LIS 770 Management of Libraries and Information Centers

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Promoting and Implementing Technology Training in a Public Library

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“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” – Charles Darwin.

To remain relevant and necessary, library leaders have recognized the need to embrace the digital and online transformation. With this acceptance of technology comes the responsibility of educating and training library staff. Libraries and librarians must adapt to the technology world to ensure that libraries maintain an integral part in their communities and remain committed to education, equity, and access to information.

Why should libraries invest staff time and budget on technology training? Libraries must provide the best possible customer service to their patrons. This includes excellent technology services. A well-trained staff performs services at a higher level of proficiency, which will in turn, save the library money. The line between what is real and what is virtual is fading. People now interact and connect to each other using technology, versus having face-to-face interactions. The role of the librarian has expanded into virtual space. Librarians must know what kinds of resources are appropriate for patrons’ questions, how to evaluate the resources they find, and how to help the patron find and evaluate their own resources. “We need to give ourselves courage to be innovative. It means not just getting out of the box but getting rid of that damn box and getting out of our comfort zone.”

Many employees complain about training – especially mandatory training. Training must be linked both to what the employees want to learn and what they need to know. Library management must assess what technology skills are needed. This can be done by asking employees, their supervisors, and the patrons of the library. Library management must effectively consider employees’ strengths, interests, job fit, and development needs while deploying training in order to create employee satisfaction and a positive response to

professional development. “The fact that most libraries still have staff today who are not comfortable operating the programs they use every day in their work, including helping users with the library’s technology offerings, is not only unacceptable but also points to the library’s own failings in training its staff to meet those expectations.” Libraries must avoid technology incompetence or they will become less of a reliable resource in the future. The future patron base is growing up with technology – digital media is becoming their primary source of information. Libraries should be providing information across media platforms that appeal to young patrons. The technology services offered to patrons should not be treated as “extra” work to the library staff. Technology and change are here to stay - libraries’ technology related services can become seamless with adequate training.

Persuading staff members that do not want to learn new technology is a very difficult task. Library management must find ways to motivate individuals to convince them that technology training is a worth-while investment. The training should be focused on using internal motivators versus external motivators. Internal motivation focuses on the individual wanting to increase their own experience and confidence, while external motivation is the individual’s fear of being reprimanded in some manner for not learning. For this reason, employees must be involved in the planning process for technology training. This will aid in getting their buy-in and alleviate surprises as the training progresses. Supervisors and managers must also be supportive of the training programs and be advocates of the training to their staff.

Employees that are resistant to learn must be shown why they should care about training. If they are hostile to learning, one-on-one sessions may be needed. They can be shown how technology can benefit the library and their position, as well as their personal interests. For those

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staff members that still resist training, negative consequences may need to occur. Some people disagree with the library’s technology priorities; have a personal disinterest, or use years of service as excuses for not learning. Personnel policy must clearly state the technology training requirements.

“Staff rewards and incentives can go a long way toward ensuring the measurable impact and success of the training program. And the success of the training program ultimately means the success of the library’s services for its customers.” Learning new skills may be incentive enough for some employees, but not for all. Technological competencies must be incorporated into annual goals and expectations. Staff members will be more motivated if their training and technical knowledge becomes part of their annual performance evaluation.

Some other ways to motivate individuals include:

- Classes count toward formal continuing education credits
- Participation or measurable functional skill level improvements can lead to pay increases or one-time bonuses
- Skill level improvement could lead to promotional opportunities or a move to a different position
- Small ways – diplomas, small prizes, raffles (for small electronic devices)

Both library management and employees are responsible for the library staff becoming technology adept. Poor performance must be addressed to ensure that the library’s reputation in the community does not suffer. “Without changing our patterns of thought, we will not be able to solve the problems that we created with our current patterns of thought.” – Albert Einstein.

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Resistance to training can occur for various reasons:

- Time invested in the status quo
- Employees don’t understand or disagree with the need to change
- The staff is not well-informed regarding the training and the expectations
- Skepticism that the training will be successful
- Individuals may feel threatened (change in current habits and job security)
- Lack of self-confidence that they can learn
- Employees may feel pressured and nervous
- The pacing of the training may either be too slow or too fast
- Employees may want to stay in the same position forever
- It may be difficult to let go of “the way things have always been done”

Resistance must be recognized, valued, and managed. Library management must try to minimize the impact of resistance through communication, planning, understanding, and problem solving.

“A status quo attitude in times of universal change can render stagnation, and stagnation condemns organizations to obsolescence.” 4 The current world of changing technology, customer needs, and knowledge-intense climates requires libraries to create a collaborative and cooperative culture throughout all levels of the organization. Sharing knowledge, team building, focusing on customer requirements, and a collective responsibility to customer service, will help convert resistance into a commitment to embrace change and foster an environment of training and life-long learning.

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“In the past, a library’s value could be defined by the information it held. More recently, however, in an age of readily and abundantly available digital information, the truly successful library is one that has the human capital on hand to guide users through the process of gaining value from relevant information by filtering and applying data to the question or problem at hand.”

Access to electronic information, services, and networks is one of the American Library Association’s Bills Of Rights. Librarians must be trained with the skills to support this statement. Theses skills include - regardless of the format or technology:

- Selecting Information
- Producing Information
- Providing Access to Information
- Identifying Information
- Retrieving Information
- Organizing Information
- Providing Instruction to the use of Information
- Preservation of Information

Libraries must have a written technology training plan. The plan should be written in such a way that the staff knows that technology skills can be a moving target – that the plan may need to be modified as new technology, resources, and services are introduced. The training needs to be prioritized based on the following: customer demand, organizational goals, training usefulness, and consequences of lack of training. The technology training plan should include:

- A purpose statement
- An assessment of the staff’s current skills

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• An evaluation of the library’s learning environment
• Goals
• Budget
• The training and learning methods
• Criteria for evaluating training and measuring improved skills sets at certain time periods throughout the year

Effective trainers must encourage class participation and treat the training as a collaborative project. Trainers can either be in-house employees, or external individuals.

Training materials should be both audio/visual and hands-on. Real-world examples must be demonstrated and on-line resources (with up-to-date information) must be provided. Exploration of the technology being learned must be encouraged. Tips and tricks for ease of use should be introduced.

A great training event could be a setting with multiple technologies for staff to experiment with and learn their functions. This hands-on experience should include technologies that staff members will be using in their jobs and those that the library uses to promote the library and its programs, as well as technologies that the users of the library are employing in their use of the library services and resources. For each technology demonstrated, materials should be provided that include manuals, resource guides, cheat sheets, recommended books and articles, and web sites for more information. Some of the demonstrated technologies should include eBooks and eAudiobooks, RSS and feed readers, digital photography (such as Flickr), podcasting, video sharing (such as YouTube), instant messaging, gaming, open source software (such as Google Docs), online marketing (such as iGoogle or Yelp), blogs, and wikis. To
support this event, libraries may be able to borrow some of the items from local retailers as a donation to the library.

Training can be done in-house or at an off-site location. Training may be done individually versus in a group setting. On-line training should also be considered, but must be devised in such a way that employees can track their progress. Webinars, webcasts, electronic resource vendors, blogs, discussion boards, and listservs are all electronic methods of learning.

Librarians should also possess skills in social networking. The library can use social networking sites to implement and promote library services, as well as use information gathered from users of the sites. Training regarding social networking sites should include: interacting with patrons within the sites, understanding and articulating the nature of the sites, understanding the library’s potential roles, creating presence and content, evaluating and applying information, and being able to help patrons acquire and apply these same skills.

Internal blogs can also aid in training. Blogs form a communication tool accessible to all library employees. Blogs can keep employees up-to-date on what is going on within their departments, as well as other departments. Types of blogs used for internal communication include:

- Weeding – stating what has been removed from the library and why
- Training – a place to reinforce completed training and to discuss upcoming training and future training ideas
- Acquisitions – explaining buying decisions and reasons for delayed purchases
- Professional Development – a placed for staff to share what they have learned at conferences, seminars, courses, or from personal readings
Creating blogs can be a training session. Maintaining the internal blogs must be a task for all employees, which will reinforce and utilize what they have learned.

With technology, more public libraries are hiring employees that are not librarians—people that have different knowledge and skill sets. Many librarians have hired employees with experience in systems and networks to maintain and enhance computer systems, to train other staff members, to stay current in technologies, and to make recommendations for future technology needs. This can cause changes within the culture of the library; as well as resentment due to compensation differences. Other changes within the library may occur, such as automated vendor acquisitions and patron initiated service systems (such as self-checkout). All changes must be communicated and introduced in a positive manner to ensure success and staff support. Library management must create a culture of learning and set clear expectations. Job descriptions must be accurate and up-to-date. The benefits of technology related training, positions, and services must be communicated in terms of both benefits and budget.

Planned change encourages all employees within an organization to buy into the process and commit to it. Change efforts are successful if all personnel join together in strategic thinking and technology investment choices. Proactive change recognizes the need for change and sets the stage for the planning, initiating, and evaluating its impact. A positive process requires trust and participation by all. An environment that fosters change includes good communication, promotes staff morale and teambuilding, includes conflict management, and accountability for controlling and implementing the changes. A learning organization is marked by a team-based culture, open flows of information, empowered employees, and decentralized decision making. “Learning organizations have become adept at translating new knowledge into new ways of behaving. The move toward learning organizations brings with it an emphasis on continuous
growth and training.” No library is exempt from change – to remain up-to-date librarians have not choice but to continue to learn.

With technology, new problems of digital organization and preservation will become an important part of the librarian’s job. The library is becoming more complex – librarian must be trained to navigate the information metadata. “…libraries and librarians will remain relevant for the lover of physical books while serving as gateways to and guides through the new technology of “living” books that change and evolve.” Continuous technology training is needed:

- To support changes from the traditional information formats
- To support the changes in landscape of information access and use
- To redefine library procedures, services, and roles of the library staff
- To maintain a collaborative environment

Libraries must evolve into institutions that provide pathways to high-quality information – moving beyond the old mindset of ownership and control to one that seeks to provide service and guidance in a meaningful and useful manner. “Libraries and librarians will have a role to play in harnessing technological advances and the proliferation of information, creating from them a portal – both digital and physical – through which users can enter and find their way to accessible, credible, and vital knowledge.” The professional librarian will evolve in a way that meshes with 21st century informational, educational, and technological environments.

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Technology is ever-changing, and to succeed libraries must accept and thrive on change. To maintain their positions as knowledge centers in their communities, libraries ongoing learning must become a priority and incorporated into the job responsibilities of their staff. Creating a learning institution can lead to recruiting highly skilled individuals and can increase staff retention rates. Confidence and excitement are infectious – proper training helps spread these feelings throughout the library. Do not let your library become complacent and let things continue as they always have. “We are not in our jobs to maintain the comfort level of the staff or a board or administration that does not want change. Hire and work with those who are willing to be courageous and confident and help them get there. Become organizations that are user-centric.”

The values of the library remain the same – promoting literacy and reading, accessing, assessing, and getting information to their customers - but the strategies and patron relationships have changed. Try new things. Push the boundaries. Take chances. Break with the past. Make a difference.

It is my opinion that most public libraries are not promoting the technology training necessary to succeed in the future in an efficient manner that will be most valuable to their patrons. Training in technology is not mandated – it is not discouraged either – but it is not offered or marketed openly. Many librarians are not properly trained, particularly now that a growing number of employees are part-time. Part-time employees are often not available for in-house training or employee meetings. They are often over-looked when full-time employees are instructed on new technology introduced to the library – they must learn on the fly. Libraries also are increasing their use of volunteer workers. Although they do not perform the role of the librarian, their training of the library’s technology is repeatedly overlooked, causing errors in the

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responsibilities they are performing. The public library must get on board with technology training. Well-trained employees will be equipped to use technology to its full potential, thus preserving the library’s future as an integral part of their community.
Bibliography


