Panning for the Future:
An Exercise in Teamwork

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Abstract

These days, budgetary crises, increased user expectations, and growing workloads create challenges for library staff to continually do more with less. Collaboration, within and between libraries, is essential for moving forward without compromising quality of the services we offer. In the form of teamwork, collaboration enables libraries to progress by consolidating processes and practices, streamlining existing workflows, and taking advantage of innovative technology. We will examine teamwork from two different approaches: a general one of many libraries working together in a consortium, and the other specifically focusing on a single library department in their quest to reorganize.

The Current Climate

Libraries today are in varying stages of crises, brought on primarily by the current dire economic circumstances of library budgets. Library collections budgets have been cut and many libraries expect additional cuts over the next few years as they lose funding and personnel. Library positions are being eliminated when vacancies are left open, positions are cut altogether, or staff are shifted to other areas. Some libraries faced layoffs, and many that hitherto escaped layoffs are now at risk. Even libraries that realized significant savings by furloughing employees one or two days each month are concerned that the action was not sufficient. As so many libraries face this demanding environment, it is essential for their survival that they take advantage of the possibilities that remain and that they create new opportunities wherever possible.

Along with the grim budget situation, there are also new goals to strive for in the delivery of information to our users. While users want access to traditional materials and library services, they also want electronic resources. In fact, whatever e-journals, e-books, and databases a library currently offers, their users want more. Digital collections and Electronic Resources Management Systems (ERMS) are a part of the library vernacular, but development in these areas tends to be slow within a library unless they have a specialist on staff. New formats and collections bring a greater complexity to our work, which results in changing workflows and workloads. For example, title management and the collection and evaluation of usage statistics of e-journal packages is performed completely differently from those same duties associated with print journals.

Exploring the Library Consortium

In dealing with this plethora of changes and challenges, no one library or librarian stands alone. Teamwork within a library is an effective and vital approach, but collaborative efforts

yield success likewise when libraries band together. Just as people thrive in communities, there are library communities to help us forge ahead. Specifically, libraries participating in one or more consortia access not only consolidate purchasing power, but also the additional benefits of group affiliation.

For acquisitions, a consortium offers support beyond the machinations of purchasing resources. While consortium-negotiated pricing enables a materials budget to go a bit further, consolidated billing helps libraries with shrinking staff or staff who are already stretched in their duties. Fewer invoices to process means less work for libraries, particularly if they must double-enter vendor records and invoices into an institutional accounting system as well as their own Integrated Library System (ILS). A consortium regularly deals with the many publishers and distributors whose products they offer, so they offer one point of contact (the consortial service representative) for libraries with any billing or access issues. A library can call or email its consortium rather than individual vendors to resolve problems, and a relationship develops between the library and consortium staff. By extension, consortium staff receive feedback from their member libraries on the products and services they offer, enabling them to address chronic issues experienced by more than one member library.

In communicating with vendors, this leverage in numbers works not only for negotiating pricing and licensing terms, but also in developing better products and services offered by vendors. These services can include the gathering and evaluation of usage statistics, electronic resource management (ERM), title management of e-journal packages, and product trials and training. Vendors are tapping into consortial membership by beta testing new developments, standards, resource sharing services, and discovery tools with subsets of member libraries. As agents see their print subscriptions subside, they look towards consortia and their member libraries to lend direction to their title management and ERM activities.

Some consortia are also partnering in the development of new resources, technologies, and emerging standards. But these types of activities should be directed by the input of consortium members, primarily by their board of directors and various committees. From the directors who sit on the consortium board to the individual librarians who serve on committees to those who monitor postings on the consortium listservs, consortium members offer each other often helpful and sometimes very creative ideas. For example, product exploration committees are comprised of interested staff from member libraries as well as consortium staff; therefore, products are evaluated with the commonalities of member libraries of a consortium in mind. A consortium may also offer webinars, conferences, meetings, tutorials, and classes for members, in addition to forums for communication. Finally, a consortium can directly support its members by offering grants, scholarships, and travel support for members to meetings and conferences.

For many, networking with their counterparts in other libraries is an essential benefit of consortial membership. Faced with a challenge, a librarian can tap into a network of similar libraries for discussing opinions and options. This support system is apparent also in reciprocal borrowing, interlibrary loan, digital repository projects, and shared depositories for print and media materials.

A consortium promotes cooperation amongst its members and with vendors through events, webinars, and training, as well as the consortium offers put out to its members. The Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC) holds an annual Colloquium and Vendor Day. Colloquium showcases issues in electronic resources, often including member librarians as speakers. This year, Colloquium was streamed live so that those who could not attend in person could still participate. Vendor Day is held in conjunction with Colloquium and affords member

libraries the opportunity to see vendor demonstrations and meet with representatives who focus on the consortium members' particular interests. And it is another opportunity for member librarians to gather and exchange their concerns, issues, and ideas with one another.

One Library's Venture

When old practices cannot survive weakening budgets, it is time to dig into the layers of established procedures and see how they stand the test of relevance. Although behind the scenes, Technical Services (TS) plays a vital role in the expenditure of a library's materials and personnel budgets. TS at California State University Northridge (CSUN) Oviatt Library undertook a study and discovered a not-so-gold mine of superfluous traditions, outdated mechanisms, and a noticeable lag behind the times. The discovery led to the re-organization of the department, the re-design of existing workflows, and the introduction of innovative technology.

CSUN is located in Southern California, and serves a student population of nearly 36,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The Oviatt Library collection contains of 1.4 million volumes, 150,000 e-books, 57,000 e-journals, and 120 A&I and full-text databases. Currently, the Technical Services department consists of three units: Acquisitions & Materials Processing (five full time staff and five students), Cataloging / Database Maintenance (1.5 librarian positions, and nine staff), and Electronic Resources (one librarian and one staff).

The process of change started at a natural point when the new Cataloging Coordinator, Helen Heinrich, began her job by conducting an audit of the Cataloging Unit's workflow and staff responsibilities. It became clear rather quickly that legacy procedures did not respond well to the pressures of the current environment. A large number of existing procedures could not be rationalized, and staff themselves had suggestions for streamlining cataloging practices. Consequently, copy-cataloging procedures were revised and the resulting changes made a dramatic impact on the productivity of the unit. By eliminating such steps as shelf-listing, unessential editing of bibliographic records, and excessive verification of the item's physical description, productivity increased by 50% in just one month. Consequently, a three month backlog was also eliminated within that time.

Impressed with the results, Oviatt Library's Administration requested that the workflow study be extended to the entire Technical Services (TS) department. In order to conduct a thorough review of existing practices, a Reorganization Committee was formed, consisting of unit supervisors and key personnel, with Helen Heinrich appointed as Chair. Creating a committee that represented all veins of TS processes helped to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together. Once the big picture emerged, the team was able to identify the hot spots of duplication, loss of traction and other inefficiencies. In conjunction with the internal examination, the committee conducted an external review by surveying outside factors that affected daily routines, such as changes in the auditing regulations, and advances in technology and its local utilization. The committee also conducted a cost analysis of cataloging and materials processing. The results helped to determine that subscribing to vendor shelf-ready services shortens the turnaround between receiving books and getting them out to the shelves. Through shelf-ready implementation, service to the user would improve without increasing the cost of processing.

The review process aimed to make operations lean through the elimination of duplication, the discontinuation of needless tasks, and the adjustment of quality standards to a new reality by modifying local procedures and implementing PromptCat service. By applying the principle of low-hanging fruit, the committee focused on changes that were easy to make but that yielded big

results. The staff-related changes entailed cross-training, leveraging of staff expertise, and pegging it to the optimal task level, minimizing the number of times an item is passed between people, and providing training in making better use of ILS functionalities. A large part of the resulting improvements in efficiency came from the technology side. The innovations ranged from adjusting loaders and pre-populating constant data to purchasing an EDIFACT module and implementing electronic invoicing. It was very important for the team to ensure that changes percolated through the entire material receipt-to-shelf cycle. For example, the time savings achieved through automated cataloging and shelf-ready services could not be lost in the shelving and processing queue. Therefore, the processing procedures for materials not covered by full shelf-ready treatment were adjusted to expedite the movement of materials.

However, the reorganization project did not face its biggest challenge in the areas of workflow or technology improvements. The difficulty came from the personnel side. There was a persistent resistance to change. Looking back to the lessons learned, this lack of staff buy-in to the reorganization had its reasons. First and foremost, the issue of job security was looming large in everybody's mind. Perhaps realizing it from the get-go would have saved the team leader quite a bit of frustration. And since Helen Heinrich was new to the organization, there was no established trust between her and employees; it had to be earned over time. For some, insecurity in their skills and ability to learn, especially in relation to new technological processes, sapped an interest in optimization. And then, of course, there were career "coasters" who did not want to be bothered with learning or attempting anything new.

 A more general personnel factor that may impede such reorganization process at CSUN and other libraries is staff longevity. Libraries, and perhaps more specifically TS, are known for the longevity and low turnover of their personnel. There are certainly some positives about it: collective knowledge and experience, no need for training, and job and workflow stability. But, longevity also brings some challenges. A study conducted by Getzler & Company, a consulting firm in New York, found "that low employee turnover at many companies may cause a lack of creativity, stale management and failure to adapt to changing times."[1] What that means is that, even with developing technology, CSUN's TS staff still followed the policies, processes and procedures conceived long time ago because that was what they knew. New tasks were added to the old ones, instead of replacing them. The stability and hum-drum of everyday work does not provide an incentive to look in a new direction. The study by Getzler & Company mentioned earlier cites a manufacturer who "bought an expensive software package to improve its operations, but failed to use it because middle management was comfortable with the existing system." Even when resources are cut, TS often accumulates backlogs or tries to work faster to accomplish the same amount of work rather than editing procedures and using innovations to do more in less time.

Reorganization takes a long time because it requires not only workflow changes but also a shift in mentality. In order to keep the change constant, the responsibility for introducing efficiencies and for knowing about new processes and technologies should be in one person's job description. Someone has to attend conferences, subscribe to the online lists and read current articles to avoid stagnation and the perpetuation of outdated practices. A librarian may be tasked with this, as librarians are more likely to receive support for professional development. It is

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[1] Meece, M. (2000, Dec 3). Does staff turnover help a company? *The New York Times,* BU10. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/03/business/personal-business-diary-does-staff-turnover-help-a-company.html

unlikely that the innovation would come from the ground up; therefore, any such process should have its champion, advocating the freshness of ideas. Another important factor in the success of restructuring and re-engineering is to collaborate with vendors and consortia. In the case of CSUN, vendors made changes in their portals to accommodate library's requests, revised data output, came to CSUN for staff training, and maintained consistent email communication. Implementation of any change is a slow process and having your partners facilitate those changes for you makes a dramatic difference. The same benefits apply to the power of consortia, which was addressed in the paper earlier on.