.

According to Hofstede (2001), the position of an organization on these dimensions is partly determined by the business or industry the organization is in.

Rather than making assumptions about library and IT staff along these dimensions, it would be more helpful for both senior executives and middle level managers to be aware of these dimensions and how they get manifested before, during and after the organisational change process. For example, it is best to appeal to self-interest with individualistic cultures and to appeal to "common" interest with collectivistic cultures. With cultures that value certainty, one must provide specific rules, structures, steps and processes, whereas with cultures that have risk orientation, it might be beneficial to reward creative behaviour that moves the organisation toward the end goal.

With libraries and IT departments, process versus results orientation and service versus infrastructure can become sources of conflict at times, due to greater emphasis being placed on policies and procedures in libraries. IT specialists often prefer to work towards a technical solution and not 'waste' time with documentation, policies and procedures. Some of them may see customer demands as interference in technology or security risk. Introduction of the ITIL framework in IT departments in recent years has been helpful as it provides guidance on customer service and customer satisfaction and requires policy and procedure development for service improvement by introducing standards now adopted in major IT organisations worldwide.

Libraries and IT departments in Turkish universities

In Turkey, there are 132 universities, 94 of which are state universities. The rest are funded by their own foundations and tuition fees. The Turkish Higher Education Council (YOK) has a high level of authority on the way all universities are run in the country. YOK acts as a quality assurance agency on behalf of the government and must approve not only a new university, but also all its faculties, programs, appointment of professors, promotion of academics and governance.

In all state and non-state universities, libraries and IT departments are completely separate units, sometimes reporting to the same senior officer and other times to different senior officers of the University. University libraries, especially those in some of the more prestigious universities such as Middle East Technical University, Koc University, Sabancı University, Istanbul Technical University, Bosphorus University and Bilkent University have been able to provide technologically enriched services, collections and facilities to their students and faculty for some years now. The Turkish Academic Network and Information Centre (ULAKBIM) has been able to secure national site licenses for major electronic information resources for all Turkish universities and research organisations. These resources range from Science Direct to Web of Science, major journal collections and databases like IEEE and EBSCO. Some university libraries have been able to hire staff with IT skills and knowledge to manage information technology aspects of their activities, whilst others have been reliant on the central IT departments completely. Services and facilities such as "Information Commons" or "Academic Commons" have not yet become common in Turkish universities. However a few universities, including Ozyegin University, provide their students with laptops when they arrive on campus. Computer laboratories managed by the IT departments are relatively common. A few universities have begun offering Institutional Repositories for research publications to their constituents.

As the main topic of this paper is not about an analysis of Turkish universities or their library and IT departments, but more about the multi-cultural, multi-generational and multi-professional nature of library-IT converged organisation in a Turkish university, I shall not dwell upon Turkish universities and their organisations a great deal.

Özyeğin University

Library - IT convergence is a new phenomenon in Turkish universities. Ozyegin University, a new not-for-profit non-state university was established in mid 2008. The Council, on the recommendation of its Rector, decided to organise its library and IT under one organisational umbrella called Information Services. As there was no previous structure with the exception of a very small IT team, the new university appointed a Director of Information Services as its CIO who was then charged with the task of recruiting library and IT staff and to plan and organise the converged department from day one.

The library staff were recruited from other university libraries in Istanbul and IT staff came from a variety of organisations. Most staff, especially those without a university background, were not aware of the relationships between libraries and IT departments. It was quite an advantage to be able to start with a converged organisation from day one, as the need to bring together two separate departments with their own cultural histories did not exist. The demographic composition of staff is multi-generational, but the 25-35 age group make up about 60% of the overall population.

The university had to build its own organisational culture as staff came from a variety of organisations around the world, for example banks, IT, media, insurance companies, research organisations and other universities, mainly in North America, Turkey and Europe. The challenges and opportunities were recognised right from the beginning and the excitement of being part of the creation of a new and innovative university in Turkey is seen by staff as a privilege and a motivating factor.

The new converged Library - IT team was born together and has been growing together ever since the beginning. The team initially started operating as two separate groups, sharing the same office space. It did not take long for library and IT staff to start collaborating on a number of projects and activities which helped them understand each other's expertise, strengths and capabilities and how they complemented each other. The activities ranged from joint policy and procedure development to sharing the Help Desk software, planning and delivering ICT literacy (including information literacy) seminars for academic staff and students. The Library Help Desk is the single physical desk for both IT and Library. ICT equipment, such as laptops, projectors and so on are lent from the library. The electronic Help Desk is used both for library and IT related enquiries. The faculty librarian is the account manager for customers in faculties in relation to orientation, consultancy and as first point of contact. One of the library assistants has been trained to help with ICT support. The customer satisfaction survey prepared by the team covers all of information services. The course management system (CMS) is used by the faculty librarian to communicate with students for each course and for information literacy. The Information Services blog is for the whole department where both library and IT related announcements are made. Prior to the purchase and roll-out of the library management system, the need to have a simple interim library system was resolved by one of the applications development staff creating a system to list library holdings and for basic circulation activities. The evaluation, selection and roll-out of the Library Management System (LMS) were done with a great deal of cooperation and collaboration between library and IT staff over 9 months. During Turkish Library Week, a seminar was presented to the Istanbul library and IT community to showcase Ozyegin University's converged organisation. Two of the presentations were done jointly by Library and IT staff. The preparation process for the seminar was another catalyst that helped bring the two cultures together. Library and IT staff involved in preparing for the seminar started further collaborative activities afterwards, such as a joint Information Services blog, individualised orientation, joint CMS training for new academic staff, and a *service catalogue* on the Web.

The strategies to develop, maintain and strengthen the converged organisation included; staff development and training, coaching and mentoring, project teams, use of project management techniques based on PMI, joint public relations activities, such as seminars and workshops for the faculty and students, joint development of policies and procedures, joint team meetings and shared work space as well as joint social activities.

Conclusion

Schein (1993) asserted the importance of dialogue for organisational effectiveness. He argued that groups that come from different cultures or sub-cultures have difficulty communicating with each other, even if they speak the same native language. Administrative departments and faculties in universities

have been developing their own language, communication style and culture out of necessity as they go through various organisational life cycles. Subcultures in organisations often feel that others should learn their language and terminology. IT language and library language are somewhat different from each other, but often mutually comprehensible which facilitates dialogue between the two groups. Librarians sometimes forget that non-librarians do not understand terms such as *monograph*, *holdings*, *serials*, *reference works* and so on. The same is true with IT staff. They are particularly notorious for their use of complicated technical language especially when communicating with customers.

One cannot emphasise enough the critical importance of the effective use of dialogue as a tool for team and culture building amongst IT and library staff, to develop organisational learning and a common language, not just within the Library – IT team, but with the external and internal customers. The main ingredients of effective dialogue are "active listening", "knowing one's assumptions", "appreciation of individual contributions", "giving air time to everyone" and "members feeling as equal as possible within a group" (Schein, 1993, p31). If dialogue is not used as part of everyday working life, success of the converged model is bound to be at risk.

At Ozyegin University, the converged organisational model is new just like the university itself. The journey has only begun to develop, grow and reflect on what has been achieved so far and what else needs to be done. The continuous improvement process involving planning, implementation and evaluation of products and services and subsequent communication with and feedback from the end users is integrated into the culture using both day-to-day and medium to long term planning strategies. In some ways it looks easier when one is so small and new and in other ways it is a lot harder because so much has to be achieved in such a short time by a small number of staff to achieve the mission and vision for the university.

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