

Team-Based Organizational Structure:  
A Case Study of the Edmonton Public Library

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With deep appreciation to the leaders and team members of the Edmonton Public Library  
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With love and gratitude to my husband for his unwavering support

### Abstract

Organization theorists suggest that success in today's technology-rich and financially volatile environment is best achieved through a less hierarchical structure. In addition, many also argue that this flatter structure is best supported through the use of self-managed teams. This paper explores the evolution of the organizational structure of the Edmonton Public Library over the last twenty years and its use of teams through a review of secondary and primary data. The results of the study suggest that, although there have been significant changes during this time, EPL's structure remains hierarchical. EPL has created various types of teams since 1990. By comparing teams to effectiveness factors described in the literature, the strengths and weaknesses of EPL teams are identified. The study concludes with specific recommendations to help enhance the overall effectiveness of EPL's teams. The current literature regarding library structure and use of teams in public libraries is limited. Therefore this case study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of organization design and team theories within a public library setting.

*Keywords:* organizational structure, public libraries, teams, evolution

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Organization theorists suggest that success in today's technology-rich and financially volatile environment is best achieved through a less hierarchical structure. Within the library literature as well, Stueart and Moran (2007) suggest that there is a "widespread belief that adoption of new technology will inevitably lead to radical changes in the organizational structure of libraries" (p.187). Theorists go on to argue that this flatter structure is best supported through a system of teams providing the necessary coordination for a flexible and responsive organization. This paper explores the evolution of the organizational structure and use of teams within the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) over the last twenty years, a period characterized by unprecedented growth, technological change, a re-orientation to a customer-driven service philosophy and a vision of "one library, one staff" (Edmonton Public Library Board [EPLB], March 2006).

This study begins by reviewing the theories of organization design, with particular emphasis on the types of organizations described by Mintzberg (1989). This is followed by a review of the library literature, looking specifically at the organizational structures of libraries through two standard, albeit somewhat dated, works by Martin (1996) and Webb (1989), before turning to more recent periodical literature. Mintzberg suggests that organizations are not exclusively one type or another and that their structures in fact evolve over time. Greiner's (1998) evolutionary model first presented in 1972 proposes a series of phases through which organizations move adjusting their management practices. These phases are triggered by revolutionary crises. This model provides a useful tool with which to consider EPL's evolution over time.

Management theorists, writing both within and outside of the library field, argue that, although there is no one structure which best addresses an organization's needs, teams can play a broad role in this flatter, less hierarchical structure. A brief overview is presented of the literature on teams, their typology and effectiveness. A conceptual framework of effectiveness factors was created based on the work of Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Van Maanen, & Westney (2009); Mohrman, Cohen & Mohrman (1995); and Parker (2003). This, together with recent library literature on this topic, was used to inform the analysis of EPL's use of teams. Through the analysis of secondary data and interviews with EPL team participants, the features of EPL teams are described; their strengths and weaknesses explored. The study concludes with several recommendations to increase the effectiveness of EPL teams.

### **Edmonton Public Library**

Founded in 1913, EPL has a broad mandate of service to members of its community, facilitating access to lifelong learning, civic engagement and entertainment for all Edmontonians. A 'cradle to grave' public service now operating out of seventeen locations, the demographic shifts of aging boomers, mini baby booms, the influx of immigrants and a growing urban aboriginal population all require library services to be continuously adapted and promoted.

Throughout its history EPL has aggressively pursued the integration of technology into its services and operations. In the 1987 annual report, the Board Chair writes that "EPL has earned a reputation for being relatively fearless where technological change is concerned" (p.9). Over the last two decades technology has transformed EPL services and operations and, although competition has intensified in today's internet environment, technology has also helped library staff get out from behind the desk and beyond library walls to connect with customers and contribute to the building of strong communities.

Similar to libraries around the globe, EPL has experienced a fundamental shift in information-seeking behaviours over the last twenty years, as increasing numbers of customers are able to find much of the information they need through Google, social networking or online resources. Book, music and video stores have always been direct competitors of libraries for those who can afford to pay. As the commercial sector shifts operations online and towards digital and downloadable content and convenient e-business processes and services, libraries are being challenged to respond in kind.

Despite all of these changes, statistics regarding the use of EPL have never been higher. As with other public sector organizations, the strategic directions and goals of public libraries are not oriented towards profit or profitability, but are framed in terms of social value or impact to a community. As society's expectations of libraries change and expand, the structure of this beloved institution is adapting "a design sanctified by time and tradition" (Martin, 1996, p. 94).

### **Research Purpose**

The objectives of this paper were first of all, given the predictions of management theory, to determine the extent to which EPL has moved toward a team-based organizational structure over the last twenty years, a period characterized by unprecedented growth, technological change, a re-orientation to a customer-driven service philosophy and a vision of "one library, one staff" (Edmonton Public Library Board [EPLB], March 2006). By also looking closely at the types of teams put in place over time and their purpose, the role of teams in meeting these challenges would be determined.

Secondly, by analyzing the effectiveness of EPL's current complement of teams, opportunities would be identified to enhance the teams' contributions to EPL's overall success.

## Literature Review

Richard Daft (2007) in *Organization Theory and Design*, defines three components of organizational structure: “formal reporting relationships including number of levels in the hierarchy and the span of control of managers and supervisors;...grouping together of individuals into departments, and of departments into the total organization;...design of systems to ensure effective communication, coordination and integration of efforts across departments” (p. 597). As was noted in the introduction, the literature on organizational design identifies a link between an organization’s structure and its ability to innovate and respond to the ever-changing external environment in which it operates. The review of the literature is therefore divided into two sections: (a) theories of organizational design, including the organizational structure of libraries, with specific focus on public libraries; (b) theories regarding teams within organizational structures and the application of these theories to teams in libraries.

### Theories of Organizational Design

The literature regarding theories of organizational design includes a variety of suggested models. The work of Henry Mintzberg on management and structure of organizations in the late 1970s and 1980s identified elements of organizational structuring and combines these into a comprehensive typology. Of particular interest is *Mintzberg On Management* (1989), in which he expanded upon concepts outlined in an earlier article, entitled “Structure in 5s: a synthesis of the research on organizational design” (1980). His analysis of the role of “coordinating mechanisms” (1980, p. 324) and “liaison devices” (1980, p. 334) within each structural type, which he described as “the glue that holds organizations together (1989, p.101), is particularly relevant to the main focus of this project.

Mintzberg (1989) defines organizations as configurations, which he likens to “species” (p. 97). He describes each of these in terms of their basic parts, coordinating mechanisms, design parameters and contingency factors, as well as two influences which impact decision-making: an “internal coalition” of all employees and an “external coalition” of forces outside of the organization (1989, p. 98-99). Noting that no organization is purely one configuration or another, Mintzberg suggests that his framework is nevertheless “useful for comprehending and analyzing the behaviour of organizations” (1980, p. 331).

Of Mintzberg’s (1989) seven types of organizations, four are particularly relevant for larger public library settings: Machine, Diversified, Professional and Innovative. Briefly, Machine Organizations, called “machine bureaucracies” (p. 131) in an earlier work, are characterized by standardized work processes and an efficiency borne out of routine, repetitive activities. These organizations tend to be older with standards fully developed, thanks to a stable environment with minimal technology. Work is divided into specialized functions within a hierarchy of tight controls, centralized decision-making and avoidance of change. Although clear operating standards and direct supervision are the coordinating mechanisms which characterize Machine Organizations, these lead to a lack of coordination due to the division of work into specialized and isolated functions. Rules and regulations ensure equal, if not equitable, service. In terms of strategic planning “procedure replaces vision” (p.145). Machine Organizations tend to have an internal focus and ignore the fundamental changes occurring in the marketplace, sometimes at their peril -- changes, which Mintzberg points out, could in fact be identified by those on the front lines. With regard to administrative or support services, although “many of the staff services could be purchased from outside suppliers, this would expose the organization to the uncertainties of the open market. So it ‘makes’ rather than ‘buys’, that is, it

envelops as many of the support services as it can within its own structure in order to control them, everything from the cafeteria in the factory to the law office at headquarters” (1989, p. 136). Whether on the front line or in middle management, the focus is on compliance with standard operating procedures developed by a group Mintzberg calls the “technostructure”. These are “analysts out of the formal ‘line structure’, who apply analytic techniques to the design and maintenance of the structure and to the adaptation of the organization to its environment (e.g. accountants, long-range planners)” (1980, p. 323). In such organizations, although power may rest with senior management, “the necessary knowledge is often at the bottom” (1989, p. 148).

In Diversified Organizations, divisions or work units serve distinct customer groups with administration housed in the headquarters (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 155). These divisions, which can provide similar services across diverse client groups or geographical locations, tend to function as machine organizations. Headquarters delegates considerable authority to division managers, while providing centralized support services to the organization as a whole. Division goals are coordinated through headquarters and are often operational based on tight, quantitative performance controls established centrally (p. 158). Mintzberg suggests that this configuration is not suited to public or non-profit sectors, whose intangible “social” (p. 171) goals do not lend themselves to the necessary quantitative performance measures.

Professional organizations rely on the “skills and knowledge of their operating (frontline) professionals” (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 174). There is a degree of standardization in professional response to particular situations. However, this does not create the same hierarchy as in Machine Organizations, since these standards of practice are based on the expertise and judgment of the professional through extensive formal education and on the job training. Mintzberg makes a

distinction here between the standards which characterize the Professional Organization and the creative problem-solving which characterizes the Innovative Organization (1989, p. 177).

Within a relatively stable environment, this type of organization offers significant autonomy to the professional, which can be both its strength and its weakness. There is often a lack of coordination and of cooperation amongst individual professionals which can hamper innovation (p. 191). Mintzberg also notes that the collective focus of unionized environments works against the professional principle of individual responsibility to the client (1989, p. 194). This is also noted later in the literature regarding the organizational structure in libraries. Professional organizations are characterized by significant administrative support, some of which is provided by the professionals themselves. However, “what frequently emerges in the professional organization are parallel and separate administrative hierarchies, one democratic and bottom-up for the professionals, a second machinelike and top-down for the support staff” (1989, p. 179). Hospitals or universities are examples of such settings.

The last of the structures to be discussed here is the Innovative Organization, which Mintzberg also calls an “adhocracy” (1980, p. 336). It draws together all parts of the organization, both operating and support services, into a flexible and collaborative web of multidisciplinary project teams. Project managers coordinate laterally across teams of line managers, staff and operating specialists (1989, p. 201). Managers “derive their influence more from their expertise and interpersonal skills than from formal position” (1989, p. 205). “Power is based on expertise, not authority” (1989, p. 206). Coordination is achieved through “mutual adjustment” which is seen as the mechanism best able to deal with the most complex forms of work (1989, p. 102). This mechanism requires significant liaison activities and devices, such as teams and task forces. Since its activities are not routine, direct supervision within the Innovative

Organization is not useful as a means to standardize output or operations. “Action planning cannot be extensively relied upon in these organizations” as they “must respond continuously to a complex, unpredictable environment” (1989, p. 210).

As noted above, Mintzberg (1989) argues that an organization is not purely any one species. He does not, however, delve into hybrid organizational models, such as cross-functional (i.e. matrix) structures. Before moving on to a review of the organization design found in library settings, it would be useful to take a brief look at the matrix structure, as this model has a number of characteristics in common with team structures. Ford and Randolph (1992), in an article entitled “Cross-Functional Structures: A Review and Integration of Matrix Organization and Project Management,” point to the advantages and disadvantages of matrix structures suggested in the literature. Although these authors note throughout that additional research is required to validate these findings, they state that “most of the advantages [of matrix structures] are derived from creation of horizontal communication linkages, whereas most of the disadvantages spring from the ambiguity and conflicts inherent in this model’s dual authority and influence” (1992, p. 272-273).

Advantages include the matrix’s ability to “solve an information processing problem” (Ford & Randolph, 1992, p. 273), improving communication “by forcing managers to maintain close contact with all organizational groups upon whose support they must rely for project success” (p. 273). The resulting communication improvements support better decision-making and response time “which translate into an organization that can quickly and flexibly adapt to a dynamic situation” (p. 273). Functional, also known as technical, experts contribute to a project, while at the same time continuing to contribute within their respective functional work units (1992, p. 274). Ford and Randolph also comment on the advantages presented for individuals by

the cross-functional structure in terms of fostering a broader experience and outlook, increased responsibility and involvement in decision making, as well as the opportunity to display their own capabilities and skills. “Additional benefits include the development of interpersonal and groups skills, problem-solving abilities, planning and improved career pathing” (p. 274). The cumulative effect of these advantages is to “facilitate high quality and innovative solutions to complex technical problems” (p. 274).

Disadvantages of the matrix structure arise out of the sharing of authority and responsibility between functional and division managers. The resulting ambiguity in authority and decision-making can create conflicts or power struggles. Sources of conflict may relate to “project priorities, administrative procedures, technical perfection versus performance trade-offs, personnel resources, cost estimates, scheduling and personalities” (Ford & Randolph, 2002, p. 276). For an individual, conflict may arise from “multiple reporting relationships (role conflict), conflicting and confusing expectations (role ambiguity), and excessive demands (role overload)” (p. 276). The stresses associated with an individual’s participation in a cross-functional organization relate to role ambiguity, negotiating conflict and increased responsibilities, all with the potential to decrease motivation and job satisfaction (p. 277). Conflict for a functional manager within a cross-functional environment may arise, should he or she “experience insecurity and an erosion of autonomy” and “a loss of status, authority and control over their traditional domain, all of which can result in resistance and hostility to the matrix” (p. 276). Another disadvantage of a matrix structure relates to higher administrative costs: management overhead, added administrative staff and excessive meetings or “groupitis” and training requirements (p. 276-277).

The successful use of the structural models presented by Mintzberg (1989) or of cross-functional hybrids is aligned with the stability or complexity of the environment and the status of an organization's evolution. At points in time, one type may be more useful than another (Mintzberg, 1980, p. 103). With these models in mind, we will now turn to the literature describing the organizational structures in libraries.

### **Organizational Structure in Libraries**

A review of library literature reveals limited formal research applying the principles and theories of organizational structure to public libraries and even fewer of these studies reflect a Canadian setting. That said there are a number of studies regarding organizational design of academic libraries serving post-secondary institutions. Although the mandates, customer base and stakeholders of public and academic libraries differ, there are nevertheless lessons to be learned from the research about academic library organization structure, as there is a broad similarity across library sectors in both the functions performed and the decisions taken regarding structure. Edwards (2002) touches briefly on the differences between the two library sectors, stating that “although the ubiquitous nature of technology has brought the various work responsibilities of academic and public librarians closer together during the last decade, there remain key differences in job-related duties and the work environments...Although various public service initiatives offered in public libraries are similar to those prevalent in academic libraries, distinct variations exist which affect the overall organizational structure and operations”. He points out that public library services, collections and programs are developed to serve the cultural, recreational and informational needs of a diverse customer base, whereas academic library services and collections “exist to meet the educational and research needs of a fairly limited variety of clientele”. In terms of governance, public libraries operate under a

board of trustees, relying largely on municipal funding and, in Edward's view, are therefore quite vulnerable to economic, social and political pressures. He describes academic libraries as operating as "autonomous entities" within the university's administrative structure and less vulnerable than their public counterparts. Noting that both institutions tend to have hierarchical structures, Edwards concludes by stating that "Unlike many academic libraries, public libraries retain a strong sense of departmentalization. The flatter and more participative organizational structure prevalent in academic libraries [is] not exhibited in most public libraries".

Two primary texts provide an historical overview of library organization design. They analyze structures in the 1980s and 1990s, a less tumultuous time in which efficiency and stability were dominant objectives and they only hint at the profound impact of technological change on library services, collections and programs. A third text considers library structures within the last ten years. The authors of the latter work remark that "although many organizations are moving away from the bureaucratic model, most libraries, because of their size, the technology they use, and the services they perform, are still organized in this fashion" (Stueart & Moran, 2007, p. 187). It is therefore useful to look at the earlier works to obtain a clear picture of traditional library models.

Lowell Martin's *Organizational Structure of Libraries*, first published in 1984 and revised in 1996, provides an overview across various types of libraries. Acknowledging that libraries often form collaborative or consortial arrangements with other libraries, Martin chooses to focus his work on "the internal organization of single libraries" (1996, p. 93) of all types.

Martin begins by describing the context within which libraries operate, stating that most are part of the corporate structures of a larger system, such as a municipality, school or university (1996, p. 139). Although some public libraries are departments of city government, most are

governed by a volunteer board of trustees, appointed by (and including) members of City Council. The Board's one employee is the Director of the library. Although there are certainly opportunities and challenges presented by this aspect of public library organizational structure, the focus of this paper is on Martin's findings with respect to public libraries' internal design, in which the Director or CEO is the highest management position in the organization. Martin describes the basic components of library structure including functions, such as acquisitions, cataloguing, reference service and circulation (inventory and account management) activities, and divisions, such as branch locations, service to specific customer groups and material formats (e.g. film, print).

As functional organizations, closely resembling Mintzberg's (1989) Machine and Diversified Organizations, libraries have experienced the challenges of effective coordination across functional boundaries, a rigidity in processes undertaken by those who have little or no contact with end users and an attitude of protecting one's territory when resources are being allocated (1996, p. 179). Martin also points to the need for a "hierarchy of administrators" (1996, p.179) to support such a structure.

According to Martin (1996), "in public libraries the historical base was a central functional organization to which subject units and branches were added"(p. 180). With respect to subject specialization, this structure appears to alternate with a more generalist approach as funding constraints and the availability of subject specialists have fluctuated. Martin observes that the most successful of the user group specializations in public libraries has been that of children's services, speculating that this is a result of a "goal-oriented form of organization that focuses on a distinct clientele" (1996, p. 189). He also concludes that, "as distinct from the 'give them what they want' philosophy that controls the rest of public library ministrations... [this

goal] is to introduce children to the best of juvenile literature”(1996, p. 188). Martin’s conclusions about the reasons for the success of this role may not apply to today’s environment which has adopted a more user-centric focus in service and collection design. Far from an objective analysis of the changes in libraries over time, Martin frequently expresses personal opinions in a somewhat judgmental tone. For example, he regrets the disappearance of the user group type of a diversified structure stating that the “lack of organization by user group results in the impersonal and discontinuous nature of most library service” (1996, p. 194), having just lamented the behaviour of librarians “standing in the path of trends which they considered undesirable or offensive” (1996, p. 190). In a geographic design type, Martin outlines a management structure which sees branch locations grouped by region under area managers subordinate to an overall Head of service. He indicates that within this model there is often an “emphasis on conformity” (1996, p. 199) and a structural tension between “functional centralization and geographic decentralization” (1996, p. 201).

Martin (1996) describes another type of specialization, by levels or professional skills, reminiscent of Mintzberg’s (1989) Professional Organization. Within the levels of professionals, paraprofessionals and clerks (1996, p. 207), he suggests a duality in library work, which requires the skills of professionals, developed through specialized training, as well as the more mechanical skills required for routine inventory management in support of the role of libraries as “repositories of materials” (1996, p. 208). Martin observes that librarians are moving away from their professional expertise into management positions with little if any expertise in management. It is worth noting that some fourteen years later, Sivak and De Long (2009) point to a similar shift in their summary of the University of Alberta study, “8Rs: Human Resources in Canadian Libraries”. The report recommends that this re-structuring requires support from an

increased focus on management skills development in the curricula of professional schools (p. 176).

Martin (1996) also touches on the roles played by “staff officers” (p. 270), Mintzberg’s (1989) support staff. Noting that others have referred to such services as “the enemy within” (p. 39) and a “necessary evil” (p. 245), Martin states that the former are specialists in their respective fields, such as personnel, public relations and buildings management, particularly in large library settings. As noted earlier, Martin was writing in 1996 and only hints at a growing role for technology experts, predicting an inevitable disruption of established processes and practices as a result (p. 248-9).

Martin (1996) ends with a look ahead at an environment in which libraries could face significant competition if “new enterprises...arise to organize the world of digital communication and to guide people in its use” (p. 301). Although in the preface to the revised edition of his study of organizational structure in libraries Martin notes the trends toward “participatory administration, Total Quality Management and the electronic library” (p. ix), the reality is that the electronic library was still in its infancy in 1996 and hence the transformational impact and implications on organizational structure could not have been fully appreciated at the time.

The second text to explore library structure in detail is T.D. Webb’s *Public Library Organization and Structure* (1989). Focusing specifically on the public library organization, Webb describes a “highly bureaucratic environment” (p. 102), once again with limited foresight as to the changes on the horizon due to emerging technologies. Nevertheless, his book does complement Martin’s (1996) work and provides a different perspective on organizational structure in public libraries.

Webb (1989) begins with the following observations about how “structure relates to the social function of public libraries” (p. 10). He selects two functions which he identifies as standard across libraries, cataloguing and circulation, and states that these “relate to the social meanings of public libraries as they are perceived by users and librarians” (p. 14). Not unlike Martin (1996), Webb appears somewhat uneasy about a trend to “rel[y] on tastes of the public as a sole guide for the design and delivery of library services” (p. 10).

His descriptions of functional and divisional variations in library structures are similar to those of Martin (1996). “The library in fact mimics a book. It is divided into subject departments, analogous to chapters; it relies on precise cataloguing and a catalogue to make information retrievable the way an index functions in books; and, like a book it offers to enlighten or otherwise change the status of the individual who partakes of its resources” (Webb, 1989, p. 222).

Like Martin (1996), Webb describes libraries as “fashioned in the pyramid hierarchical style” (1989, p. 19) and points to the “uniformities that lie under the diversity of public library organizational arrangements and the assortment of services the public library offers” (p.19). Later he draws attention to the potential complexity of library structure, as “a double structure in public libraries—one for the formal organization and another for professional duties...These two structures conflict and the nature of public libraries is determined by this conflict” (p. 225). A different duality than that cited by Martin (1996), Webb explores the implications of professionalism within a bureaucratic structure. He draws upon literature which defines professional occupations and in this light reviews job descriptions of librarian positions, concluding that librarianship does not in fact fully meet the criteria of a profession (is in fact more of a ‘semi-profession’) and suggesting that the hierarchical ladder for librarians may in fact

be “artificial” (1989, p. 102). The conflict faced by librarians does nevertheless reflect the tension within Mintzberg’s (1989) Professional Organization. Webb comments that as librarians choose to move more and more into management roles, they move away from the core role of librarianship, “building and mediating collections” (p. 95), “not necessarily the management of a formal organization” (p. 226). This core role implies a professional focus on providing “individualized collection mediation services” and the librarian’s need to develop subject specialization, which Webb suggests may conflict with public library goals of a “collection that is broad and rather general” (p. 102).

Webb (1989) ties formal organizational structure to the concepts of professional librarianship. Admitting that libraries are not unique in their commitment to “the containment and arrangement of all knowledge” (p. 224), he asserts that this commitment underlies libraries’ “organizational arrangement” (p. 225) and concludes therefore that there is a fundamental tension within libraries as librarians must choose to “sacrifice either the formal library organization or the professional services it provides” (p. 225).

It is worth noting that both Martin (1996) and Webb (1989) speak of an aimlessness in public libraries, perhaps triggered by emerging technology, financial constraints or a sense that their influence is waning within their parent organizations. Webb (1989) calls for a new and more meaningful role for the public library by “narrowing and strengthening the practices of public librarianship” (p. 227).

Before moving on to a review of the third text, two studies from the periodical literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s provide another perspective on structures in libraries. In the first of these, Johnson (1990) proposes the matrix model as an alternative to what she refers to as “the comfortable simplicity of the traditional hierarchy” (p. 227). She first touches on aspects of

the functional, divisional (subject or geographically dispersed branches) and organic models, reviewing briefly the benefits and challenges of each. With regard to the functional model, she describes the “well-known communication difficulties between technical services and public services as a negative consequence of a functional library organization” (p. 223). “The divisional model, directed to user service rather than to professional expertise” (p. 223) is superior to the functional model. However, there is a duplication of skills and equipment which results in resources not being fully utilized and a lack of coordination due to geographic distance between outlets (p. 223). Neither structure responds effectively to the “state of flux now found in the internal and external environments of libraries” (p. 223). She then points to the organic model as one “suitable for people tolerant of ambiguity” (p. 224), but “wasteful of resources” (p.224) with its potential duplication of effort and lack of individual accountability. Johnson then presents the matrix model as “a more realistic alternative for creating individualized, adaptive structures” (p. 224) and one which “gives equal significance to overall functional divisions and divisions based on products or clientele” (p. 224). She argues that, whereas matrix structures were thought to be most relevant to projects, such as library building or technology implementation, the model’s usefulness extends beyond temporary projects or task forces in today’s environment of rapid change and the requirement for collaboration and shared goals. Johnson’s advantages of a matrix structure are similar to those identified by Ford and Randolph (1992) above (i.e. effective utilization of technical expertise and improved communication). She also recognizes the potential for conflict (interpersonal, intergroup and inter-organizational) within this structure (p.226). She suggests that this model may in fact “allow academic librarians to enhance their job skills, better adapt to technological innovations, and improve client services” (p. 229).

Harris and Marshall (1998) present one of the few Canadian perspectives on the organizational structures of libraries. Through interviews and surveys of frontline librarians, middle manager librarians and senior administrators of public and academic libraries across the country, they sought to understand the reasons for major structural changes in libraries and the implications of these changes to the role played by librarians and paraprofessionals. They concluded that the structural changes were being caused by both financial constraints and technology. Within the context of “the centrality of the user to the survival of libraries” (1998), budgetary cutbacks were driving the need to look for greater efficiencies in work processes, as well as changes in the division of duties between managers, librarians and paraprofessional staff. They refer in passing to “establishing work teams in order to flatten the organizational structure (i.e. reducing the proportion of managerial positions and pushing decision-making responsibilities lower in the staff hierarchy)” (1998) – to less expensive staff. Their survey describes a movement away from specialization similar to that described by Webb (1989) and Martin (1996), leading Harris and Marshall (1998) to note that “as the cadre of professional librarians shrinks, the need for their roles to become very broad will eliminate their ability to specialize in the areas of expertise that have defined the core of the profession”. Harris and Marshall also point to the somewhat derogatory comments in the responses from library leaders about the value of librarians’ direct involvement with core, front line activities, suggesting for example that cataloguing duties are a “waste of a librarian”. They suggest that “this minimizing of the traditional professional functions in the language of senior managers is a means by which they can protect themselves from accusations of professional betrayal” (1998).

With concerns echoed by Martin (1996), Webb (1989), and Harris and Marshall (1998), the deprofessionalization of the work of librarians at the turn of the century was expected to have

a significant influence on the future organizational structure of libraries. A mainstay of library technical services functions, the cataloguing function in technical services departments, has been experiencing profound change as libraries re-think the return on investment of original cataloguing and outsource parts of, or indeed the entire, function. More recently survey results show that in Canadian libraries “a majority (six of ten) professional librarians work in a supervisory or managerial role, while a notable minority (three of ten) of paraprofessionals also work in these roles” (Sivak & De Long, 2009, p.170). These researchers also argue that the “current and predicted future demand is high for librarians to perform managerial functions” (p.176).

With the work of Martin (1996) and Webb (1989) as a foundation, the review of the literature regarding organizational structures in libraries concludes with a third more recent text, Stueart and Moran’s *Library and Information Center Management*, published in 2007. Their description and analysis of library organizational structure in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not focus specifically on public libraries and most examples are in fact drawn from academic libraries. They review more current organizational structure in libraries from a perspective in which technology is much more fully integrated.

Stueart and Moran (2007) comment on the significant amount of restructuring taking place in libraries. That said, as noted earlier, they state that there has not been a significant change from a traditional bureaucratic structure. They describe today’s environment as “not stable but turbulent” (p.184), calling into question the appropriateness of a bureaucratic model. In addition to functional and divisional structures, they describe the organic structure, “the opposite of the classical bureaucracy, which emphasizes standardization and formal relations” (p. 185) and “characterized by an emphasis on lateral and horizontal flows of communication” (p.

185). They suggest that “in large libraries, subunits of the library are becoming more organic in structure. For example, using teams” (p. 187). “Instead of radically restructuring, many libraries have changed in a way that is not reflected on their organizational charts,...becoming more hybrid in structure, by organizing some departments more organically than others or by employing so-called overlays, or modifications imposed on the basic bureaucratic organizational structure...the pyramid remains largely intact, but modifications are in place in many libraries that are flattening the pyramid and allowing more employee input into decision making” (p.188). Stueart and Moran provide brief overviews of models such as cross-functional teams, task forces, matrix and hybrid structures as well as boundaryless approaches. All are presented as potential models which support innovation and enable responsiveness in a rapidly changing environment.

### **Evolution of Organizational Structures**

Complementing the literature regarding specific types of organization structure is research which describes the evolution of these structures and suggests how and why this occurs. Mintzberg (1989) links the various species of organizations to growth and the associated increase in complexity required to manage these (p. 98). He describes a shift in organizational type in terms of the transformation which occurs in the six basic parts of the organization as it increases in complexity. For example, he notes that the “automation of the core transforms bureaucratic administrative structure into an organic one” and that, as social relationships change as a result, “the obsession with control tends to disappear” (p. 107). In one particular statement, he suggests that “every form of organization sows the seeds of its own destruction” (p. 365), a key principle articulated some fifteen years earlier by Larry Greiner (1998).

First published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1972, Greiner’s article entitled “Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow” was re-printed with additional commentary

by the author in 1998. As he says in this commentary, the original article described “industrial and consumer goods companies, not...knowledge organizations or service businesses” (p.65). He then briefly applies his model to professional service firms, such as law firms. Although no mention is made of public or not-for-profit sector organizations, his model is nevertheless useful to this study.

Greiner (1998) begins by identifying the five dimensions which inform his evolutionary model. The first of these is the age of an organization, since “management problems and principles are rooted in time” and “the passage of time contributes to the institutionalization of managerial attitudes” (p.56). A second dimension is that of size (i.e. number of employees, sales or use of a company’s products and services or number of physical locations). As the size increases, so too does the complexity of the required coordination and communication. Dimensions three and four include “periods of substantial turbulence interspersed between smoother periods of evolution” (p. 56). The latter are characterized by incremental growth and continuity in terms of management patterns, whereas the former are described as tumultuous times of “serious upheaval in management practices” (p.56). The final dimension in Greiner’s model is the growth rate of the industry and the degree to which the market or demand for products or services expands. This last factor can influence significantly the speed at which organizations move through the phases in its evolution and Greiner suggests that “companies...in slower-growing industries encounter only two or three phases over many years” (p. 60).

As noted above, key to Greiner’s (1998) model is that “each phase is at once a result of the previous phase and a cause for the next phase” (p. 60). Each of Greiner’s five evolutionary phases ends with a crisis which forces a revolution in management practices in order to resolve this crisis. Phase One occurs when an organization is first formed. Creativity is the order of the

day, together with long hours by founders, frequent and informal communication, high levels of motivation, with decisions and adjustments driven by customer response. As the size of the organization grows, the resulting pressures lead to a “crisis of leadership” in which the founders’ management practices are supplemented, and in many cases replaced, by a skilled business manager who can “pull the organization together” (p.60). Phase Two is characterized by sustained growth under the direction of the business manager and the establishment of a hierarchy, in which roles reflect specialized skills and a functional focus, and centralized systems are put in place to support decision-making by the business manager and senior managers. The frustrations experienced by line managers, whose first-hand knowledge of customer needs is virtually ignored in this phase, results in a “crisis of autonomy”, out of which comes Phase Three’s decentralized structure (which Greiner prefers to the term “delegation” used in his 1972 article). There is an increase in responsiveness to customer needs and higher motivation amongst line managers. Although reporting requirements from managers increase, through this phase the executives tend to become isolated from day-to-day activities and communications to and from senior management become infrequent. This phase does facilitate growth; however, the delegation of authority to line managers ultimately results in deterioration in coordination across departments and loss of a sense of control by senior management. The resulting “crisis of control” is followed by Phase Four in which centralized planning and management information systems are put in place to enhance coordination. In addition frequently “decentralized units are merged into product groups” (p. 62). Although this phase is characterized by more efficient use of resources overall, these bureaucratic processes are soon seen by both line managers and those providing centralized services as increasingly unwieldy and ineffective for problem-solving and

a “red-tape crisis” ensues. Greiner notes, “In short, the organization has become too large and complex to be managed through formal programs and rigid systems” (p. 62).

In his 1972 article Greiner (1998) identifies one final evolutionary phase. To address the dissatisfaction in a model in which “procedures take precedence over problem solving” (p. 62), this last phase is characterized by collaboration and “spontaneity in management action through teams and the skilful confrontation of interpersonal differences” (p. 62). Greiner observes that this phase can be difficult both for line managers who can no longer rely “on formal methods to get answers” (p.62) and for those at headquarters whose roles have been to operate the centralized control and coordination systems. Of particular relevance to this applied project is Greiner’s description of the management characteristics of this phase, in that the work of the organization is carried out by teams with faster problem-solving results from cross-functional participation. “Staff experts at headquarters are reduced in numbers, reassigned and combined into interdisciplinary teams that consult with, not direct, field units” (p.62). Matrix structures are used and Greiner clarifies in his 1998 commentary that this occurs at senior management levels. Skill-building for leaders includes teamwork and conflict resolution. Management meetings are devoted to specific problems. Real-time information systems are available for daily decision-making. The organization rewards team performance versus only individual achievement and new practices are encouraged throughout the organization. These characteristics are reminiscent of several team effectiveness factors identified in a later section of this study (p.62).

In the updated re-print of his article and in keeping with the principle that for every evolutionary phase a revolutionary crisis will eventually follow, Greiner (1998) suggests that Phase Five will lead to a crisis of “realizing that there is no internal solution...for stimulating further growth” (p. 65). This will in turn be resolved through a sixth phase which calls for

networks of organizations, partnerships and alliances to enable continued growth. Greiner's description of "extraorganizational solutions" (p. 65) brings to mind the boundaryless organization of current organization theory (Stueart & Moran, 2007). Contrary to other theorists who suggest potential organizational transformations due to emerging technologies, Greiner (1998) then briefly argues that technology will have little impact on his model, as it serves as a tool, the nature of which adapts depending on the phase or crisis. Greiner's evolutionary model can quite readily be applied to the structural changes in libraries as will now be explored.

### **Structural Evolution in Libraries**

Although urban public libraries, such as the Edmonton Public Library, have been in existence for decades, if not centuries, many have experienced increases in demand for services over the last twenty years, even as technology has evolved. As described by both Bernfeld (2004) and Klinck (2004), rapid growth can increase complexity and engender revolutionary crises similar to those described by Greiner (1998). In her overview of the competitive environment within which libraries operate, Klinck (2004) quoted Margaret Wheatley: "The old days of 'continuous improvement' seem as leisurely as a picnic from the past. In this chaotic and complex 21<sup>st</sup> century, the pace of evolution has entered warp speed, and those who can't learn, adapt and change moment to moment simply won't survive" (p. 167).

In Martin's (1996) analysis of the organizational structures in libraries, he observes that the structure in libraries between the 1960s to the mid-1990s has in fact moved away from specialized divisions and back to a more functional approach (p. 203). Looking at this development within the framework of Greiner's (1998) evolutionary phases, one could conclude that the decentralized divisional structure in Phase Two caused a "crisis of control" for library executives as they dealt with the inefficiencies arising from the subsequent lack of coordination

of “plans, money, technology and personnel” (p. 62). Rather than resolve this crisis by moving to a period of increased coordination, Martin (1996) observes that libraries have in fact taken a step backward to the more directive Phase One -- a direction which in Greiner’s view “usually fails because of the organization’s newly vast scope of operations” (1998, p. 62). Although Martin may have been describing the situation in 1996, Stueart and Moran (2007), writing some ten years later, suggest that “although many organizations are moving away from the bureaucratic model, most libraries, because of their size, the technology they use, and the services they perform, are still organized in this fashion” (p.187) – causing one to conclude that libraries have not in fact evolved beyond Greiner’s first evolutionary phase. The experiences of Bernfeld (2004) and Klinck (2004) below suggest otherwise, however, as both organizations appear to have evolved to the Collaboration phase, a team-based environment in which “the focus is on solving problems quickly through team action and teams are combined across functions to handle specific tasks” (Greiner, 1998, p. 62).

## **Teams**

In “The Coming of the New Organization”, Drucker (1988) suggests that information-based organizations will drive changes in organizational structure. “Traditional departments will serve as guardians of standards, as centers for training and assignment of specialists—they won’t be where the work gets done. That will happen largely in task-focused teams...The traditional sequence of research, development, manufacturing and marketing is being replaced by synchrony: specialists from all these functions working together as a team, from the inception of research to a product’s establishment in the market” (p. 47).

Several researchers have explored in detail the types of teams, their design and operation and have identified factors impacting their effectiveness within organizations. Although much of

this recent literature focuses on the private or for-profit sector, the challenges and opportunities presented are often relevant to public sector organizations, such as libraries. To inform the analysis of team structure at EPL, the research of the following management theorists has been considered: Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Van Maanen, & Westney (2009); Mohrman, Cohen & Mohrman (1995); and Parker (2003).

For the purposes of this study, a team is defined as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (Katzenbach, 1993, p.21). A well-known writer on the subject of teams since the 1980s, Katzenbach’s definition is very similar to those of Ancona et al. (2009), Mohrman et al. (1995), and Parker (2003), all of whom draw a distinction between ‘groups’ and ‘teams’, with teams being characterized by mutual accountability and interdependence.

As observed previously in the review of organization structure literature, the utilization of teams in organizations is seen as a means to enhance organizational effectiveness. According to Parker (2003), “individualism is out, teamwork is in...Rigid organizational lines are out; fluid collaboration is in” (p. 1) and Mohrman et al. (1995) stress the value of teams in handling “lateral integration without proliferating the management structure” (p. 10). It is also worth noting that in Mohrman et al.’s view “teams are more effective if they are well designed and if the organization is designed to support them” (p. xvii). Ancona et al. (2009) explore various features of the “*new organization*”, one of which is “networked”, emphasizing the interdependence occurring across the organization, as well as the creation of “teams as fundamental units of activity” (p. M1-13).

**Team typology.** In the book entitled *Designing Team-based Organizations*, Mohrman et al. (1995) focus on self-managed teams and their usefulness in knowledge work. The following team types are identified: work teams, integrating teams, quality or process improvement teams (p. 65). Another type, called a cross team, is a variation on the integrating team type and “integrates between teams that are interdependent” (p. 118). The horizontal linkages and interdependencies across teams and team members are considered particularly valuable in a knowledge-based organization (p. 66), forming a network of teams embedded within a larger organizational system with “lateral relationships with other teams” (p. 65). Overlapping membership and liaison roles are common in such systems and reinforce integration (p. 116). According to Mohrman et al., team types arise out of the “mission, relationship to the formal structure of the organization and duration (temporary or long-lasting)” and the power of the team or its authority to act is “directly related to its scope of responsibilities” (p. 65).

Parker (2003) explores in detail the concept of cross-functional teams, which he differentiates from two other types of teams: functional and self-directed. He suggests that each type has a corresponding environment to which it is best suited. Hierarchical, stable and predictable environments are supported by functional teams, whereas self-directed teams can contribute in hierarchical organizations, as well as in those with an “embedded base of participative management and history of employee involvement” (p. 6). Parker defines cross-functional teams as “a group of people with a clear purpose representing a variety of functions or disciplines in the organization whose combined efforts are necessary for achieving the team’s purpose” (p.9). These are particularly successful in customer-driven, agile organizations operating in turbulent markets (p. 6).

Ancona et al. (2009) identify similar team types to those of Mohrman et al. (1995) and Parker (2003), touching on Quality Circles, which focus on “quality-related problems...to continuously find ways to improve them” (p. M3-11) and the Office of the President (or Executive team), which “collectively assumes the role of the COO in managing internal operations and helps the CEO formulate strategy and manage external relations” (p. M3-12). Elsewhere Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge (2007) decry “the myth of the complete leader” (p. 92), suggesting that executive teams reflect the more realistic model of distributed leadership.

Reminiscent of Mohrman et al.’s (1995) concept of ‘cross teams’, Ancona et al.’s (2009) X-teams are also characterized by interdependence. It is suggested that X-teams are best suited to the following conditions: “flat, spread-out systems with numerous alliances...when teams are dependent upon information that is complex, externally dispersed and rapidly changing; when a team’s task is interwoven with tasks undertaken outside the team and activities are coordinated with what is going on around them” (p. M6-29). X-team membership has a three part structure -- “core, operational, outer-net” (Ancona, Bresman & Kaeufer, 2002, p. 36) and considerable flexibility in that “people may move in and out of the team...or move across layers” (p. 36). Team design or structure aside, the key difference between an X-team and other types of teams is the former’s attention to the world beyond its boundaries. Assuming that goals and roles are clear, X-teams engage in three types of boundary-spanning activities, within and outside of the team and the organization itself: strengthening the links with strategic objectives through regular interactions with upper management; comprehensive information gathering from elsewhere in the organization, as well as the external environment; and connecting with other business units, teams or functions with whom the X-team’s tasks are interdependent (Ancona et al., 2002, p. 35).

These efforts are supported by building relationships with influencers outside the team and creating ‘coordinating mechanisms’ through which the information gathered is shared with the team, decision-making processes are made transparent, and flexibility is enabled (Ancona, 2009, p.M6-26).

**Team effectiveness.** “Many organizations simply establish teams and expect teamwork to occur” (Mohrman et al.,1995, p. 62). Mohrman et al. and Ancona et al. (2009) have created similar frameworks of success which go beyond a simple assessment of performance output. They measure team effectiveness from three perspectives: a) performance and contribution to a business unit; b) learning and improvements that employees themselves achieve; c) the team member’s satisfaction.

For Mohrman et al. (1995), success is reflected in the quality and timeliness of a team’s output, learning on the part of team members (including the capacity to work interdependently), and individual team member satisfaction (p.62-65). While Ancona et al.’s (2009) list resembles that of Mohrman et al., the former add a fourth element, “outsider satisfaction”, defined as “how well the team meets the needs of outside constituencies such as customers and suppliers” (2009, p. M3-13-15). Parker (2003) identifies a similar factor, potentially addressed through membership from outside the organization, including customers or suppliers.

According to Mohrman et al. (1995), practices within team-based organizations impact team effectiveness, for example, a performance management program which has “traditionally fostered individual performance and continue[s] to reinforce that mode of performance” (p. 62). Rather than exploring internal team dynamics, Mohrman et al. focus on “enablers” such as integration and coordination mechanisms within and across teams, timely decision-making and confidence in a team’s ability to accomplish its goals (p. 62-65). They note that teams are

generally not self-contained and reference the work of Galbraith (1994) and Hackman (1990) with respect to the need for development of the skills and organizational systems necessary to “support lateral integration” (p. 63). The specific factors of Mohrman et al.’s effectiveness framework include processes around decision-making, communication, recognition and reward. Their observation that “a team whose internal processes are excellent can still fail to accomplish its goals because of issues external to the team that influence its ability to perform” (1995, p. 65) is echoed several years later when Ancona et al. (2002) caution that teams ignore the world outside of the team at their peril. Ancona et al. (2009) suggest that team effectiveness is impacted by team operations, including internal processes and boundary management. Team operations are themselves a reflection of organizational values, information-sharing, cooperation and other assumptions about teamwork, formal and informal recognition and reward systems. Ancona et al. also discuss aspects of team design, such as membership and team size. Ancona et al. are not alone in describing the horizontal linkages and boundary-spanning activities which further strengthen communication. Marrone (2010) has undertaken a recent literature review of the team boundary-spanning research of Ancona and others and notes the challenges such activities present.

Parker (2003, p. 281) has developed a framework of twelve success factors for cross-functional teams, which can be sorted into those identified above by Mohrman et al. (1995) and Ancona et al. (2009): leadership effectiveness; empowerment; shared goals; recognition; role clarity; boundary management; performance appraisal; team training; team size; management support; interpersonal excellence; customer/client focus. The work of Parker (2003), Ancona et al. (2009) and Mohrman et al. (1995) provides the theoretical basis for the analysis of the

effectiveness of EPL teams below. Before proceeding to this analysis, the literature review concludes with the perspective of teams in libraries.

### **Teams in Libraries**

There are few published studies of the use of teams in public libraries. Further to the review of organization theory in libraries, Stueart and Moran (2007) provide general comments about teams in their textbook within the context of participatory management. They define this as “a type of management characterized by the delegation of authority and power to lower level employees” (p. 387) and go on to say that “participative management empowers employees to make decisions relating to their work” (p. 387). Although they note in passing the experience of early adopters of team-managed structures in academic libraries in the United States, most of the information offered in this text focuses on management theory found elsewhere regarding teams and does not include examples of the application of this theory in specific library settings. The authors do suggest that the levels of participative management in libraries are higher than in the past and they expect this trend to continue as libraries seek to meet user expectations and respond to technological changes (p. 402).

Changes introduced at the University of Arizona in the early nineties, both in the university as whole and in its libraries, have served as a model for the introduction of self-directed teams for both academic and public libraries (Berry, 2002). Indeed, what research has been done about the use of teams in libraries has focused almost exclusively on this type of team. “Since 1993 the Arizona librarians have struggled to replace the hierarchies of a long bygone era of academic library despots with a productive, empowering organization” (p. 41). Organized into ten teams, the library’s organization chart shows library customers at the top with the teams listed horizontally below. The position of assistant dean for teams and organizational

development was created. The Dean has stated that this structure enables both faster changes and fewer turf wars, and has allowed University of Arizona libraries to “put as many librarians as possible in direct, one-on-one work with faculty and students” (p. 42). The transition took about ten years and has required continuous adjustment, bringing Mintzberg’s (1989) coordinating mechanism of mutual adjustment in adhocracies to mind. The implementation of this team-based structure is considered revolutionary in library circles. According to the Dean, “the driver of this change is economics. It is not technology—technology can be an enabler if we let it—but I believe we simply cannot afford to keep doing things the same old way” (Berry, 2002, p. 42). And the ‘economics’ were not solely budget cuts, but included rising costs for information resources and the need for more competitive compensation to retain and recruit employees. The Dean goes on to say that these all must be considered within a values context, including the value which libraries bring to customers’ lives and work (p.42).

In *Teams in Library Technical Services*, editors Bazirjian and Mugridge (2006) assemble examples of the use and evaluation of teams at the University of Arizona and other university libraries, specifically for the functions of cataloguing and processing of materials. These studies look at the self-managed team type from four perspectives beginning with a theoretical or historical perspective on teams and the evaluation of team effectiveness. Along with the exploration of specific types of teams, examples are also provided of university libraries which have decided to move away from a team-based structure and toward their former hierarchical model (2006, p.vi). The University of Arizona’s guiding principles for its change to a team-based structure included the following: a focus on customers; an empowerment of individuals and teams to make decisions for which they have appropriate information; a knowledge and skills base and training for all employees; an evaluative assessment to ensure that services were

efficient and effective; an impetus toward change to ensure ongoing learning and organizational development to benefit the user; and effective communications (Norman, M., in Bazirjian & Mugridge (Ed.), 2006, p.27).

This same article, “When is a team really a team?” identifies a number of features of team-based implementation which speak to effectiveness. Membership includes librarians and staff within and outside of functional groups. Skills training is offered in team building, team dynamics, conflict resolution and team leadership. Decisions are made by consensus. There is strong leadership within the team and active and constant communication (p. 32-33). Teams are seen as a means to “use the full potential of their workforces and make their work as effective and productive as possible” (p.26).

Moving to a team structure in University of Arizona libraries also caused “the definition of professional work to come under scrutiny” (Bazirjian & Mugridge, 2006, p. 53). As described earlier in Webb (1989), Martin (1996) and Harris and Marshall (1998), the shift away from collection development, cataloguing and front-line reference service activities was seen as eroding the primary roles for librarians. Since the early days of the University of Arizona’s transition to a team-based structure, the libraries had created a series of self-directed and cross-functional project teams with the authority to “re-shape fundamental dimensions of service” (2006, p. 56) and the roles of both professional and paraprofessional staff were changing as a result. At the time of the article, the long-term impacts had not yet been confirmed.

With some local variations the experiences reported at other academic libraries in Bazirjian and Mugridge’s (2006) collection seem to have followed the same journey. One very different situation is Robert Alan’s description of the decision within the Serials Department at Penn State to revert to a more traditional structure for two of three self-directed teams (p.135).

An assessment had revealed that, in cases where teams had not been effective, there had been an initial reluctance to move to a team structure and a lack of attention to training needs of new team members which had undermined their individual success. Leadership within the teams had been taken over by dominant, long-term members with a controlling versus leading approach. Some bullying had taken place in fact. It was clear that the organizational culture within the department had not changed to support team-based management.

Only two studies were found in the literature describing the introduction of a team-based organizational structure in public libraries. As Director at a small Wyoming public library, Bernfeld (2004) used the restructuring at the University of Arizona (UA) as a model for the implementation of a team management structure. Bernfeld reports that the change at UA “focused on adopting a user focus, accepting the need for continual change, creating teams, and empowering frontline staff to make decisions” (Stoffle, as quoted in Bernfeld, 2004, p.113). According to Bernfeld, the same drivers of change in academic libraries have been impacting the public library sector, i.e. budget cuts, technology, an environment of constant change” (2004, p. 113). The Teton County Library’s 24,000 square foot main library and a small branch location served approximately 18,200 users in 2004, a figure which tripled to a seasonal high of about 50,000 in the summertime. The library housed close to 100 computers, hosted almost 100,000 internet sessions a year, and lent out 325,000 items annually. There were four key components to the Teton County Library’s transition to team management: a) cross-training, which Bernfeld commented was easily achieved given the small facility and the generalist approach to job duties which was in place at the time; b) a cross-functional team or circle of leaders, representing all major functions (circulation, administration, reference, youth services, technical services, information systems and outreach) and chaired by Bernfeld herself as library director; c) job

descriptions drawn together from standardized modules, outlining duties for specific functions (e.g. children's services and circulation, a leadership module and a generic Customer service/staff relations module); and, d) a peer review and self assessment process, adapted from UA. After its initial success, the transition to a team-based model appeared stalled and further discussions with her UA mentor led Bernfeld to adapt the model, by considering one additional component, that of empowerment (p.120). This concept was illustrated through a re-working of the library's organizational chart into a series of concentric circles, with those functional teams most closely serving customers identified in the outer circle, cross-functional teams towards the centre reporting to the Circle of Leaders with the Director, Board, mission and strategic directions in the centre. In addition to clarifying the notion of empowerment, another benefit to this new organizational chart was its explicit recognition of the role of cross-functional teams in the organizational structure. Bernfeld describes an epiphany of sorts, seeing the empowerment of teams as a means to shift or share the burden of responsibility and accountability for the library's achievements. The description of the library's team structure includes several of the effectiveness factors identified in organization theory: recognition, empowerment, training and performance evaluation (p.123). Bernfeld comments that she has provided leadership at this small public library not only through her use of the UA model, but also by undertaking this shift to team management as part of her larger vision of Senge's (1994) learning organization.

The second overview of the introduction of a team-based structure in a public library is Klinck's (2004) experience at a small Ohio library. She sets the context of the need for change with a description of the competitive environment within which libraries operate. To the list of challenges such as technology and funding and competition from bookstores and cable companies, she adds shortages in qualified personnel, including those with appropriate skills in

“technology, marketing, service design, knowledge management and virtual teaming” (p.166).

All of these pressures had heightened customer expectations, driving the need to redesign services and the marketing of those services. Klinck (2004) notes the exponential growth at her library over twenty-five years with borrowing increasing to two million per year and staffing levels increasing from seven to 150. Among the underlying principles guiding the library through this period of change was a “dedication to a horizontal, team-based structure...use of self-directed teams” (p.169). She describes a period of intense training, both for new and existing employees. Although she talks about the horizontal nature of the organization, Klinck also describes an increase in the number of hierarchical levels requiring “new expectations for the front-line staff, new skills for the Director to work through middle managers” (p.172). She points to a decision not to replace a branch manager for a time and to instead support a strong staff team in directing the activities of the branch (p.172). The activities of this team of paraprofessionals included: work process design and improvement, project management, planning and implementation of new services and programs, creation of departments within the branch and integrating new staff into newly created positions (p.172). Considered the “senior practitioners in each department” (p.174), team leaders at this library focused on customer services and managed the library’s overall program. Managers with formal training or experience as supervisors, but without professional training as librarians were recruited to support the team leaders. This decision brings to mind the distinction which Webb (1989) made earlier between the core role of librarianship, which is “not necessarily the management of a formal organization” (p.226), although in this case the decision not to recruit librarians to these positions may simply have been the result of a lack of qualified manager/librarians. The managers made up the Executive Team (p.172) and were assigned as liaisons on various

functional or divisional “groups”, such as technical services, materials handling and reference (p.177). Klinck (2004) likens the library’s organizational structure to a hospital setting “where administrative staff supports the clinical personnel” (p.175). She refers to the non-hierarchical nature of the structure and the structure does appear to be more of a matrix in which communication travels both vertically to the supervisor and horizontally to functions or divisions represented on the teams. Klinck ends with a very brief mention of various ad hoc teams and describes the future of organizational design in libraries as the emergence of “concepts of clustered, multi-leveled, circular teamwork” (p.178).

Interesting as these two case studies may be, neither of these two public libraries reflects the complexity of larger municipal libraries, nor is there an acknowledgement that the mission of public libraries differs from that of the academic library. However, the studies do demonstrate several of the concepts identified in organization theory, such as the interdependencies and horizontal linkages across teams, the liaison roles, extensive cross-training.

This literature review has provided insights into organizational structure theory, including the effective use of teams, and the application of this theory in libraries. As has already been stated, there is little available in the way of formal research regarding organizational structures and the use of teams in large urban public libraries. The theories and research presented in the literature can nevertheless inform the analysis which now follows of the evolution of the Edmonton Public Library’s organizational structure and use of teams from 1990 to 2010.

### **Research Design and Data Collection**

The research design had two phases. The first phase focused on the evolution of the use of teams within the organizational structure of the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) over the last

twenty years. The second phase focused on an analysis of the general effectiveness of EPL's teams.

As a long-time employee of EPL, my own experiences have informed the analysis of EPL's structure and use of teams. Since 1989 I have held a variety of positions and led or participated on approximately thirty teams. During the first phase of the project timeline (1990-1996), I served as a branch librarian, Manager of the Children's Division at the central library and Manager of a large branch location. As for phases two and three, when the District Structure was implemented in 1998, I took on the role of District Manager, South, and in 2000 moved to my current position as Executive Director, Management Services. My knowledge of the reasoning behind organizational decisions and changes to EPL's structure is limited by the nature of the positions which I have held since 1989 and wherever possible I have looked to the secondary and primary data described below to inform my observations.

### **Phase One**

In order to determine the evolution of EPL's use of team structure over the last twenty years, it was essential to understand the organizational context within which these teams operated (i.e. EPL's organizational structure). As a first step I assembled and reviewed organization charts and, as these were not available for each year, I re-constructed these based on information available through the "EPL Capsule History" posted on the EPL web site; meeting minutes of the Executive Team from 1989 to the present; and Board minutes over the same period which included the Library's budget submission to City Council. The latter included information about the budgets required for particular departments and in so doing revealed major structural changes which had taken place during the year. Although the focus of the research was on the years of 1990 through 2010, a review of Board and Executive Team minutes from

1989 helped provide some context regarding the organization just prior to the arrival of the new Library Director. In addition to the organizational charts, I reviewed EPL strategic and business plans (1984-1988; 1991-1996; 1999-2005; 2006-2010), annual reports from 1989 through 2009, and EPL's two values statements from 1994 and 2010. EPL also conducted three environmental scans in this period (2005, 2007 and 2010) and two employee engagement surveys (2007 and 2010). This data was sorted into three phases: 1990-1996 (term of previous CEO); 1997-2007 (current CEO, current Executive Director, Management Services, previous Executive Director, Public Services); 2008-present (current CEO, current Executive Director, Management Services, new Executive Director, Public Services).

To understand the nature of EPL's teams, their operations, as well as internal and external relationships, an analysis was also carried out of team terms of reference, which outlined membership composition, purpose or mandate, often with a detailed description of expected activities and reporting relationships. All team minutes and reports available on the intranet were also reviewed. The terms of reference were sorted in various ways to reveal themes or trends: by year, by team type and by department. Similarly Board and Executive Team meeting minutes were reviewed by team and chronologically by date. These minutes often provided information regarding the progress or activities of teams, and in some cases, provided a context for establishment of specific teams. To this data was added information from brief meetings with the Library's current CEO and Executive Director, Public Services.

## **Phase Two**

An analysis was also undertaken linking the evolution of EPL's team structure over time with the effectiveness of existing teams. First of all a conceptual framework was created based on the literature review and integrating the team effectiveness factors identified by Ancona et al.

(2009); Mohrman et al. (1995); and Parker (2003). These researchers found that, first and foremost, clear roles and goals are best linked with strategic and business plans. A team must have a clear sense of its authority to make decisions. Skilful leadership, both formal and informal, are important features of team design, along with the right size, the right people and the right resources. Teams operating with open communication, clearly articulated decision-making norms, skilled conflict management are more likely to create an overall atmosphere of trust and confidence. Boundary management (i.e. a team's relationships and interactions with senior management, other teams and work areas or others outside of EPL) can make or break a team's success. Performance appraisal, reward and recognition systems must be adapted from a focus on individuals to both assess and acknowledge team accomplishments. And lastly, learning on the part of the leaders and team members plays a strong role in team effectiveness and can take many forms—from teaching and learning from one another, to formal training in new skills related to the team's mandate, to simply learning how to work in teams.

Using an interview protocol (Appendix A) derived from this framework, primary data was gathered through seven hour-long interviews which I conducted in person with managers and team leaders. Participants were asked to describe their experiences as leaders or participants on EPL teams within the context of the factors above. They were also asked for their general observations about how EPL teams and team structure have evolved over time. Each of the interviewees was assigned a letter identifier and their responses were encoded with this letter. The interview responses were then grouped by question and by team name and this data was reviewed several times. By comparing and contrasting this data, which referenced twenty-three EPL teams in total, I looked for themes which reflected the dynamics of EPL's teams and identified potential areas for further development.

Although all of the interviewees have participated as both team leads and team members at EPL, the most significant limitation to this study is the small number of team members interviewed regarding the various effectiveness factors. Interviewing a large number of people was not possible given the project's limited timeline, as well as summer vacation absences. There was also limited data and staff knowledge regarding the mandates and operations of the committees in the early 1990s.

### **Analysis of the Data and Findings**

#### **Evolution of EPL's Organizational Structure 1990-2010**

Greiner (1998) and Mintzberg (1989) both point to the importance of the age and size of an organization, as well as the pace of its industry's growth, in the shaping of structure. As EPL approaches its centenary in 2013, economic, societal and technological trends have all had profound impacts, compelling EPL leaders to continually adjust strategies, directions and structure to maintain the relevancy of libraries in the community.

The context for the twenty year period under review can be seen in EPL's 1991-1996 draft strategic plan. Presented to the Board of Trustees in 1990, the plan identified three key factors affecting the operating environment. Change is seen as a constant in the "Inno-Formation age...Based on a powerful combination of innovation/information...the world [is] a much smaller place" and information is seen as critical to both a "competitive economy and a healthy society" (EPL Board [EPLB], April/June, 1991). The risks associated with illiteracy, censorship and the denial of access to information for those who cannot afford to pay threaten the social and economic viability of society. It should be noted that, although the organization is philosophically opposed to the introduction of a user fee for library customers at that time, the

economic environment is such that the Board plans to consider such a fee (p.561). Reading and listening continue to be critical life skills “despite the revolution in computerization” (p.558). Reference is also made to the local municipal government and a recession which has forced the City of Edmonton into a time of financial restraint. The socio-economic analysis shows high unemployment; increased immigration from Asia as well as South and Central American countries; increasing poverty levels, particularly in families; high crime rates linked with unemployment and other societal issues. Other statements assert the effectiveness of the library. However, it is unclear whether these reflect citizen feedback or represent staff opinion. EPL is also said to have a strong commitment to fighting censorship, to operating efficiently, and to being valued and heavily used by citizens, as it experienced the second highest level of borrowing activity among Canada’s large urban libraries (p. 561).

In the 1980s and early 1990s there was considerable discussion and uncertainty within the industry about the future of libraries in this ‘Inno/Formation Age’. Martin (1996) and Webb (1989) both comment about a sense of ‘aimlessness’ in libraries at the time as noted above. Would technology sound the death knell for libraries or was it another tool enabling people to connect with information and the world around them? In the 1990s libraries determined that the answer was the latter and quickly began integrating these tools into their services and operations.

**Seventy-five and going strong.** It is helpful to first review the organizational structure and the environment which awaited the new Director, Penelope McKee, upon her arrival in June, 1990. As is noted in the EPL Capsule History on the website, the 1970s and 1980s had been a period of growth for the organization with new and renovated facilities, steady integration of technology into its operations, award-winning public relations activities and celebration of its designation as the busiest library in Canada for five consecutive years. In 1988 EPL celebrated

its seventy-fifth anniversary, with thirteen locations, including a central library and twelve branches. The 1989 EPL organization chart (Appendix B) shows that there were two Public Services (i.e. those providing direct service to customers) Departments, one for the branch locations and the other for the Main Library with each led by a Head of Service. The Main Library Services department included a combination of divisions, some of which served specific client groups while others provided specific types of library materials or services (e.g. audiovisual formats or reference service). A public relations position was situated in the central library's Lending Division. Although dispersed geographically there were few if any unique services to differentiate those in Branch Services. There were few librarian positions in branches, outside of the branch managers whose roles included professional librarian responsibilities, such as collection development and reference service, alongside their management duties. Also operating out of the main library were the two other departments: Technical and Administrative Services. Specialized Technical Services staff worked in separate Acquisitions, Cataloguing and Book Processing/Printing divisions and the department also managed customer records and accounts through the Patron Accounts and Circulation Control division. The manager and assistant manager of the Cataloguing Division were librarians, as were the cataloguing specialists. And lastly, although his department does not appear to have had a name, the Administration Manager was responsible for four divisions (Personnel, Finance, Purchasing, Plant/Transportation), all of which provided centralized support services to the branch managers and others in the main library.

The organizational structure at this time resembled closely Mintzberg's (1989) Diversified Organization. Although Mintzberg suggests that the quantitative performance measures required to assess achievements make this configuration far from ideal for public

sector organizations, whose goals are less tangible and consequently less quantifiable (p.171), EPL had a rigorous performance measures system in place at the time. Both staffing and collections resources were allocated based on number of visits and borrowing statistics, which created an atmosphere of internal competition. This funding model was a cause of concern for managers of smaller branches. It tended to create a downward spiral, as the lack of new materials or available staff often resulted in fewer customers. It was said that in desperation some branch managers and staff would check items in and out numerous times to raise borrowing figures and ensure that collections funding was not reduced. With few branch librarians at that time, the managers played the dual role described by Webb (1989), splitting their energies between librarian and management duties.

**Building capacity for growth.** Throughout the 1990s, the environment within which EPL operated was marked by financial constraints, numerous emerging technologies, growth in user population, deterioration in provincial support for school libraries and demand for increasingly diverse services and collections. Within this context the new Director introduced several changes to the organizational structure, changes enabled through the reallocation of existing resources and the exploration of other sources of funding. Almost immediately, a temporary development office was set up to explore the feasibility of raising funds outside of traditional government sources. An informal internal review of possible changes in services and operations sought to free up financial resources to support the goals of a draft strategic plan (1991-1996) (Executive Team minutes, July 30, 1990). Guided by a new mission, “The purpose of the EPL is to help the people of Edmonton meet the challenges of the present and the future by providing the widest access to the collective knowledge and culture of the world”, the plan called for increased membership, a five million dollar collection enrichment fund and the

“aggressive use of technology to increase access to collections and improve efficiency” (EPLB, p. 553).

With strategic planning under way, structural changes followed: a centrally managed staffing pool was decentralized and staff redeployed; custodial services were outsourced; and cafeteria services at the central library closed. The Branch and Main Library Services departments were combined to form a single Public Services Department. Within Technical Services, the centralized Patron Accounts and Circulation Control division was disbanded. Division staff were redeployed and the circulation control function decentralized to line staff in branches. This division was soon replaced with a new Systems Division to plan and manage the impacts of emerging technologies, such as broadband internet capabilities, online databases, the introduction of a new online catalogue and administrative tools, such as word processing software. The structure became slightly flatter when the Director chose not to replace the long-serving administration manager following his retirement and therefore most of the support services managers reported directly to her. A new department called Community Relations Services was created, an indication of a more outward orientation for the organization. In 1994, however, the department was dissolved with its head of service reassigned as a branch manager and its divisions redistributed to the two remaining departments: Public Services and Support (previously Technical) Services. Each of the heads of service was named a Deputy Director. No information is available regarding the rationale for this decision.

Although at the end of the day EPL’s structure continued to reflect a Diversified and hierarchical approach, several of the changes introduced in this time were characteristic of Griener’s (1998) Delegation or Decentralization Phase. Since her arrival the Director had fostered a more participative culture. She demonstrated an open communication style, creating

various opportunities for line staff to provide input. For example, in July she sent a memo soliciting input from all staff for the new strategic plan, stating “staff support is required right from the start as everyone will have to accept responsibility for the final plan” (Executive Team minutes, July 3, 1990). By 1994 through a grassroots process involving line and support services staff, EPL had developed its first list of Corporate Values, one of which was “Teamwork and Cooperation” (Employee handbook). In 1995 a new temporary Special Projects Coordinator reporting to the Director, focused on broad strategic initiatives, such as the development of a marketing plan, branch site criteria, business processes reviews and strategic planning. These initiatives were undertaken with considerable consultation and involvement of managers, assistant managers, librarians and staff, which is described in various Executive team minutes over this period. Numerous project and standing teams were created during this time, which is reviewed in more detail below. Other examples of the more participative environment included a formal mentor program, team leadership training, along with temporary team leader and branch manager assignments in the 1991-1994 minutes of the Executive Team, building leadership capacity within the complement of nonsupervisory librarians and new managers. At one meeting, Ms. McKee stated that she had received several calls in response to a letter she had sent to librarians asking for expressions of interest in management experience (Executive Team minutes, October 31, 1994). As a librarian and new manager myself during this time, I had the opportunity to participate in the mentor program, chaired a system wide collection development committee of librarians and gained valuable experience in a branch manager position. In 1996, the Executive introduced a three-month rotation by a management representative from each of the Public and Support Services Departments. (Executive Team minutes, December 18, 1995)

As a result of the various re-structuring initiatives, funds had been freed up and resources recombined (e.g. redeployment of branch pool, outsourcing of custodial services) to more effectively use EPL's human and financial resources. This was insufficient, however, to meet growth in the City's population (EPL Strategic Plan 1991-1996). A capital campaign was initiated which resulted in the opening of EPL's first new branch in fourteen years (EPLB, October 1996). Although explored by the previous administration, a significant change was introduced in this period due to declining revenues -- the implementation in 1994 of a registration fee for library members. Although both the Board and the public "believe[d] that there should be no charges for borrowing any type of materials...a substantial number of people believe that an annual fee for a library card is acceptable" (EPL Strategic Plan 1991-1996). A controversial decision and one which led to an immediate decline in memberships (EPLB, April, 1996), the revenue from the introduction of the fee nevertheless allowed EPL to increase hours of operation, to use technology to enhance service and, combined with other fundraising revenues, to expand the number of branch locations (EPL Capsule History, 1993).

In 1996 a new EPL vision statement was adopted: "Universal access to the universe of information and ideas" (EPLB, March, 1996). At the end of the Director's tenure, clearly EPL was poised for growth in library services, collections and programs. Although it had grown slightly in size, the formal organizational structure had not shifted significantly from a primarily vertical, hierarchical model. There was a measure of decentralization to line managers, librarians and other staff as seen in the use of teams and a more open and participative management style at the senior levels. Formal customer surveys were undertaken to determine their needs in preparation for the 1991-1996 strategic plan (EPLB, October, 1996). Whether this evolutionary phase evolved out of a 'crisis of autonomy' (Greiner, 1998) in response to the strictures of the

1980s or whether it changed as a result of the style and vision of the new Director is unclear. The financial constraints and the potential offered by technology, which Greiner alludes to, were nonetheless key drivers of the changes in management practices and the re-positioning of EPL within the community (1998, p. 55).

**Expansion and the information paradigm.** The decade from 1997 through 2007 is seen as a time of incremental growth at EPL. Funding constraints eased somewhat as the economy and the population of the province of Alberta experienced a rapid expansion which peaked just prior to the economic collapse of 2008. Over this period the remaining two sites in Ms. McKee's development plan would be opened and almost half of the library's facilities expanded and or renovated under the direction of Linda Cook, EPL's new Director (EPL Capsule History). As the City of Edmonton's population grew, so too did use of EPL services. "Over the past 10 years visits to EPL – in person and electronically – have grown by leaps and bounds, as has overall library usage" and EPL embarked on an "aggressive plan for the rejuvenation and expansion of facilities" (enriching people's lives, EPL Strategic Directions, 2006-2010, p. 4), as Ms. Cook successfully secured municipal, and in some cases provincial, capital funding for facilities, as well as increased funding to expand EPL's core "product" -- its collections. Traditional formats, as well as online databases and digital and downloadable books, movies and music were acquired to meet customer demand (EPL Annual report, 2007).

EPL's 1997-2002 Technology Strategy stated that "well over 90% of the world's information resources exist in electronic form" and cited a recent study which predicted that "reliance on the internet for information will grow by 500% over the next two years". The strategy went on to say that EPL must address this shift in the "information paradigm", as well as use technology to enhance efficiency and productivity in library operations during times of

“static funding” (p.3). Funding from all three levels of government would support EPL’s progress in this regard. Capital funding would allow EPL to take advantage of major technology developments, such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) inventory management systems (EPL Annual report, 2006). Just as EPL had been the first library in Canada to introduce a fully automated circulation system (EPL Capsule History), almost three decades later it led the field of large urban public libraries in North America in the implementation of RFID. By the end of 2008 an automated self-serve check-out service was in place at all locations, transforming both the user and the line staff experience (EPL Annual report, 2008).

EPL’s new Director had arrived in January 1997 and soon thereafter the Special Projects Coordinator was hired permanently into the new position of Manager, Marketing, Research and Planning (Executive Team minutes, February 18, 1997), and continued to report to the Director (Appendix B). By the end of the following year a significant re-structuring occurred following an administrative review initiated by the Director and undertaken by an external consultant (Appendix B). The Support Services Department was dismantled and its divisions reassigned to other departments. The Manager, Marketing, Research and Planning, was appointed Associate Director, Public Services department. To this role was added the technical services divisions of acquisition, cataloguing and processing library collections. During this time EPL shifted to a centralized collection development model, taking responsibility for selection of library materials away from individual line managers and librarians and assigning this to centralized teams which focused on materials for specific clientele or specific formats. With management of EPL’s core ‘product’ now housed in the Public Services Department, the Associate Director was able to more effectively influence the changes required in the development of customer-centred collections. During this time, the number of branch managers had increased as branches which

had previously shared a manager were 'un-tandem-ed' (Appendix B). With her span of control becoming quite unwieldy, a further change was made within the Public Services department. The Public Services main library and fifteen branch operations were divided into three districts: north, south and central (Executive Team minutes, April 6, 1998). The Associate Director, Public Services would head up the central division which included the main library's specialized divisions and the North and South District Managers each took on a portfolio of half the branches in addition to the management of her own branch. These positions reported to the Associate Director, Public Services. One of the tasks of the new District Managers Group was, almost immediately, to review and streamline as necessary the myriad of standing and ad hoc teams, some of which dated from the previous Director's tenure (Executive Team minutes, June 8, 1998). In 1999 in response to technology developments which enabled not only access to online databases and collections, but the delivery of library services electronically, the position of Virtual Services Manager was created (Executive Team minutes, October 18, 1999), reporting to the Associate Director, Public Services. This served as an integrating position, liaising between public services divisions and IT Services (Mintzberg, 1989).

A temporary contract position of Associate Director for the new Management Services Department had been created in 1998 (Executive Team minutes, April 20, 1998) and this individual was responsible for leadership of those administrative services which had previously reported to the Director, along with the Systems (IT Services) and Plant and Transportation (PLT) divisions from the disbanded Support Services department. This individual undertook a review of EPL's administrative services. Following his resignation, I moved into the Associate Director position in late 2000. The position of Associate Director, Management Services, became permanent in 2001.

A third department was created in 1998, called Community Relations and Community Development (CRCD), and its Associate Director, the previous Deputy Director Public Services, carried out fund development activities and led the Communications and in-house Printing Services divisions following support services disbandment (Appendix B). This department also reflected a renewed emphasis on alliances and collaboration with the community and other libraries, as can be seen in its responsibilities for various partnership activities in “To Boldly Go”: EPL’s Business Plan 2003-2005.

In 2004 with the retirement of the Associate Director, CRCD, the departmental structure changed once again. The CRCD department was disbanded. A Marketing manager was hired and a new Marketing and Communications (M&C) Division created. The Library’s Production (Printing) Services division would soon become a section within the M&C division to better support publicity and communications activities. The division became the newest addition to the Public Services department. The Associate Director had held the position of Manager of Marketing, Research and Planning in 1997, as stated above. Although not formally documented, as a member of the Executive Team I know that the CRCD partnership development role was shared by the Director and Associate Director, Public Services. With respect to the fund development responsibility, a temporary Fund Development manager position was created (Executive Team minutes October 12, 2004). Filled through the secondment of a branch manager, this position reported to the Director.

With the scope of her position continuing to expand, a central District Manager was appointed to allow the Associate Director, Public Services, to manage her diverse responsibilities. As with the other two District Managers, in addition to her central District Manager duties this person also managed a division the Collections Management and Access

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division (formerly Acquisitions, Cataloguing and Processing). This structure remained in place until the retirement of the Associate Director, Public Services late in 2007 (Appendix B).

As with the previous stage in EPL's evolution it is not clear that the changes which occurred in management practices arose out of a crisis, as Greiner (1998) suggests. The organizational structure still remained bureaucratic with functional divisions, although there was some blurring of the lines between public and support service functions. That said this decade does reflect the characteristics of Greiner's (1998) Coordination phase in that there was considerable activity in articulating roles of the central, district and community branches and in creating or standardizing procedures and processes. Among the Prime Directives of the 2003-2005 Business Plan were two organizational principles: "We are One Library, One Staff with One Collection" and "Every Customer is My Customer" (p.1), the rationale being that customers should experience 'seamless service' across all EPL locations. Strategic alliances with external organizations, such as school boards, became more formalized. As for the Library's human resources, the rapid growth which characterized the Alberta labour market prior to 2008 was impacting employee attraction and retention, with unemployment rates averaging 3.5% (EPL environmental scan, 2007, p.4) and "Oh, the places we'll go!": 2006-2009 EPL Business Plan "anticipated recruitment and retention challenges" (p.36). As in the period 1990-1996, building leadership capacity at all levels was once again a recognized need (p.37) and team leader and temporary manager opportunities were developed.

**Accountability and ambiguity.** A modest restructuring followed the departure of the Associate Director, Public Services (Appendix B). In 2008 the M&C Division shifted to the Management Services Department and Virtual Services was combined with IT Services in Management Services. The Financial Services Division (including Accounting and Purchasing

sections) now reported to the Director (now called the CEO), instead of to the Management Services' Associate Director and the Administration Department was created. The CEO and I had discussed this change, in light of the budgeting and financial information she routinely required. Shortly after the arrival of the new Associate Director, Public Services, it was agreed that the broad scope of the North and South District Manager positions, which had included management of a branch location along with leadership support for several branches, was impractical and branch management responsibility was assigned to two new managers. The central District Manager position was eliminated and the incumbent reclassified as Director, Collections, Management and Access Division. The remaining two District Manager roles were reconfigured as Directors, Library Services, and each took on a portfolio of branches (now numbering sixteen) and central Public Services divisions.

A comprehensive classification review was undertaken in 2008, resulting in a minor title change to the two Associate Director positions, which became known as Executive Directors. The Manager, Financial Services position was reclassified as the Chief Financial Officer to reflect the more strategic scope of the role and the growing complexity in the administration and reporting of EPL's financial resources. Although there was brief period in which the Directors, Library Services and HR Director were members of the EPL Executive, membership on this team soon was revised to the current complement: the CEO, the two Executive Directors and the CFO. In late 2009 a new Senior Management Group was established consisting of those at the Director level and above and one line manager. The role and effectiveness of these and other teams will be touched on below.

The review project also saw the reclassification of three of the four managers of Management Services functions -- Human Resources, eServices (Virtual and IT services) and

Facilities & Operations (formerly PLT) -- to the Director level. The M&C position remained at the manager level. Overall these changes reflected the growth of the organization and recognized the need for specialists in each of these fields who could provide strategic as well as tactical support to the organization. With the departure of the M&C Manager, one structural change was introduced in 2009, when the Fund Development function became part of the M&C Division and the management position was reclassified to the Director level (Appendix B).

As noted above, with the economic crisis EPL has begun to see a tightening in available operating funds at the same time as use of the library dramatically increased. This is quite typical of recessionary periods (Walton, January 26, 2009) and at EPL was a key factor in a 23% increase in items borrowed in year-over-year statistics for 2008 and 2009. Planning is well underway for facilities in two new communities along with the replacement/expansion of four others, heralding another significant period of growth for EPL when these locations open within the next two to three years (EPL Annual report 2009).

With the economic downturn it has been predicted that funding would decline or at best remain at current levels for the next several years. With a growing proportion of routine inventory management activities now automated and with enhanced self-service options available for customers to carry out their library 'business' online from home, school or work using continually evolving technologies, there is once again an opportunity to assess and recombine resources in order to provide more value-added service to customers and support continued growth. A review of annual performance measures for Canada's large urban public libraries shows that EPL's long time goal to reach the national average in municipal funding was achieved in 2009 (L. Cook, personal communication, September 14, 2010).

The Public Services Leadership Team, headed by the new Executive Director, Public Services, has introduced a series of activity and process analyses of the impact of the RFID implementation. The resulting data has been used to streamline procedures and in some cases to redefine roles and responsibilities of positions at all levels in the Public Services department. There has been a streamlining and refocusing of team assignments. Staffing and other resources have been freed up and recombined, as in the 1990s, to support new and renewed services and programs (e.g. several positions have been redirected as a result of the implementation of customer self-service checkout). Personnel funds were also redirected to create several community librarian positions whose role is to build relationships with organizations and leaders and work collaboratively to strengthen communities. Lastly, funds have also been redirected to support enhanced research, planning and human resources support services and, as of the summer 2010, a management position dedicated to performance measurement and assessment was created. This position reports to the Executive Director, Public Services as can be seen in the 2010 EPL organization chart (Appendix B). The intention of this new role is to provide data or evidence to inform decisions regarding a wide range of activities and directions throughout the organization.

The evolutionary phase of the last two years remains one of Coordination, although one can see elements of Greiner's (1998) Collaboration phase in terms of organizational structure. Greiner characterizes the Coordination phase as one in which formal systems are introduced by senior management to improve efficiencies through greater coordination (p.62). An increased emphasis on accountability, as seen in new reporting mechanisms within Public Services, the centralizing of functions, such as advertising, and the introduction of standardized cash handling practices are all examples of coordination activities at EPL within the last two to three years.

One can also observe elements of a ‘red tape crisis’ in response to these systems, although the term ‘crisis’ is perhaps too strong. Greiner (1998) describes this as a growing tension between line and support staff managers and a sense that “procedures take precedence over problem-solving” (p.62). Two recent examples at EPL relate to cash handling practices and purchasing procedures, the subject of some frustration on the part of both line managers and support services. A strong control and coordination system also supports efficiencies created through standardized procedures. Efforts to flowchart numerous work processes, such as materials handling procedures, have enabled the sharing of best practices across the library system. To some extent the standardization of processes has been driven by the introduction of automated systems. As noted by Mintzberg (1989), the ongoing automation of routine processes is changing the “social relationship” (p.107), opening the way for a more organic, i.e. less bureaucratic structure. The Phase Four revolution at EPL and the evolution towards the Phase Five collaboration which Greiner (1998) states will follow is being driven by a desire for faster decision-making and increased agility. EPL’s move towards collaboration phase can be seen by considering just a sample of the characteristics identified by Greiner (p. 62):

- 1) “Teams are combined across functions to handle specific tasks”: Marketing and Communications Division representatives are now members of both the Adult and Youth services programming teams, which plan and implement program;
- 2) “Staff (i.e. support services) experts...consult with, not direct, field units”: strong collaboration between Human Resources Consultants and Library Services Directors through weekly meetings;

- 3) “Conferences of key managers are held frequently to focus on major problems”:  
Public Services Department holds regular cluster meetings with public services managers to discuss and problem-solve specific operational issues;
- 4) “Real-time information systems are integrated into daily decision-making”: although some information has been available for managers, the collaboration between IT Services and the new Performance assessment manager and between the City of Edmonton and EPL’s HR Services will move these information systems forward within the next year.

In summary, EPL’s structural evolution over the last twenty years is best described by Stueart (2007) as “more a reorganization around the edges than complete discard of an old structure and beginning anew” (p.188). As EPL has experienced growth in size and complexity, there have been modifications to the organizational structure. The change has not been radical, however. As can be seen in the organization charts from 1989 through to 2010 (Appendix B), the fundamental structure remains one of a traditional hierarchy of functional/divisional departments, with splashes of cross-functional coordination and liaison activity.

The focus of this section has been on EPL’s organizational structure from the perspective of its formal organizational charts. It has been acknowledged in the literature that, although these reflect the division of labour and hint at the authority and influence in the organization, they do not present a complete picture of the true structure of an organization. As stated by Wang and Ahmed (2003), “there are an increasing number of organizational forms that cannot be simply illustrated by an organizational chart” (p.53). Informal structures, as well as formally established teams, are always reflected in these charts and this is certainly the case at EPL. The nature of EPL’s coordination and liaison activities over the last twenty years has varied with ad

hoc and permanent teams routinely used. A discussion of how EPL's use of teams has evolved over time now follows.

### **Analysis of Team Design and Operations at EPL 1990-2010**

#### **Team Typology**

Over the last twenty years, EPL has made significant use of four main types of teams: quality/process improvement, project management, service and integrating teams. In

1990, when the new Director arrived, these were called 'committees'. Three years later she would change the name to 'teams' "to reflect current management style" (Executive Team, January 4, 1993). She had made a similar change approximately a year before, changing the term 'supervisors' to 'managers' (Executive Team, February 24, 1992).

EPL has used the designations, 'standing' and 'ad hoc', to describe 'permanent' and 'temporary' teams respectively. Through a review of Executive and Board meeting minutes, it appears that four 2010 standing teams were already in existence as of 1990: Customer Service, Circulation Procedures, Learning and Development and Executive. Other permanent teams have been established in the intervening years, albeit with shorter life spans. As Mohrman et al. (1995) suggests, "teams vary along a continuum from permanent (at least as permanent as any structure can be in today's world) to temporary...The distinction is important" in terms of "goal setting, review and reward" (p.47). As has been noted elsewhere "management theorists predict that the organization of the future will be built around temporary teams" (Ancona et al., 2009, p. M6-4). A review of approximately fifty teams' terms of reference shows that EPL has struck many, many such teams since 1990, most of which were of the process improvement or project types.

**Services teams.** One of the longest running EPL teams is the Customer Service Team (CST). In 1990 the team was called Circulation Policies and Procedures and was responsible for processes and procedures related to borrowing and account management activities. Within the next decade its mandate was narrowed to a policy focus, with procedures shifting to an existing spin-off team called the Circulation Procedures and Training Team. In 1999 the District Managers Group, of which I was a member, recommended to the Executive that the team's name be changed to the Customer Services Team and its mandate broadened to include policies regarding customer service as a whole, and not just services to borrowers (i.e. circulation activities). The team had begun broadening its scope late the previous year, when it undertook a survey of "policies that hinder[ed] good customer service" (Executive Team minutes, September 16, 1997). This reflects the 1999-2005 Strategic Directions, "Vision for 2005", which signalled a shift to a more customer-driven service model at the time, thanks to increased funding and the integration of technologies which were on the cusp of transforming library services, collections, programs and operations (p.4). "To Boldly Go": EPL 2003-2005 Business Plan stated that "Our values have shifted. Transformations (real life impacts experienced by customers) are highly valued, not just transactions" (p.1). This strategic evolution led to an extensive customer service training program for all EPL staff (2006-2010 Business Plan action 2-4) by an external consultant. Following this rollout, responsibility for ongoing training was handed over to members of the CST. The mandate of the CST continued to expand beyond policy directions to include customer service surveys and staff training in customer service (2006-2010 Business Plan priorities planning document 2009; Customer Service Team 2009 planning document).

Other services teams created since 1990, all of which have been standing teams, have been dedicated to developing, coordinating and evaluating services to particular customer

segments, such as youth or seniors, or specialized services, such as information or readers advisory. Terms of reference for those teams responsible for services to children over the years, for example, show an evolution from a set of decentralized teams (Summer Reading Club, Card for Every Kid) in the 1990s to the establishment of the Youth Services Umbrella Team in 2003. This team's mandate was to "guide and coordinate system-wide programs for youth..." (Team terms of reference). In 2008 the team became the Youth Services Team – a team made up of the leaders of sub-teams dedicated to a specific customer segment or service (e.g. Summer Reading Club). This evolution over time paralleled the increase in the number of branch locations and an increase in customer use. Services teams responsible for adult services have followed a similar path to today's centralized Adult Services Team. In some cases the more coordinated approach to service planning was recommended in task force reports, such as the 2000 Youth Services Task Force report.

**Quality improvement teams.** The earliest example of a quality improvement team in place in 1990 was the Technical Services Quality Circle, a standing team established in 1987. According to Martin, these types of teams were "early responses in business and industry" to the Total Quality Management movement (Martin, 1996, p.83). In the 1987 annual report of the EPL Board, the Chairman notes that, having attended a session at the Canadian Library Association's annual conference, two members of the Technical Services' Cataloguing Division established a Quality Circle, which became a "testing ground" (p. 9) for innovation from the staff level upwards – with the people most directly involved in the work recommending improved methods to supervisory staff" (p.9). The report states that the team was made up of three representatives of the Technical Services divisions. One of the two employees was funded to attend quality circle leadership training. The following year the Technical Services Annual

Report acknowledged the team's accomplishments, including "a total revamping of Book Processing and Printing statistical forms, as well as production of a 'tour guide' to the operations of Technical services that can be handed out to all visitors" (1988). A current employee who worked in this department at the time said that this team was in place for three years (personal communication, September 14, 2010). As Ancona et al. (2009) describe this type of team, "the key is to understand the key work processes and to continuously find ways to improve them" (p.M3-11).

Aside from this Quality Circle, most of EPL's quality or process improvement teams from 1990 through 2010 appear to have been temporary. No less than seven cross-functional task forces were formed between 1990 and 1996, while six were created in the years between 1997 and 2007. The last of these was the Library Services to Aboriginal Peoples Task Force in 2005. As can be seen in their terms of reference, most of these task forces were charged with exploring either an existing broad-based service or a service targeted to particular users. For example, the Youth Services Task Force (YSTF) states that their report "attempted to improve coordination, cooperation and efficiency among staff, while at the same time improving services for all of our youth services customers" (YSTF, p.1). In many cases the task force focus was identified in the strategic or business plan at the time in order to strengthen these services. Other task forces were established to assess the cost effectiveness of EPL's in-house technical or support services, such as materials processing and cataloguing. The Printing and Production Task Force report in 1994, for instance, notes that the Director was considering using EPL printing services to generate revenue.

A standardized terms of reference template was used with many of these task forces, outlining responsibilities to develop a vision of service, review existing practices, survey

practices elsewhere in Canadian libraries and recommend short and long-term goals. It was expected that all of this would be developed within the context of EPL strategic directions, mission, values and other task force reports. Task force terms of reference also identified a project advisor from the Executive or senior management.

For task forces reviewing EPL services, membership was usually functional (within Public Services) with representatives from subject or service specialists, branch generalists, and occasionally acquisitions and cataloguing specialists, depending on the subject. Most often functions or divisions outside of public services were consulted, but were not formal members. Occasionally members came from outside of EPL. For example, a university professor served on the Readers Advisory Task Force (Terms of Reference) and a businessperson was a member of the Smart Search Advisory Team (Terms of Reference). For some, such as the Information Services Task Force, EPL's support services divisions were invited to participate on an as needed basis. This allowed them to not only share their expertise, but helped align the priorities within the support service divisions with the activities of the teams. For others, such as the Printing one above, membership was cross-functional with support and public services employees, ensuring that the internal clients needing such services could both provide the perspective of the end user (themselves or the public) and have input into the recommended solutions. This is consistent with Parker's (2003) description of the benefits of cross-functional teams.

In 1996 a formal business processes review was undertaken and following consultation with managers across the system, process improvement teams were established, with each to review priority areas, including reserves, records management and donations among others. These looked at processes from end-to-end and, in a manner similar to the task forces,

recommended changes. This certainly reflects the literature which describes such teams as “focused around a central business process, either to achieve the ongoing integration of its sub-processes and to make sure the business process is functioning as needed or to improve the business process by its redesign” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p.48). These were all cross-functional teams, with members representing different departments as well as levels of staff. Mohrman et al. (1995) note that “cross-functional teams are recommended to make improvements in organizational processes...based on the understanding that organizational processes cut across organizational units and that a process cannot be optimized without examining in its entirety” (p. 7). This process review project was led by the Special Projects Coordinator who reported to the Director, although the teams presented recommendations for change to the Executive Team. This process was considered a success and was re-introduced a short time later.

**Project teams.** Project teams have been used to shepherd EPL through a myriad of initiatives since 1990, including the introduction of new technologies and systems upgrades (e.g. the Sirsi Unicorn Steering Committee in 2002/2003); the development of corporate values Corporate Values Team in 1992/1993); library building renovations (Abbottsfield Branch Design Team in 2009/2010). They have often been cross-functional, drawing together expertise and experience from across the organization. These teams’ membership design was in keeping with Mohrman et al.’s (1995) assertion that “creating teams that represent various perspectives close to where the work is done and close to the customer improves the quality of decision-making” (p. 186).

**Integrating teams.** A number of permanent EPL teams can be considered integrating teams, “whose purpose is to coordinate the efforts of different parts of the organization” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p. 21). The mandate of one cross-departmental integrating team, the

Technology Action Group (TAG), which operated between 1998 and 2007, was to “lead and coordinate the planning, prioritization, integration and evaluation of technology into library services and operations;...bridge all areas of the library’s operations...taking into account the diverse interests and needs across the organization” (Terms of reference). As a member of the Public Services District Managers Group at the time, I recall a growing animosity between public services and technology support services due to the lack of coordination of priorities and resources, as well as information-sharing between the two departments. Once other liaison devices, such as the creation of the eServices Director position late in 2007, an individual who was very familiar with technology as well as services and operations directions, coordination and information-sharing was enabled and a team structure was no longer required. (Executive Team minutes, March 2007). Teams, such as the Youth Services Team described above, are also considered integrating teams, in that “they link together the work of two or more interdependent teams, and teams that cut across various parts of the organization that share a focus, perhaps on a particular customer” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p. 41). Similarly, the Executive Director, Public Services points out that the Readers Advisory Services Team’s work was incorporated within the Adult Services Team, in order to avoid “silo-ing” this particular service (P. Martinez, personal communication, July 13, 2010).

Mohrman et al. (1995, p. 41) note that “management teams are a special example of integrating teams”. The Executive Team, Public Services Leadership Team (known as the District Managers Group from 1998-2007) and the recently formed Senior Management Group all are considered by Mohrman et al. as teams “whose power to influence the various units that [they are] integrating comes at least in part from hierarchical position” (1995, p. 41). Ancona and Nadler (1989) state “the fundamental rationale for establishing any team, including an

executive team, is to create synergy – to increase coordination across functions and activities so that the performance of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (p.20). The District Managers Group, a new three-person team of which I was a member from 1998 to 2000, fit perfectly within Katzenbach’s (1993) definition of a team due to the interdependency in our work and the strong sense of mutual accountability.

**Self-managed and X-teams.** A review of both temporary and standing teams established in or operating between 1990 and the present day reveals that none of these meets the definition of the ‘self-managed’ or ‘X-team’ described in the literature. The former are defined as “teams which makes decisions that were once restricted to management (i.e. hire members, allocate tasks and roles, determine work schedules and work flow and handle disputes) and in this way moving power and decision making downwards in the organizational hierarchy (Ancona et al., 2009, p. M3-11). EPL is not structured to distribute such powers to teams. Nor are X-teams suited to the EPL environment, as they are “appropriate, first, when organizational structures are flat, spread-out systems with numerous alliances rather than multilevel, centralized hierarchies; secondly, when they are dependent on information that is complex, externally dispersed and rapidly changing; and thirdly, when a team’s task is interwoven with tasks undertaken outside the team” (2009, p. M6-29). It is not surprising that EPL’s use of teams has not evolved in this direction over the time period under review, given the limited evolution described above of EPL’s structure away from a primarily functional or divisional structure.

### **Team Effectiveness**

As was noted in the Research Design section above, an integrated framework of factors, drawing on Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Van Maanen, & Westney (2009); Mohrman, Cohen & Mohrman (1995); Parker (2003), was created and served as a basis for employee interviews. A

thorough review of team terms of reference, strategic and business plans, team reports, and other secondary data was undertaken, as well as the detailed analysis of interview data described above. The results show that, although generally EPL's teams do demonstrate satisfactorily many of the factors which management theorists have identified as critical to team effectiveness, there are shortcomings which, once addressed, could significantly enhance the design, operations and positive impact of teams and ultimately better support EPL's success.

**Clear goals and roles.** EPL has historically developed formal terms of reference, outlining purpose, responsibilities, membership, reporting relationship and type of team for both temporary and standing teams. A review of some fifty teams' terms of reference from 1999 through to the present day revealed that the task force teams from 1990 to 2005 included an overarching statement about working within the contexts of EPL strategic and business plans and shared values. From 1997 through to 2007, reference is more likely to be made to the EPL mission for other types of teams than to its strategic or business plans. For standing teams, their purpose is usually explicitly linked to strategic priorities or mission and their goals are reflected in specific actions within the three-year business plan. The goals of temporary teams, which by their nature are often struck in an ad hoc manner when a specific business issue arises, may or may not be linked with specific business plan actions. Short term ad hoc teams do not always have terms of reference and for one such team this could explain the contradiction in the responses of two interviewees. Both are founding members and yet provided a different answer regarding the name of the team lead. These same individuals provided contradictory responses about whether the team had terms of reference. These same interviewees would later describe team member dissatisfaction, prolonged delays in decision-making and minimal progress towards the team's objectives.

Five of the seven interviewees stated that the purpose of the teams which they have participated on was clear to themselves and team members. EPL has a number of services teams, such as the Customer Service and Adult Services Teams, whose mandates have been reviewed and revised since 2008. Team members provided input into these terms and one interviewee commented that the associated discussion had helped clarify and narrow the focus of the team's mandate. The purpose of three teams was identified by participants as very or somewhat ambiguous. In one case the scope of the team's mandate was described as vague and so broad as to be impractical. The second of these teams, the Assistant Managers Group, has been in existence for about twenty years. The stated mandate of this team is to "provide an opportunity for communication among the Assistant Managers, enhancing their ability to fulfill their responsibilities in support of the Library's mission statement and corporate values; to encourage the Assistant Managers to take an active role in the growth and development of the Library" (Terms of reference, 1999). Membership includes some twenty assistant managers from branches large and small, of which five also carry out professional librarian responsibilities, as assistant manager/librarians. Although there is value in sharing information, concerns and ideas (key duties of this team), this team does not fit Katzenbach's (1993) team definition above, in that membership is not small nor do the members hold themselves mutually accountable. In my previous roles as branch manager and district manager in the mid to late 1990s, the question arose as to whether a formal team structure with quarterly meetings, a chair and vice-chair was needed to achieve the group's expressed purpose. The team still exists today and one of the interviewees posed a similar question. There is a recognized value to the team in terms of building relationships and this may account for the longevity of the team. Lastly, as a member and past leader of the Learning and Development Team over the last fifteen years, I have

observed the evolution and ultimately the team's decline. In my opinion its effectiveness reached its peak between 1998 through 2003, when its purpose was clearly linked with EPL's strategic directions. At that time, the team structure was redesigned to reflect specific types of services. The team drafted a comprehensive learning and development policy for EPL and had input into the three-year business plan initiatives. Since 2003 two changes have occurred in the EPL environment: technology has changed when, where and how learning can and should occur; and a growing need for leadership development has been identified, which the team was not structured to address. The team also lost a core member with expertise and interest in the principles and practices of adult learning. In the years that have followed, although the team's written mandate has not changed, its focus has narrowed from a strategic perspective to a more reactive and tactical role. The ongoing struggles of this team were noted by four of the seven interviewees, as well as by the Executive Director, Public Services, in informal discussion. Further evidence of the ineffectiveness of this team will be seen as the analysis of the remaining factors continues.

In some cases the roles of teams overlap and it is not always clear to the teams where each other's responsibilities and authority lie. Interviewees noted such an overlap between a number of services teams and the Learning and Development Team. Over the last two years, in the absence of the strong leadership and coordination role normally played by the latter, services teams have stepped into the vacuum and developed or planned ad hoc training in support of their specific service; thereby further eroding the role of the centralized learning team. The lack of coordination results in inefficient scheduling processes, a reactive and ad hoc approach to training which is not necessarily aligned with the year's priorities. Other examples of overlap in mandate can be seen in the purpose statements of services teams whose customer segments

overlap, (e.g. adult services and seniors, seniors and aboriginal services, aboriginal services and youth services, youth and various new immigrant groups). In order to ensure that respective roles are clear, Mohrman et al. (1995) suggest that “teams must define performance with other interdependent teams...This interteam planning – the lateral process of collaboration — defines the goals and roles of the teams relative to one another. Each team can then work out its intrateam designs and make plans to achieve team goals” (1995, p.212).

According to all interviewees, a team’s annual goals are determined in a collaborative manner with team members playing an active role. Direction regarding specific priorities for a given year may also be provided through team sponsors or members of senior management teams. These are usually broadly linked with the strategic or business plans. In one interview it was suggested that the expiry in 2009 of EPL’s business plan has impacted the planning focus for those teams whose annual objectives had been driven by specific strategies or goals in the plan. No other interviewee expressed this view. This comment may relate back to this same individual’s sense that the team’s purpose is overly broad and ambiguous. Mohrman et al. (1995) suggest that goal-setting must be both vertically and laterally coordinated. Within the Public Services Department, this is achieved through the Public Services Leadership Team. Those interviewees who are not based in Public Services note that goal-setting with teams in Management or Administrative Services is not formally coordinated with those of public services teams and this has led on occasion to conflicting priorities and a lack of alignment of support services resources. This lack of coordination has recently been discussed by members of the Executive Team. The need for greater coordination was also raised early in 2010 at a meeting of the newly-formed Senior Management Group.

**Empowerment.** Mohrman et al. (1995) define power as “the authority to make decisions about how the team does its work” (p.283) and “to influence decisions made elsewhere that impact one’s work” (p.57). Power is seen as part of a larger list of team requirements: “knowledge, skill, information, resources and power to perform in a manner that enables [the team] to make decisions” (p.57). According to team terms of reference from 1997 through to 2010, the reporting relationship of most teams has been to the Executive Team, the former District Managers Group and the Public Services Leadership Team. From a review of the secondary data, the only reporting relationships to a single senior manager have been the Executive Team and Senior Management Group which report to the CEO.

Although teams have the authority to make decisions about their operations, all but two of those interviewed expressed the view that there has been little distribution of power to teams for other than routine activities. Interviewees were asked what authority the teams had to act or to make decisions. The following quotes are examples of the comments received from six of the seven interviewees: “unclear what we can decide, if anything”; “constant need to check”; “level of uncertainty”; “hesitancy”; “not so clear with new things”; “not clear”. Team activities are described as having been closely monitored and there is a sense that permission has needed to be sought for any new process, direction or initiative. The remaining interviewee contradicted these comments, noting that one of their teams had quite a bit of latitude and support for both existing and new initiatives. As stated by Neilson, Pasternack and Van Nys (2005) in “The Passive-aggressive organization “it is never possible to specify every decision right a priori. In healthy organizations decisions do not go unmade because no one has been designated to make them. Most of the time, someone will jump in and get the job done. In such places, people take the

initiative because they know their efforts will be rewarded” (p. 89). For most of those interviewed, EPL teams have hesitated to take initiative without checking first.

With unclear authority the volume of decisions made by senior managers increases and this in turn can result in delays. At times such delays on the part of senior managers can impact the momentum of a particular team initiative, even when it is ultimately approved. One interviewee described the negative impact on team morale and attributed slow decision-making to conflicting priorities on the part of the senior managers. As Mohrman et al. (1995) notes, the role of integrating management teams, such as EPL’s Executive and Public Services Leadership Teams, is to “resolve recurring broader scope issues” (p. 49) along with competing priorities or tradeoffs and this may in fact require the reversal of team decisions or refusal to accept recommendations. As noted by Mohrman et al. (1995), however, such changes are most effective when the “escalation of decisions [to senior managers] leads to collaborative decision-making across levels rather than to hierarchical decree” (p. 190). In some cases team decisions may impact other teams and delays in decision-making result from what one interviewee described as “bouncing around from team to team”. As the literature suggests, minimizing these interdependencies and/or clarifying roles and responsibilities amongst specific teams can help clarify overall decision-making authority (Mohrman et al., 1995). Strategies, such as proactively managing boundaries between teams and building support for specific initiatives, which will be discussed below, may also help address this situation.

**Team design.** A review of terms of reference for thirty-three EPL teams revealed that twenty-eight of these included between four and eight members. Parker (2003) notes that “researchers have proven that about four to six members, but certainly not more than ten members, works best” (p.51). The teams which interviewees considered to be a good size were

described as having a “diversity of voices” and varied knowledge bases, the ability to create small working groups to take on specific tasks, the ability for all members to be heard, the ability to make decisions and build relationships. One interviewee described the experience on a large team as feeling that one’s contribution was “watered down” and had much less impact than on smaller teams. One team which was described by three interviewees as having been too large was the 2006-2009 Business Plan Team. As a member of this team, I also found the group to be too large. Although there had been a desire to ensure broad representation from all departments at ten members, the team size resulted in a lack of cohesiveness. It was difficult to establish an atmosphere of trust and openness. Since that time a number of team members have informally expressed to me their dissatisfaction at the process. As Parker (2003) notes, “As the size of the team increases, members are less likely to be open and honest in their comments; be willing to disagree with the leader; feel confident that they can depend on each other; give each other honest feedback” (p.165). As EPL prepares to develop another Business Plan within a few months, it will be important to learn from past experience.

Team membership at EPL is structured as a combination of core members, often based on their positions in the organization, plus other members who represent a particular function or size of branch. A review of Executive Team minutes shows that in the 1990s team leaders’ and team members’ appointments or re-appointments were made annually by Associate Directors or the CEO.

Today it is rare for EPL teams not to have a designated leader. The leader is most often appointed by senior management rather than voted on by team members. A review of terms of reference shows that the vast majority of team leaders are managers, with sub-teams often led by those in other roles, such as librarians. In my experience, the leadership position rotates for EPL

standing teams, albeit somewhat irregularly, while for ad hoc or temporary teams, such as task forces, the leadership is often fixed for the duration of the team's project. Two interviewees pointed out that for some services teams the team lead is assigned based on the position held by the individual. For example, the Manager of the Information Services Division is the leader of the Information Services Team. This is consistent with Parker's (2003) observation that selection decisions often take into account the leader's expertise, referred to by Parker as "technical background" (2003, p. 56). Interviewees did not specifically mention people management skills (Parker's other criteria) or past leadership experience. That said in my experience these are discussed when selection decisions are being made, since these may impact the degree of support or coaching needed from the team's advisor. EPL has, both in the past and currently, used team member and leader appointments as opportunities for leadership development.

The team lead's style was mentioned by two interviewees as impacting team operations and atmosphere: negatively in one case with the leader described as "unintentionally dominating"; positively in the other due to a "collaborative" approach. Mohrman et al. (1995) describe teams where there is no hierarchical authority between the team lead and the membership. As was noted by one respondent, there is no voting or veto power by EPL's team leads, the role is mainly that of a facilitator. In these situations Mohrman et al. (1995) suggest that to be successful leaders must demonstrate effective communication and conflict resolution skills, as well as those required for consensus-building and recognizing team efforts. Each of the team leaders who were interviewed identified two or more of these as important skills in their roles. They also suggested that formal training or coaching in one or more of these would be useful.

Recently for Public Services Department teams or for Public Services representatives, team lead positions have been appointed by the Public Services Leadership Team while generally other positions are advertised internally, together with a brief description of requirements, time commitment and expectations. This is seen by all those interviewed as a positive step toward the recruitment of enthusiastic and committed participants. Aside from one or two core positions on some teams designated due to specific job functions, most terms of reference for permanent teams state that membership rotates every two or three years. Interviewees commented on the pros and cons of this membership structure. The rotation of team members is seen as “healthy”, as it fosters fresh ideas and perspectives. Two interviewees suggested that it helps rotate out those with inflexible attitudes and can address interpersonal conflicts which appear irresolvable. As for leaders or members who remain on teams for several years, two interviewees remarked that the history, knowledge of the organization and experience of these people are valuable, whereas another cautioned against “stale thinking”.

Most Public Services teams have assigned sponsors from the Public Services Leadership Team. Similar roles have been included formally and informally in the past, specifically for task forces, as noted above. This role is designed to help set direction and provide guidance. For current Public Services Teams, the Executive Director of the department described the role as one of support for the team chair when dealing with more complex issues (P. Martinez, personal communication, July 13, 2010). Those interviewees whose teams had a sponsor considered this role as a positive contribution to EPL’s team structure, particularly if team leaders are new to this role. Three of those interviewed commented that when the sponsor or a team member, who is a senior manager, attend meetings, there is a tendency for many within the team to defer to these individuals, potentially undermining the role of the team lead. Another suggested that there is

sometimes a perception with sponsor participation that a team is being micro-managed. Despite these concerns, interview responses clearly support the value of the sponsor role, including the opportunity to bounce ideas around, to discuss team membership selection, to discuss strategies for rolling out new initiatives, to provide context about past and current decisions and to provide advice about how to achieve team objectives.

When asked to describe the informal leadership which occurs with their teams, the interviewees described most team members as very engaged, taking turns or volunteering within the group to take on tasks or to lead sub-teams. In some teams, informal leadership is assumed by those with specialized skills or their expertise is well-known and others naturally turn to them. Two interviewees described their informal leadership activities on one team as a means to move an issue forward and push for a decision. These descriptions all suggest high levels of commitment, which Mohrman et al. (1995) describes as follows: “People are collectively responsible for doing what is necessary to achieve performance goals” (p. 359).

**Resources.** Research participants stated that funding for teams is generally adequate. Only two of the teams discussed during interviews do not have an assigned budget. For those which do, two interviewees were not clear about the purpose or value of the funding, nor were they sure about the team’s authority to decide how to spend it. Two interviewees were unclear about whether additional funds could be requested in the course of the year. With the overlapping mandates of some teams and limited coordination of annual goal-setting and budget requests, team leaders are not always clear about whose budget will pay for particular activities and there is a risk that one team will assume that another team will request funding for a particular initiative. This has been recognized and mechanisms, such as a recent 2011 budget planning meeting of team leads and senior managers, are being put in place to address this.

Four interviewees spoke about insufficient support, specifically for marketing and IT resources, although they acknowledged that resources in both areas are more integrated into team planning than in the past. Competing priorities within departments and divisions, both those represented within the team and those outside of the team, have resulted in delays in decision-making or delays in project or program implementation. Increased coordination in goal-setting can improve this situation, as described by Ancona et al. (2009), Mohrman et al. (1995) and Parker (2003). Time to simply do the work of the team outside of meetings was identified by three participants as an inadequate resource, which slows and even halts progress toward team goals. The potential for greater use of technology tools, such as Outlook, SharePoint, video and audio recording and more effective use of the Staff Web were suggested by one participant as a means to increase efficiency and facilitate communication.

**Team operations.** Most teams meet regularly. Interviewees noted that frequent and regular meetings do support a productive atmosphere, fostering more trusting relationships and open discussion. For two teams which are currently struggling, there is a tendency not to meet. This was described in one interview as a ‘chicken and egg’ situation, in that without meetings progress grinds to a halt and yet, without progress, there is no reason to meet. Another commented that “there is no frequency because there is no clarity”. Although Parker (2003) advises “no purpose, no meeting” (p. 177), he also notes that “lack of action is especially detrimental to team morale” (p.177/178). As a member of one such team, I see that one of the consequences of no meetings is that, since there are still some decisions to be made, these are being made in an ad hoc fashion by a small subset within the team. In the opinion of one interviewee, this has likely further demoralized team members.

On the heels of 2009-2010 leadership training, several EPL teams developed ground rules, which outline how the group works together. Norms around decision-making, communication, attendance and other team functions are articulated. Although some interviewees note that the ground rules are not always referred to at each meeting, a number of teams post these on the wall or include in the agenda at meetings. All but one interviewee stated that decisions are made by consensus in EPL teams. The recent leadership training introduced a basic 'levels of consensus' chart to help teams and staff groups with decision-making. One interviewee said that although these were provided as basic tool for teams, "we haven't had to use it". If decisions cannot be reached within the team, they are escalated to the team or individual to whom the team reports. If the team has a sponsor, interviewees stated that this individual is usually approached first.

Communication within teams is described as open and free-flowing by most respondents. The literature suggests that conflict is inevitable and that "applying various tools and techniques [will] allow the team to develop new shared viewpoints that reinterpret the conflict in a resolvable way" (Mohrman et al., 1995, p. 55/56). Interviewees identified few examples of conflict within EPL teams. One person suggested that this may be because team members do not feel "safe" expressing opposing viewpoints. Another suggested that there may be a perception that disagreements will be seen as obstructive to the work of the team. In my past discussions with members of EPL's senior management, it has been recognized that within EPL's culture, people tend to avoid conflict. Ancona et al. (2009) suggest that the diversity within cross-functional teams will create communication challenges and increase the likelihood of conflict. They also argue that, if skilfully managed, this can enhance the quality of decisions and ultimately improve team performance. Interviewees described three conflict scenarios. Faced

with a difference of opinion about a particular task, two interviewees said that these were usually resolved by gathering more information. Two others described occasional philosophical differences. The different perspectives were explored; pros and cons assessed within the context of the team's goals and mandate. This approach is consistent with Mohrman et al.'s (1995) observation that "conflict will be resolved productively only if a team has shared goals" (p. 251). If these had become a barrier to decision-making, team leaders would discuss with the team sponsor. This type of conflict can be what Ancona et al. (2009) describe as "the 'good' kind... called *substantive conflict*" (p. M5-13), such as the two situations above. "The 'bad' kind of conflict is called *affective conflict*,...consists of interpersonal clashes due to personality or perceived differences in style, background or values" (p. M5-13). Only one participant described interpersonal conflict which had impacted team operations. Ancona et al. (2009) note that "the key for teams is to find ways to encourage substantive conflict". Mohrman et al. (1995) and Parker (2003) also stress the value of this type of conflict and the importance of conflict management training for team leaders and team members.

The team atmosphere, as described by the team leads among those interviewed, is by and large positive with a level of camaraderie and considerable level of trust within teams. Communication within teams was described as "free flowing", "open" and "mutually respectful". In one team, however, there has been some tension in that, while the team has operated to date as a group of equals, one member is described as dominating the discussion and using position power to advance a particular direction. As noted previously many EPL teams, including the new Senior Management Group, have established ground rules within the last two years. It is not known whether the particular team above has done this. Parker (2003) refers to these as "guidelines for communication and trust" or "communication norms" (p.176). Included

in more than one team's guidelines is a statement similar to the Customer Service Team groundrule: "we leave our various positions at the door". Interviewees described the confidence in each others' expertise and in their ability to achieve their objectives which was present in the various teams in which they participated. Two interviewees noted that team confidence is tempered slightly by the uncertainty about authority, as discussed above.

**Boundary management.** Ancona et al. (2009) state that "no team is an island" (p. M6-8). They go on to say that "the need for new information, feedback and coordination with outsiders means that teams must have dense linkages within and outside the firm" (p. M6-9). The extent of a team's relationship with those outside of the team can determine its success. The failure in these relationships can undermine its reputation and ultimately its viability. Interviewees were asked to describe the interactions of their team with senior management, with other EPL teams, with other branch or divisions and finally with others outside of EPL.

Most team interactions with senior management occur between the team lead and the Executive or senior management sponsor or the position to whom the team reports. This is one of the options described by Ancona et al. (2009). In other cases, as noted above, senior managers are members of the team. Interviewees' description of this relationship confirms Ancona et al.'s (2009) observation that interactions with senior management help align a team's goals to the organization's strategic directions. Teams introducing new public services policies or initiatives have in the past presented these to the Executive Team for approval. More recently these are brought forward to the Public Services Leadership Team and, once approved at this level, are brought forward to the Executive Team by the Executive Director, Public Services. There is often discussion along the way with the CEO, as well as other senior managers or workgroups who may be impacted, to gather or share information. Through this "ambassadorial

activity” (Ancona et al., 2009, p. M6-10), support is gathered for the initiative. Teams post minutes and quarterly reports on their blogs and more than one of the team leads interviewed said that they assumed that members of the Executive and senior management teams reviewed these. As a senior manager, I know that this is not necessarily the case. The exploration of how best to share information would be useful.

The handling of interactions with other EPL teams occurs in a variety of ways. The requirement for coordination is often outlined in team terms of reference, which also identify members serving a liaison role with another team. Interviewees also describe informal or ad hoc participation by representatives of other teams to discuss or resolve a particular task. For example, a representative from the Circulation Training and Procedures Team regularly participates in the Customer Service team, but is not a member of the team. Amongst the services teams described earlier whose customer segments overlap, joint planning and implementation of programs or events does occur, such as the Language of the Heart world language storytimes for families, planned by the Youth Services and Multicultural Connections Teams. To strengthen communication, interviewees also pointed out that the Public Services Leadership Team has introduced joint meetings of public services team chairs. Two interviewees spoke about the “confusion” and “disconnect” between the Learning and Development Team and EPL services teams, noting that the latter have learning components which the learning team is unaware of. With little in the way of boundary management activities at present, this is yet another effectiveness factor which the Learning and Development Team must address in order to successfully regain its credibility and value to the organization.

Coordination and information-sharing with those staff and work areas not represented on teams take different forms. In 2010 a number of EPL services teams added representation from

the Marketing Division to their membership. Interviewees participating on these teams, as well as the Executive Director, Public Services, have recognized that this has greatly improved team effectiveness. As Parker (2003) points out, “cross-functional teams reduce the time to get things done” (p. 12). They “discover...problems at the front end or simply catch them before they occur” (p. 13). Not only is their expertise readily available, but there is also increased coordination in public and support services’ priorities and resource allocation. Three interviewees suggested that more cross-functional representation on teams would be beneficial. In the past EPL established cross-functional internal advisory teams, such as the Virtual Services or Internal Communications Advisory Teams, specifically to gather input from internal stakeholders. More recently information-gathering from those outside a team occurs through internal online surveys, while information-sharing is done through team blog postings and presentations at sessions, known as Up to Speed Cafes, or at work area staff meetings. An example of another coordinating mechanism is the appointment of representatives within each branch and division in all EPL departments. Called Customer Service Advocates, they serve as local contacts to share or gather information. As noted above, interviewees describe the role of services teams as influencing rather than imposing changes and at times they have encountered resistance. Increasing boundary management activities may help minimize these.

Two interviewees commented that the Executive Team has become isolated with little visibility due to a lack of information-sharing with those outside of the team. Meeting minutes had traditionally served as the mechanism for managers and staff to learn about new initiatives, policy decisions or the external activities of these senior managers. Historically meetings were usually held weekly with minutes emailed to Managers weekly as well. In the fall of 2004, after the retirement of the Associate Director, Community Relations and Corporate Development, it

was decided that the team would meet monthly (Executive Team minutes, October 12, 2004). This continued until February 2009, at which point Executive Team meetings were replaced by informal breakfast meetings, for which no minutes are kept. The outcomes of these meetings are shared, as deemed relevant, with the Executive Directors' direct reports. To date no other communication vehicle has been developed for the Executive Team to routinely share information with managers or staff at large.

Fundamental to EPL's vision is the development of close relationships with community organizations. A review of team terms of reference shows that membership on teams from those outside of EPL does not generally occur. Recent exceptions are the recently disbanded Smart Search Advisory Team, the 2003 Readers Advisory Services Task Force and today's Aboriginal Advisory Group. A community-led service philosophy has been formalized in 2010 and includes a commitment to listening to and engaging with community members, agencies and organizations to determine the needs for EPL services. Interviewees who participate on EPL services teams described a range of external boundary activities in support of this commitment. Interviewees on other EPL teams described information-sharing and information-gathering with organizations or individuals outside of EPL, such as City of Edmonton departments, social services and government agencies. EPL project teams have regularly sought information about local practices and experiences from other Canadian libraries, as is described in various EPL Task Force reports from the 1990s through to 2005. Within EPL's unionized environment, team activities do on occasion require information sharing and negotiation with union officials. Some of this occurs through a joint labour/management team which has been in existence for ten years and serves as a forum for discussion and dispute resolution as required. Team operations have changed over time. As co-chair of this team since 2000, I believe that the majority of issues

arising are now discussed and resolved with union officials outside of this team. The team is more of a symbol of the union/management relationship than an essential structure for success. Since its existence is prescribed in the last several collective agreements, it will continue to operate for now.

**Performance appraisal.** It has been my experience over the last twenty years that the formal evaluation of team performance and team member participation has been limited. Since 2008 the Executive Director, Public Services and her leadership team have enhanced accountability within public services teams through the introduction of annual goal-setting and regular progress-reporting throughout the year. Interviewees described the standard expectation to evaluate events or new initiatives which now forms part of a team's responsibilities. Although certainly such assessment is acknowledged as important, one interviewee noted that this does not give the full picture of a given team's overall effectiveness. No interviewees described an evaluation of team performance by external stakeholders, such as managers, staff or customers or teams with which they collaborate, which is suggested by Mohrman et al. (1995). "Performance should be managed by those who have a stake in the performance" (p.203). By introducing evaluation by stakeholders, which could be formal or informal, inter-team processes may be enhanced, customer needs clarified and communication improved. It is worth noting that although the Public Services department has introduced effective processes within its teams, which admittedly make up the majority of standing teams, these were isolated changes within this department and have not been adopted across the organization. Implementing such practices in other departments would enhance coordination and communication.

Reward and recognition for team activities are limited as well. The most public recognition for organizational achievements occurs at the annual 'year in review', a lunchtime

gathering of EPL managers at Christmas. The celebration includes a PowerPoint slideshow depicting accomplishments, which is then posted on the intranet. Although specific activities mentioned may have been developed and implemented by a particular team, the team is not often explicitly recognized. Three interviewees described informal recognition of team accomplishments through the team leader. Together with occasional internal celebrations, this type of recognition has appeared sufficient. One interviewee suggested that this type of recognition is more meaningful than formal external recognition and another believed that external recognition is unnecessary, since team member satisfaction is primarily derived from achieving the team's goals. Few team members were consulted in this research and so there has been no confirmation of how widespread this view may be. EPL's Recognition program has been in place for two years. Although there are funds distributed to managers to be used for recognition and reward for members of their work units, a similar strategy is not in place for EPL teams. Despite the observations of the interviewees, the literature is quite clear that reward and recognition of team performance are essential factors in team effectiveness. Mohrman et al.'s (1995) research has shown that "the more people were rewarded for team performance, the better their team's performance was, the better their business unit's performance was, and the more process improvements the teams and their business unit had made" (p. 230).

With respect to the evaluation of an individual's participation on a team, Mohrman et al. indicate that "the process of defining team performance leads to the process of defining the performance of individual members" (p.211). Mohrman et al. also suggest that "internal team planning and setting individual team goals and roles should be largely team-defined" (i.e. "members must collaboratively work out their individual goals and roles") (p.212). Interviewees stated that their personal participation on a team is noted in the annual performance appraisal and

in their self-assessment. Only one of the team leaders interviewed reported being contacted by a team member's direct supervisor at annual appraisal time for comments about a team member's performance. There is no standardized performance evaluation process for team members nor are there explicit expectations in this regard for team leaders or for one's peers. Mohrman et al. note the challenges inherent in developing performance management processes for teams, including the fact that an individual's performance cannot be considered in isolation from the performance of his or her team. However, they also argue that "empowerment is primarily a function of the defining and developing processes of performance management" (p.220) and strongly advise organizations to begin to define expectations, which in turn will help identify potential development needs of both the team and the individuals.

Interviewee comments about reward and recognition practices for individual contributions to a team were varied, with one individual describing recognition received as "nothing". Two interviewees stated that they had received formal and informal recognition, while most respondents described an informal 'thank you' or pat on the back. The informal nature of recognition was generally considered to be sufficient with one person suggesting that more formal recognition of individual contributions could undermine the collegiality of the team and EPL's commitment to the principle of "One Library, One Staff". Mohrman et al. (1995) confirm that "rewards for individual performance have a disruptive effect on team performance" (p.231) and that in fact the more interdependent the work of the team, the more difficult it becomes to reward individual contributions. For Mohrman et al., recognition of team performance, such as special team awards, is a much preferred option.

**Learning.** Much of the learning that takes place in EPL teams occurs as part of the work of the team itself. Although EPL does not have an explicit goal of using teams strategically for

organizational learning, such as Mohrman et al. (1995) describe, considerable learning does take place in these forums. Four interviewees spoke about team members with specific skills demonstrating or training others. These and others describe team members taking on specific tasks, teaching themselves through research or reaching out to other libraries or organizations and then sharing with the team. Support for conferences was mentioned by three participants, two of whom said that the learning was shared with the team and others through the intranet.

Team leaders reported significant personal learning about teams and teamwork from their leadership responsibilities. Although they reported little formal training for team leaders, coaching and support are available from team sponsors. Although all interviewees had attended recent leadership training which touched on such topics, interviewees suggested the need for more in depth training in the following areas (the number of interviewees who identified is noted in parentheses): team building (3), conflict management and building consensus (3), creating a trusting environment (1), how to inspire as a leader (2), facilitation (3), coaching (2) and, lastly, chairing a meeting (1). During my time on the Learning and Development Team over the years, similar course requests have come forward. All of these observations are consistent with Parker's (2003) description of the formal and informal learning which takes place in teams. He writes of the value to the organization of the networking that takes place in teams and suggests that an open environment fosters informal learning. He goes on to recommend "training that breaks down the barriers between strangers" and "team training in group dynamics, being a team player, conflict resolution and meeting management" (p.31).

## Recommendations

“The change from a traditional, hierarchical organization to a team-based organization requires redesigning the organization” (Mohrman et al.,1995, p. 37). EPL is not yet ready to make such a shift. Although not a team-based structure, EPL’s use of teams over time has increased information-sharing and coordination across the organization. Keeping in mind that the small number of interviewees limits the ability to generalize about EPL teams, the analysis of the primary data regarding team effectiveness does reveal a number of interesting themes which could be explored further in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the current and future team complement.

The majority of EPL Public Services teams discussed by interviewees appear to have a clear mandate, although there are examples of those with a very broad or vague scope. As Katzenbach (1993) notes, “the best teams...translate their common purpose into specific performance goals” (p.165). The recent restructuring of public services teams and requirement to establish performance goals have clarified their purpose and enhanced accountability. By undertaking a review for all EPL teams, including functional and cross-functional teams based in all departments, purpose would be confirmed and clarified and measurable performance enhanced. For those teams which appear to have lost focus, a discussion about whether these ought to be re-purposed would be valuable, as would the determination of whether a team, as defined by Katzenbach (1993), is in fact the appropriate structure to achieve an existing team’s mandate.

This review would also include the clarification of overlapping responsibilities. If interdependencies cannot be eliminated, then defining in a proactive rather than ad hoc manner the specific focus of each team, its relationship to other teams, including potential areas for inter-

team planning, would enable more effective allocation of the required financial, marketing, IT or other resources, reduce inefficiencies and provide clearer direction to the efforts of all.

Although within Public Services there are mechanisms for vertical coordination and some for lateral coordination of team activities, this cannot be said laterally across departments. Improved coordination of team activities across departments will support alignment of priorities and resource allocation across the organization. Creating more opportunities to coordinate information sharing, information gathering, decision-making and joint planning across teams, similar to the 2011 budget planning meeting of team leaders and senior managers, would be invaluable. In order to ensure that respective roles are clear, Mohrman et al. (1995) suggest that “teams must define performance with other interdependent teams...This interteam planning – the lateral process of collaboration — defines the goals and roles of the teams relative to one another. Each team can then work out its intra-team designs and make plans to achieve team goals” (1995, p.212).

Given the uncertainty about decision-making authority for a majority of interviewees, it is recommended that this be discussed by team leaders and sponsors or those to whom a team reports. Not only does this impact team morale, but it can result in inefficient decision-making. Although the role of sponsor and of senior managers who sit as team members is generally seen as positive, the unclear authority identified during the interviewees is related to these individuals’ roles. A facilitated discussion of team leaders and sponsors on the topic of authority and decision-making would help reduce the uncertainty. A starting point for such a discussion could be Parker’s (2003, p.71) written guidelines, articulating the increasing levels of team authority over particular tasks or responsibilities. This recommendation is made, acknowledging Neilson et al.’s (2005) observation that not all possible decisions can be identified in advance.

As noted above, EPL has generally designed effective team sizes. Although Parker (2003) suggests that it can be appealing to include more members for cross-functional teams, the drawbacks of the resulting unwieldy group far outweigh the benefits. EPL will be pulling together a Business Plan development team in the coming months. In light of the dissatisfaction with the 2006-2009 team, consideration ought to be given to smaller team complement, while at the same time identifying mechanisms to ensure that leaders who may not at the table have the opportunity to contribute, both from their respective functional areas and in cross-functional settings.

EPL's teams do not generally have the "dense linkages within and outside the firm" which Ancona et al. advocate (2009, p. M6-9). "Improving knowledge work requires designing the organization to enable and foster lateral integration" (Mohrman et al., 1995, p.23). Although there certainly are linkages in place, as well as some joint planning, coordination and communication mechanisms, further analysis of team boundary management strategies is called for in order to improve coordination and increase buy-in for new initiatives and foster appreciation and understanding of existing activities. One area for improvement is the communication from the Executive Team, given the perception that has become isolated with little information sharing with those outside of the team. Consideration could be given to expanding cross-functional representation on teams, such as the Learning and Development team.

The literature is quite clear about the value of formal evaluation and recognition of team performance. It is recommended that the goal-setting and reporting system introduced by the Public Services Leadership team be introduced across all organizational teams. It is further

recommended that formal recognition of team performance, such as a special team award, be integrated into the new EPL Recognition Program.

Together with emphasis on cross-functional planning and decision-making, one can expect increased conflict, as noted by Ancona et al. (2009). If one agrees that this diversity is valuable, then support for those who are leading or members of cross-functional teams is required. EPL has considered interest-based problem-solving as its preferred method of dispute resolution. It has been over ten years since training in this approach was presented to managers and staff. A place to start would be to build these dispute resolution skills within teams. It is recommended that a learning program for teams be developed for implementation beginning in 2011, providing support for and developing skills of teams and team leaders in the following areas: team building, conflict management and building consensus, creating a trusting environment, how to inspire as a leader, facilitation, coaching and meeting management.

One final recommendation is made with respect to a specific EPL team. Although the decline of the Learning and Development Team has been recognized by several team members, as well as others outside of the team, an assessment of this team using the effectiveness factors identified in the literature clearly demonstrates that the current situation is untenable and immediate action is required. The EPL Learning and Development Policy (2007) states: "The Edmonton Public Library understands that to have a staff of learners is to keep in the forefront of the knowledge industry and is essential to quality customer service." By clearly aligning the role of the team to EPL's new strategic and business plans and by redesigning the team's structure and operations, the Learning and Development Team will be in a much stronger position to support the organization's future learning needs.

## Conclusion

This paper provides an in-depth look at the evolution in the organizational structure of the Edmonton Public Library since 1990 and its use of teams over the last twenty years. The conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of teams may serve as a tool for use by other public libraries. Research which applies management theory to public library organizational structures and use of teams is limited and this study of the Edmonton Public Library will extend the work of theorists within and outside of the library field by applying their principles and theories within a large and very successful urban public library in 2010.

“Most organizations, moving to a team-based design are trying to flatten and simplify their structures, reduce costs and streamline decision making” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p.140). Although teams, both standing and ad hoc, have been used extensively throughout the last twenty years at EPL, they have operated within a fundamentally hierarchical structure. EPL is therefore best described as “a functional organization with overlay teams” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p.44/45). Although EPL teams do not generally serve as the primary unit of work, as in team-based organizational structures, they are nevertheless effective coordinating mechanisms and liaison devices as described by Mintzberg (1989). Management theorists suggest that the nature of knowledge organizations requires superb coordination and collaboration across the organization and consideration of structures other than functional or divisional silos. By taking a close look at the experience of one large urban public library, this study has demonstrated how teams enable increased participation by staff in decision-making and foster innovative solutions, increased efficiency and creative approaches to the challenges presented in today’s environment.

## Appendix A: Evolution of EPL's Use of Teams Interview Protocol

What EPL teams have you participated on? What was your role on these teams?

### Roles and Goals

- 1) Please describe the purpose of these teams within EPL.
- 2) Have these teams had formal terms of reference? If so, what input did you or other team members have into the terms of reference? How helpful (unhelpful) were these?
- 3) Are/were the roles of your teams clear to you?  
Do you believe that team members are/were clear about their own roles? Others' roles?
- 4) What is/has been the link between your teams' mandates and EPL's strategic/business plan goals?
- 5) How were the specific goals of your teams established?
- 6) To what extent do you believe that these are/were shared (or not) by all team members?

### Empowerment

- 1) What authority have your teams had to act or to make decisions?
- 2) What impact has this authority had on team activities or performance?
- 3) How and when has this posed challenges?

### Team Design/Structure

- 1) Size:
  - a) How would you describe the size of the teams you have participated on?
  - b) How specifically has the size of these teams affected the team's performance?
- 2) Composition: How were members selected?
  - a) What impact did this selection process have on the team performance?
  - b) How were the responsibilities of the various team members determined?
  - c) How would you describe the membership model in place on your teams? Static (specific terms for all individuals) or Flexible (members coming and going during the 'life' of the team)? How has this helped or hindered the work of the team?
- c) Leadership:
  - a) Have you participated on teams with a formal sponsor? What role did this person play? How has the role supported (or not) the team? (If you are a sponsor, what role do you play? Do you have a sense of the response to your role?)
  - b) Have your teams had a designated leader? How was this person selected and what role did he or she play? How has the leader selection process and specifically the leader's role impacted the effectiveness of the team? What constitutes effectiveness?
  - c) What informal leadership roles have others played and how has this affected the team?
- d) Resources:
  - a) To what extent have the necessary resources been available for your teams to succeed? Which resources have been adequate? Which have been inadequate?
  - b) How have you or your team addressed issues concerning the availability of resources?

### **Team Operations**

Looking at EPL team performance and your own participation as a team member or leader, how would you assess the following aspects of team operations?

- 1) Meeting frequency and location
- 2) Decision-making within the team
- 3) Communication within the team; Conflict management
- 4) Atmosphere: Trust; Confidence; Openness

### **Boundary Management**

Please describe interactions with those outside of the teams (in terms of communication, information-sharing, information-gathering, influencing, membership overlap and interdependencies) and the impact of these on your teams:

- 1) Senior management (Executive, Directors)
- 2) Other teams within EPL
- 3) Other service point/divisions within EPL
- 4) Others outside of EPL

What issues outside of the teams have impacted the team's ability to perform? What actions by you, the team leader or others are or have been taken to mitigate these issues?

### **Performance Appraisal, Reward and Recognition**

How has your participation on teams been:

- a) Evaluated formally (e.g. in your annual performance appraisal) or informally?
- b) Recognized or rewarded formally and informally?

How has the work of your team been:

- a) Evaluated formally or informally?
- b) Recognized or rewarded formally or informally?
- c) How do you feel about the level and type of recognition?

### **Learning**

How would you describe team learning:

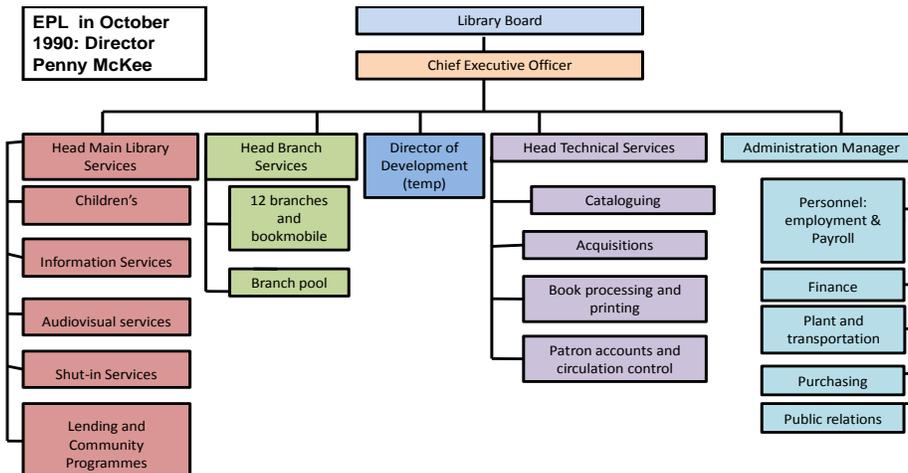
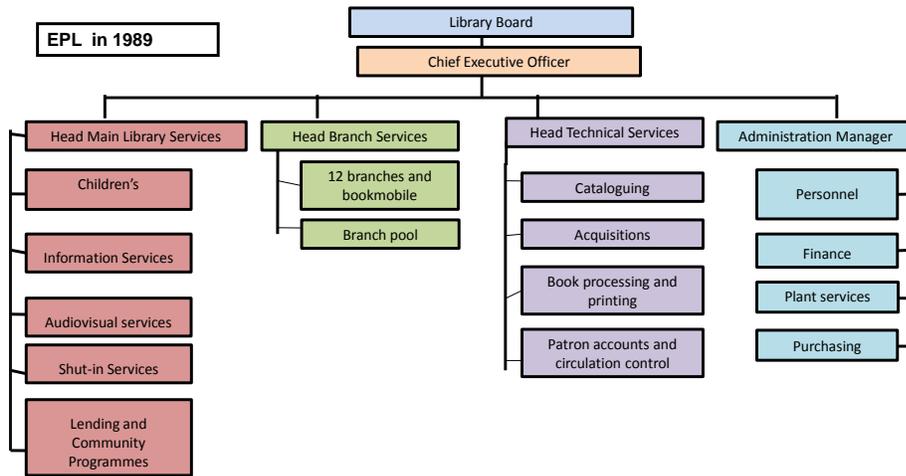
- a) What learning has taken place within your teams?
- b) How has this learning taken place? (formal training? other?)
- c) How has the learning in your team been documented or saved?
- d) How has this learning been shared with others?

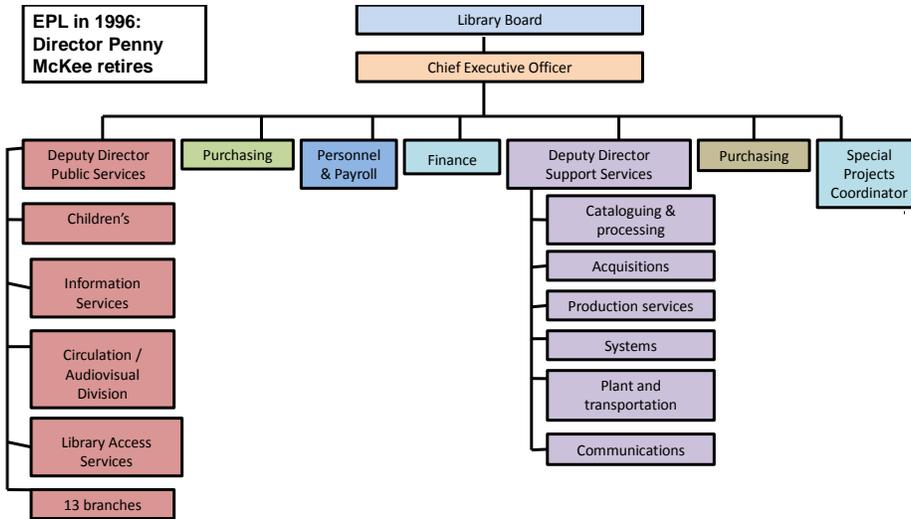
What have you learned or are you learning as member of the team? personally? skills? about teamwork?

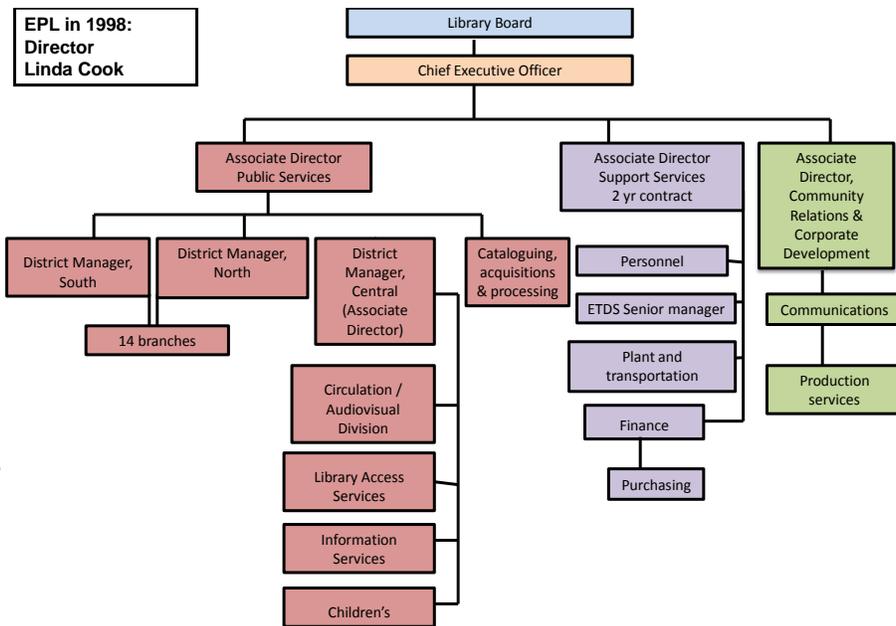
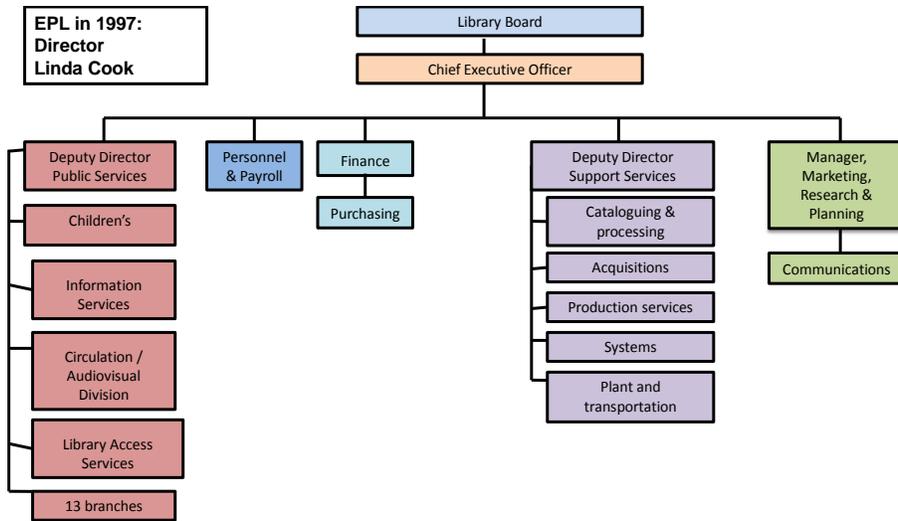
**General Comments Regarding EPL Teams**

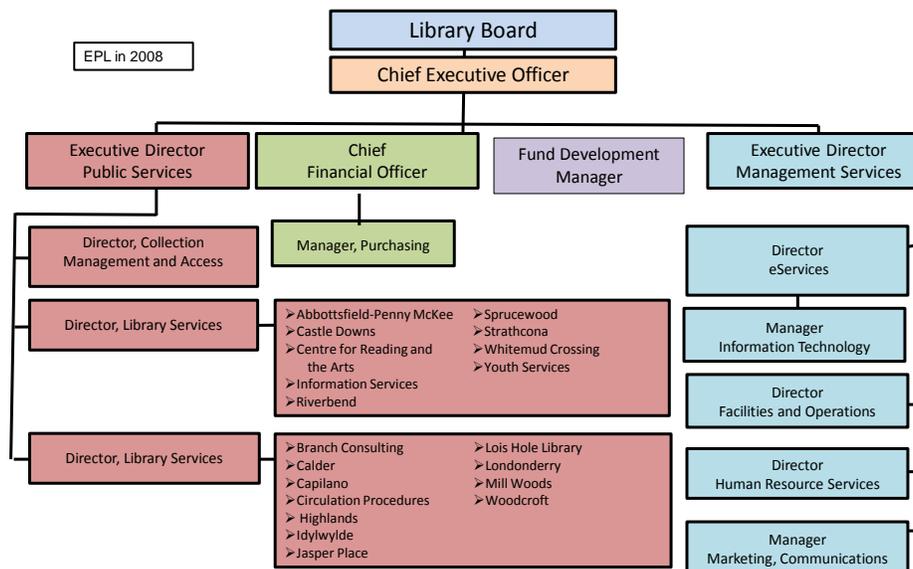
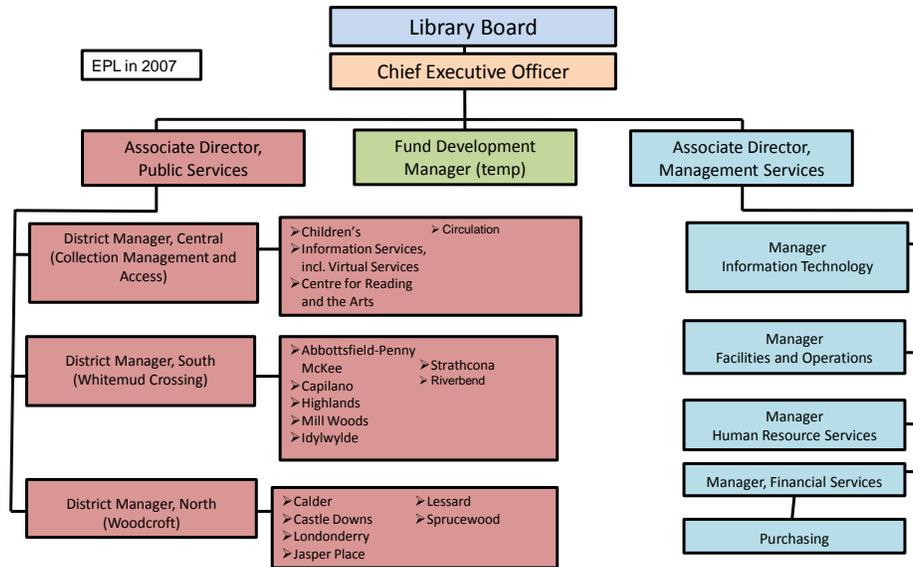
- 1) Of the teams you have participated on, what would you say makes some work well and what causes others not to work well?
- 2) We have been talking about your experience on teams here at EPL including what has worked/what has not/how these could be improved. Is there anything that we have not talked about which you feel is important to a good understanding of teams in EPL?
- 3) What suggestions do you have to make EPL teams work better or evolving EPL's team structure into the future?

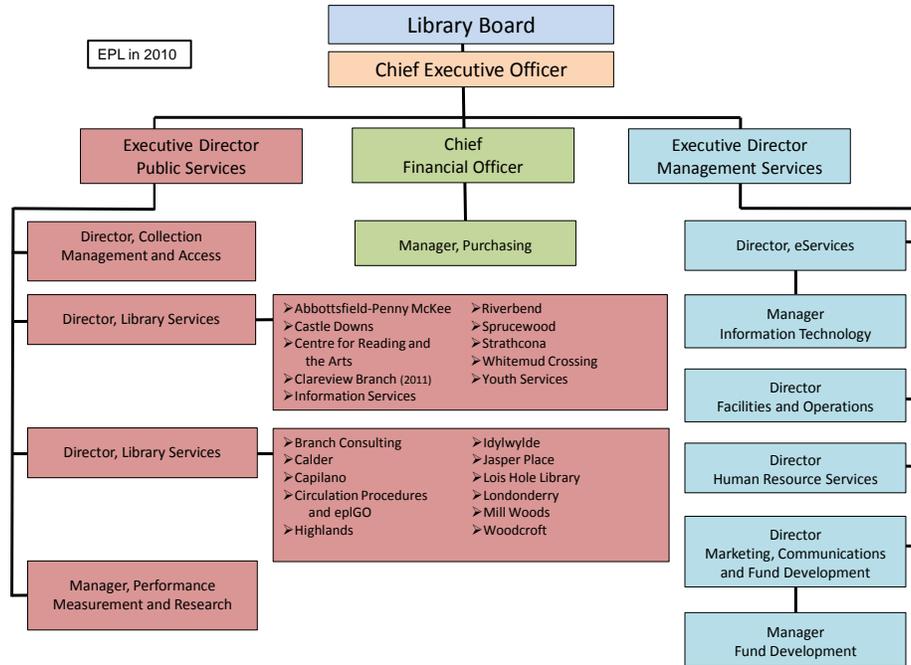
## Appendix B: Selected EPL Organization Charts: 1989 – 2010











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