

Strategic Competence: to soar above
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the case for change at Deakin University Library and the change process adopted, and to explore organisational competences and the structural and strategic outcomes achieved. The Library’s change process was driven by university strategic priorities and financial exigencies.

Design/methodology/approach – Change management theory is drawn upon to illustrate that the change process adopted is influenced by the state of the organization and the state of urgency. Four steps are outlined that encapsulate the process developed by the Library. These four steps draw upon a book by Kotter and Rathberger (2006), *Our iceberg is melting*. The concept of strategic organisational competences as proposed by Thomson and Cole (1997) is adopted.

Findings – The case study demonstrates the need to take a structural and strategic view of the organisation when developing new models of service and ways of operating. An organisation needs to develop the capacity to manage both continuous and discontinuous change. The change process has delivered improvements to the Library’s strategic and functional capabilities, as well as sustainable cost savings. Client satisfaction surveys indicate the quality of service provision has not diminished.

Originality/value – The paper proposes a change process that may suit other organisations. It advocates a simple conceptualisation of the process that will aid communication with key stakeholders. Further, to achieve the desired strategic and structural outcomes, it is critical to assess the strategic competence of the organization.

Keyword Change process, Academic libraries, Australia, Strategic competence

Paper type Case study

Introduction

A real case for change

Change management theory and guides on how to implement organisational change commonly refer to the need to build a convincing case for change. Some of the ‘cardinal sins of misleading change efforts’, according too Omar Khan from Sensei International, include

- “Too much hype and not enough action
- Over-advertising how “massive” the change will be and then delivering only a tweaked version of the current strategy

- Creating a consensus for dramatic change and then wasting a great deal of time in committee meetings
- Make no change in senior leadership
- Involve no customers and ignore the marketplace” (Khan, 2006)

One may consider that the case for change for Deakin University Library was clearly evident. However, it would be unwise to start any change process with this assumption. From 2000 to 2005, the Library at Deakin University was absorbed into a larger organizational unit, Learning Services. It did not exist as an entity in its own right. Its strategic directions were developed within the context of delivering ‘learning services’ – Library Services, Teaching and Learning Support and Learning Resources. Key functions included educational design and professional development for academic staff. Following a review by the University at the executive level in 2005, the recommendation on the future operation of the Library was to reestablish a “focused management responsibility for the development and delivery of information resources and services within a distinct group [and hence] strengthen the coordinated development of these services to meet the challenge of increasing online delivery of programs, and support the University in achieving its mission”. (Martin and Rosenberg, 2005)

The key drivers for change were twofold:

Strategic priority. To improve the Library’s capacity to respond to the university’s teaching, learning and research imperatives and the changing higher education environment and information and IT landscape.

Financial. To achieve savings in the labour or staffing component of the budget to meet 2006/7 budget targets and achieve long term efficiencies.

Many theorists suggest that leaders need to create a sense of energy at the start of any process. There was no “creativity” required. The urgency was real. It was known to all library staff that the review recommended a new library structure be introduced and that this recommendation was incorporated into the University’s Operational Plan. It was known to all staff that the Library’s budget would not meet current staff costs. Nevertheless, it was recognised early in the process that these messages would be “bypassed” by many staff, who would choose not to discuss the undiscussable – “it is the human way” (Argyris, 1999). Communication and engagement as always would be critical.

The Strategic Capabilities Gap

Organisations must be able to competently manage continuous and discontinuous change in a dynamic environment (Thomson and Cole, 1997). Libraries face escalating environmental change to which they must not only respond, but must also develop innovative strategies to continue to meet the information needs of their clients. For academic libraries, these key environmental factors include

- new models for creating, publishing and disseminating information continually being introduced and tested by the commercial world

- the pace of change in information and communication technologies increasing exponentially
- client behaviours changing as the generations change
- the higher education sector recognising the need for new approaches to teaching and learning
- mechanisms for funding research based on quality and impact (e.g. Research Quality Frameworks) influencing the sector and directing local institutional priorities.

The following questions assist in assessing the library’s capacity to sustain the best match between the organisation’s strategic resources and a dynamic environment, with its ‘shocks and surprises’ (Thomson and Cole, 1997):

- Do the organisation’s planning processes; environmental scanning and means of disseminating information lead to innovative and responsive strategies?
- Do your managers work as a team, sharing information and expertise?
- Do internal and external partnerships enrich your organisation’s learning?
- What are the functional competences required to deliver client–focused services, and to be both proactive and reactive to the environment?

Thomson and Cole propose

“that in the chaotic organizational environments of the 1990s, managers must be able to design winning competitive paradigms and then change these continuously and sometimes discontinuously if their organization is at least to stay crisis-averse and ideally grow and prosper. ... [t]o achieve this they must understand their environment and the keys to a successful and sustained match. “ (Thomson and Cole, 1997)

This statement is as relevant for today’s organization as for the organization in 2012. The date 2012 is indicative here of the forward planning being undertaken Deakin University’s next Strategic Plan, 2008 – 21012.

The Process of Change – Deakin University Library

The decision of the university executive to restore the Library as a separate entity and to appoint a University Librarian signaled the beginning of the process. The time frame was dictated by the budget cycle, and this influenced the approach adopted. The approach met the requirements set in the University’s Enterprise Agreement for significant change.

It is important to consider the *state of the organisation* (Turner and Crawford, 1998) whether embarking upon structural change or strategic change. At Deakin University Library, staff *understood* that with the appointment of a new university librarian, coupled with recent vacancies at senior levels, that there would inevitably be some change. There were also strong memories and many stories regarding past change processes in relation to previous mergers with other institutions, as well as internal university re-structures. Staff were keen to hear the vision, recognised the Library’s key purpose was to support the teaching, learning and research imperatives of the university, and were supportive of strategies to ensure the library’s services and operations were central to this purpose. Nevertheless major change is a threat, and the Library’s re-structure was major change.

I have found Chris Argyris's premise that human beings have master programs in their head about how to deal with threat most reassuring. According to Argyris, the fundamental set of rules human beings follow are:

1. "Bypass . . . threat wherever possible.
2. Act as if you are not bypassing [the threat.]
3. Don't discuss 1 or 2 while it is happening
4. Don't discuss the undiscussability of the undiscussable." (Argyris, 1999).

For the Library's process, it was 10 months from announcing the change to implementation. There are many complex diagrammatical representations in the literature proposing how to approach structural change. All have to be viewed within the context of the 'state of the organisation' and their appropriateness or fit. The following four steps have been adapted from most aptly named book by Kotter and Rathgeber, *Our Iceberg is Melting* (Kotter and Rathgeber, 2006). The four steps simply represent the key outcomes that you as the leader are aiming to achieve. There are many mechanisms to ensure communication and engagement occur, and that corporate responsibilities including industrial obligations are met.

Step 1 Set the Stage

Create a sense of urgency. Help others to see the need for change and the importance of acting immediately. Pull together a guiding team.

It is important to communicate early and start the engagement process. The new University Librarian spoke to all staff early, celebrating past achievements, presenting the vision and key strategies for the coming year and beyond, and outlined the broad principles driving the change and new structure, as well as the a timeline for implementation. To drive the change there must an effective senior management team. It was critical to the success of the change process to immediately put in place this team.

Step 2 Decide what to do

Undertake a situation analysis. Develop the change, the new models, the strategies to support the vision. Identify what is different and what is the impact. Discuss with key stakeholders. Ensure support at the appropriate executive level. Plan for adequate opportunity and time to consult with and engage staff. Develop time lines for each phase of the process.

Developing the change proposal and the new models

New Leadership/ Senior Management Team

The 'state of the organisation'- with the library disentangling itself from a larger, merged Division - required a strong leadership/management team to drive the change. The organisational structure needed to align with the University's vision, strategic plan and operational priorities. As the new University Librarian, the highest priority was to

develop a model for a senior management team that ensured the following generic competences were addressed:

- Strategic awareness
- Stakeholder satisfaction abilities
- Strategic implementation and change abilities
- Functional competences
- Failure and crisis avoidance
- Ethics and social responsibility (Thomson and Cole, 1997)

Thomson and Cole have developed a useful list of 32 organisational competences that fall under the headings above. This checklist provides a useful frame of reference when developing and continually reviewing the new organisational structure.

The senior management team was appointed, following staff consultation and executive approval. A high-level situation audit was undertaken by this new team asking the following simple questions:

- What did we need to be doing more of, differently, better or less?
- What is happening in higher education, the university, and the wider community?
- What is our vision in terms of meeting changes in IT, scholarly communication, information provision and client behaviours?
- How do we create flexible staffing structures, achieve efficiencies and make savings in labour costs?
- Were there activities the library was undertaking that were not critical to its achieving its strategic priorities?

The new managers then reviewed their structures and operations, and developed proposals for change that were audited by their colleagues in the Senior Management Team.

Communicate with key stakeholders

The University Executive need to hear how the Library will support the University's operational and strategic plans, and those of the Faculties. The Faculties are seeking reassurance that the Library will continue to provide the level of service and access to resources that they expect. All are keen to see a client-focused ethos informing decisions, not inward looking models driven by functions.

Human Resources look for a planned process for change that meets legislative requirements and agreements with staff or union bodies, and integrates staff consultation throughout the process.

Staff are expecting a clear message on how they may be affected, how their positions will change, will there be staff losses. Recall Argyris's rules for how we as human beings cope with threat. Effective means of communicating the same message will be many and varied – in person, written proposals and responses, and presentations to groups. Different staff may require different approaches. This is what is hard to plan.

Planning

A plan or proposal for change has to reach and be understood by different audiences – staff, clients, and university administrators. It must clearly articulate why there is a need for change, what are the critical factors driving the change, what is different from the past, opportunities under the new structure, the consultative process already undertaken and going forward, and the proposed time lines for each phase of the proposed change.

It can be difficult to judge what will be adequate time and opportunity for staff and other stakeholders to give feedback, while maintaining the momentum. Time lines may be dictated by factors external to the organisational unit, including budget and planning cycles. Nevertheless, it is important to be prepared to respond to feedback and make suitable adjustments to plans. It is just as important for the process not to stall. ‘Intentionality’ is the key – the change will happen.

Step 3 Make it happen

Communicate. Confirm the change and actions. Engage with staff, work with teams. Develop transition plans. Be aware of saboteurs. Press hard where required. Agree to concessions that make sense.
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Empowerment of the senior management team is critical here. Working effectively as a team- an understanding of self and others - and a knowledge of how we as human beings respond to change in different ways are critical to success, and worthy of investment early in the ‘planning and preparedness’ phase.

The Library identified functions it would no longer perform, which resulted in loss of positions. New positions were also created. Managers worked with their teams to develop transition plans, and to identify training needs and skills gaps. Staff were at various stages in their own acceptance of the change. Some positions were more affected than others, and some were not carried forward in the new structure. This is where the managers leading their teams are key to the success of the change process. It is not an easy time and to sustain and support those driving the change needs to be considered by those leading the change. Further, the support available for all staff through the university’s human resources and staff assistance or counselling services must be communicated to staff, at every step.

Step 4 Make it stick

Build effective teams. Develop effective induction and training programs for staff. Focus on innovation. Create a new culture. Hold onto the new ways of behaving and make sure they succeed, until they become strong enough to replace the old traditions.
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The power of story telling in learning is widely accepted. Reflections on the past and stories depicting the future are just as important in developing learning organisations. Kotter and Rathgeber remind us that

“Stories can stimulate thought, teach important lessons, and inspire us to use those lessons. In our modern, high-tech world, where we can stare all the time at memos, instruction manuals, charts and spreadsheets, we can forget this profound truth.” (Kotter and Rathgeber, 2006)

Deakin University Library staff had strong memories of the previous mergers of the early 1990s and memories of restructures of faculties and divisions within the university. The stories of the past were instrumental in forming the culture of the library and were used as resistors to change. The challenge, as for any change process, was for the vision or stories of the future to gain the same level of acceptance.

Team building, skills enhancement, discussion forums bringing in external speakers, planning workshops are all strategies to help 'make it stick'. Evaluating and sustaining the change are the final step in any planned change process. The Library will undertake a formal 'Reflection Day' in the next 6 months. However, the key issue is sustaining continuous change and recognising that for those working in delivering information services in a volatile ICT environment, increasingly competitive higher education sector and an information industry where key producers of information continue to re-position themselves, then cycles of major change and intervention strategies are inevitable.

Key Outcomes

1. Structural Outcomes

Senior Management Team

The new senior management team advises the University Librarian and plays a key role in planning and decision making. The library executive group (University Librarian and Associate Librarians) is able to make quick responses to meet changes in the local university or wider environment. The breadth of expertise and knowledge of the entire senior management team is called upon to ensure the Library is effectively aligned with the university's strategic priorities.

Senior Management Team

University Librarian	Associate Librarian, Client Services	Manager, Faculty of Business and Law, and Burwood Campus Library
		Manager, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, and Waurm Ponds Campus Library
		Manager, Faculty of Science and Technology, and Warrnambool Campus Library
		Manager, Faculty of Education, and Waterfront Campus Library

		Manager, Faculty of Arts, and Information Literacy
	Associate Librarian, Information Management and Access	Manager, Collections and Access
		Information Systems Librarian
	Manager, Quality and Innovation	
	Business Manager	

Underpinning the new senior management team, are cross campus faculty and functional teams providing *client services*. Coordinators of functional teams allow managers to focus on strategies to support clients and not the day-to-day operational matters. At the next level, Client Services Officers (Senior Library Technicians) coordinate teams of support staff

Client Services: A case for discontinuous change.

There had been little change in the approach to client service provision in the previous 15 years. The demand for services had been changing for some time. Services to support a largely print collection were declining. The need for information assistance that incorporated new technologies was growing and needed to be balanced with ‘in person’ service delivery. The changes in client behaviours and the rapid adoption of new technologies required re-engineering of the client services structure and service provision. The introduction of the new Client Services structure has led to three key changes in focus:

- An outward looking, client focused structure has been implemented with the senior management team’s strategic capability strengthened by new roles and new positions.
- Client Services Managers’ primary accountability is aligned with Faculties. Campus operational matters are referred to managers as an exception, not as a rule. Coordinators of cross campus functional teams ensure the delivery and attainment of quality services and processes.
- Client Services Managers have one of the following portfolio responsibilities: Services to Research; Services to International and Partners; Online and Off Campus; Information Assistance Services and Collection Assessment and Use.

Client Services

Associate Librarian, Client Services	Managers, Faculty Library Services	Client Services Coordinators Information Lending Document Supply Facilities	Liaison Librarians
			Client Services Team Leaders Inquiry Services & Document Supply Loans, shelving, collection maintenance
			Client Services Support Officers Information (Information Desk, Liaison support, e-learning administration) Digitisation
			Client Services Assistants

Many changes have been made in Client Services provision, including:

Information assistance services

Further centralisation of telephone, email, Ask a Question and web form services. These services provide information about library services, conduct transactions on behalf of library clients (e.g. renewal, holds, odd-campus requests), advise library users how to navigate the library web pages and access information, assist campus students, and refer callers to library experts.

Reduction of multiple service points and new roles for Client Services Officers and Client Services Assistants introduced. Quick transactions or basic enquiries are answered immediately by these staff. Longer enquiries or transactions are referred to library staff with the expertise.

A trial using instant messaging for receiving and responding to enquiries is being undertaken. Mobile assistance services, using wireless technology and laptops are also being provided as a trial.

Information Literacy Online

The online information literacy program for undergraduates, *Smart Searcher*, has been refreshed, and an online program for researchers and higher degree students, *Smart Researcher*, introduced.

The Library has enhanced its video conferencing capabilities, to enable recording and streaming of training to assist students choosing to study off-campus and/or online. Both outcomes were the result of the Deakin being awarded grant in 2005 - AAUT institutional award (Australian Awards for University Teaching) - for Library services supporting distance education.

Online, Distance, off-campus and on campus

The Library has moved away from distinct services and teams providing services to off-campus students, to an integrated service delivery model. This aligns with the University’s move away from the current distinction between on-campus and online and distance education, to instead a focus on Deakin as a *flexible provider of education*.

Focus on core activities. For example:

- New audio visual lending service was introduced supporting students learning through the provision of contemporary digital audio, still and moving image equipment. This was a move away from the perceived role of the library to lend equipment to support teaching spaces.
- There has been a reduction in the emphasis on ‘bibliofundamentalism’ - the perfect catalogue. Client services staff have continued to reduce time spent on collection management tasks, to re-focus on information assistance, and support for e-learning and training.

Information Management and Access: A case for continuous change

Unlike Client Services, functions associated with traditional library technical services operations – cataloguing, acquisitions, systems – had undergone continual change. The strategic decisions to replace print journals with electronic journals, to target e-book provision of core readings, to take advantage of consortial purchasing deals, and to provide an e-readings and alternative print materials service have resulted in the need for different skills sets and new work flows. This is not unexpected as most academic libraries have experienced similar pressures. Over the last five to ten years, environmental changes have forced libraries to form and re-form their procurement, processing and access functions. The perpetual questions remain; how can we improve? What further efficiencies can be achieved?

Information Management and Access

Associate Librarian, Information Management And Access	Manager, Collections and Access	Access & Data Librarian Subs. & Licences Librarian Acquisitions Librarians Faculty/Student Support Faculty/Serials Faculty/ Monographs	Librarians Technicians Assistants
	Information Systems Librarian	Library Website Developer Information Systems Coord. Innopac Coord. Cataloguing Services Coord. Bibliographic Standards Lab’s	Librarians Technicians Assistants
	Special Collections Librarian		Preservation Assistant

In the Library's earlier responses to the rapid increase in the acquisition of electronic resources, an Electronic Services Team had been formed. Over time, it was clear that more flexibility and integrated workflows in handling print and online resources were essential. Two larger teams were created, Collections and Access; and Information Systems. The aim was for these larger teams to nurture a greater level of multi-skilling, and remove the artificial boundaries based on format and function. More opportunities for exchange of knowledge and broadening of skills sets were expected.

Another divide common to libraries, that also needed to be crossed, was the organisational and cultural divide between client services and 'technical services'. The latter was re-formed as 'Information Management and Access'. Structural linkages have been established to support informed decisions about resource acquisition and access. Staff acquiring the resources have been assigned to faculties and their role is to work closely with the client services faculty teams, who in turn have close links with academic staff. Culturally, there is more to be done.

Strategic Outcomes

Strategic implementation and change abilities

The Library's Action Plan aligns with the University's Strategic and Operational Plans and supports the achievement of the University's operational targets. Planning days need to engage those responsible for setting strategic directions, and managing and coordinating key organisational units and functions. What had been an exercise for the 'executive' now involves those responsible for delivering quality services and operations. Generating greater awareness of the University's Strategic Plan and the supporting Library Action Plan is the role of all supervisors, with teams identifying how they can best contribute to successful outcomes.

Structural changes followed by team building workshops have emphasized the need for cross-campus and cross functional teams to share their knowledge and skills, enabling the Library to be more prepared for and responsive to changes in our environment. Position descriptions have become more generic enabling the organization to respond more ably to changing needs and demands.

Two key external partnerships with a library book/serial agent and the Library's ILMS vendor have been instrumental in assisting staff to think differently about what we do.

<p><i>Organisational Competences Strengthened:</i> 1. Establish appropriate objectives, plans and targets and achieve these, while always appreciating the need for flexibility, adaptation and change. 2. Create, share and implement a winning vision. 3. Empower people and motivate them towards continuous organizational improvement. 4. Foster internal cross-functional and cross-business synergies through co-operation and sharing. 5. Co-operate in external strategic alliances for competitive advantage. (Thomson and Cole, 1997)</p>
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Strategic awareness and competitive abilities

The new Manager, Quality and Innovation is reviewing the Library's environmental scanning capabilities. Currently the intranet is the tool for sharing this information and the senior management team are responsible for informing their colleagues of key developments in their portfolio areas. Consideration is being given to whether a blog for

accessibility or a wiki for its interactive features will improve sharing and dissemination of critical strategic and corporate information.

A TRENDS (Thoughts, REflections, New iDeaS) discussion forum has been introduced to bring in speakers from other service industries, researchers, library colleagues from different sectors with the aim to not only become better informed, but also to nurture innovation.

The Library will internally review its new organizational structure and work environment in 2007, and will continually review the alignment of its resources with the strategic priorities of the University. The Library also welcomes its first external review to take place in 2008, which will be timely in assisting the Library in assessing how well place it is to support the university's next Strategic Plan (2008- 2012) and achieve its vision for 'facilitating the interconnection of people, technology and information to create knowledge.'

Organisational Competences Strengthened: 6. Think strategically and holistically, encapsulating issues of past present and future. 7. Maintain an awareness of environmental changes and their implications. 8. Design and operationalise a "fitting" organization, the structure and systems of which match its environment(s) and stay matched in times of change and turbulence. 9. Understand the competitive environment, choose where and how to compete, design "winning" paradigms and improve continuously. (Thomson and Cole, 1997)

Stakeholder satisfaction abilities/ Quality and customer care

Just as the Library completed the transition to its new structure in October 2007, it was time for the scheduled Client Satisfaction Survey. The data from the survey is able to be benchmarked against Australian and New Zealand libraries. The results have been very positive, with an overall client satisfaction score of 84%.

It was also around this time that the University elected to run its Staff Satisfaction Survey, which also is conducted every two years. Recognising that the Library had undertaken a major organizational change process, it was again pleasing that the Library was the only organizational unit to where the level of satisfaction from other internal stakeholders groups in the university (faculties and divisions) exceeded expectations.

Cost reductions were achieved. We have not yet been through a cycle of review to be in a position to assess whether quality has been sustained for all service functions. There is certainly much more to be done to 'invoke a creative and innovative ... climate in the organisation'. However, we are starting 2007 from a good base.

Organisational Competences Strengthened: 10. Understand the needs and expectation of stakeholders and manage the organisation to meet those which must be prioritized. 11. Appreciate key success factors ...and match these with organizational competences and capabilities – taking into account new opportunities and potential threats.12. Provide excellent quality- as perceived and recognised by customers. 13. Continuously improve productivity and cost reductions without ever sacrificing key aspects of quality. 14. Invoke a creative, innovative and self-organising climate in the organisation. (Thomson and Cole, 1997)

Functional competences

Finance and human resource capabilities have been strengthened through the establishment of the Library's Business Unit and strong appointments in this area. A facilities management role has been established and cross campus coordination improved.

The Library Planning and Management Group, the Library's key decision making body, now incorporates broader 'manager' representation than previously; and in corporate governance terms, managers are more aware of their accountability. A new advisory committee structure drawing upon expertise and knowledge across the library is in place.

There is a gap in where the Library considers it should be in its ability to test and adopt new technologies. Certainly, the Library continues to be a leader in extending the web search capabilities of Millennium®, Innovative Interface Inc.'s integrated library management system. At the same time, we are fully aware of the need to be responsive to changing technologies and they way our clients are seeking information. Is any library as ready as it would wish to be? This is an area where we would aim to continually improve.

Organisational Competences Strengthened: 15. Acquire new, relevant technologies and utilize R&D to help create a future for the business. 16. Develop end launch new products and services both effectively and in the appropriate timescale. 17. Develop and introduce new processes for cost savings and speedier decision making. 18. Attract, develop, reward and retain people with appropriate skills and competences. 19. Harness the potential for information technology in design and for fast, efficient and effective information harnessing and sharing. 20. Maintain strong financial controls and be able to access capital for future investment programs. (Thomson and Cole, 1997)

There are two higher level organisational competences not included in this overview of outcomes. Both will be considered in reflecting upon and reviewing the structural and strategic changes introduced. The Library is well-placed to meet its *Ethics and social responsibility*. The University's compliance processes require a continuous review of the Library's awareness of issues, familiarity with university policies and appropriateness actions in place to ensure compliance. *Failure and crisis avoidance* abilities will need further analysis and consideration during the review process. In particular, the Library's risk due to its reliance on internal and external suppliers of services and resources requires an appropriate level of strategic awareness and supporting information systems.

Conclusions

The paper is a case study of the change process adopted by Deakin University Library and the outcomes achieved. It recognises that when developing a process for change, there is not one approach that suits all organisations. The state of the organisation, its history and current climate, and the perceived urgency on the part of key stakeholders are critical in determining the path to follow and the timeline required. A simple conceptualisation of the process is advocated that will aid communication with key stakeholders.

The structural and strategic outcomes are reviewed, within the context of the organisation's capacity to meet environmental changes. Emphasis is placed on the need for organisations to not only manage continuous change through its quality processes, but also manage responses to discontinuous change inevitable in a dynamic environment.

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