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Assignment 1
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**READINGS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT:
TECHNOLOGY & LIBRARY STAFF**

Effects of Technology on Staff

Lancaster, F.W., & Sandore, B. (1997). Effects of technology on library staff (chap. 3). In *Technology and Management in Library and Information Services*. Champaign, IL.: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

This chapter of *Technology and Management in Library and Information Services* addresses how the introduction of new technology may affect library staff. While this book talks about the phenomenon within the context of automation of cataloging and the introduction of subscription databases to libraries, the general principles are still applicable today. The chapter covers aspects such as the demands placed on staff, changes in the skills required to complete tasks, training and fear of technology (p. 13).

The authors address several topics useful for library managers to consider. For example, they point out that the introduction of new technology often brings with it hidden demands that may not be apparent until after the fact. They give the example of a reference librarian who not only must learn to search new databases, but must be able to teach patrons how to search them (p. 14). This tension can be applied in many other situations—new computers or a new OPAC will require that the staff train both themselves and the patrons. These hidden demands on staff affect both the amount of time they have to devote to their other responsibilities, as well as their stress levels.

The authors point out that, while some employees welcome changes in technology, others may fear the unknown—a new OPAC or database, or a new type of computer being added to the

library. This can be addressed by making sure that all employees have a chance to see and explore the new addition before it is installed. Visiting a library that is using the technology (p. 23) or conducting small workshops with trial versions of software may help anxious staff members feel more at ease.

Another tension to consider is that between staff with vastly differing levels of technological know-how. Some staff may be afraid to take on new work on the computer—they fear they will accidentally erase an important file, or otherwise damage the computer or software. Others may grumble at having to sit through a staff meeting with time devoted to explaining how to complete tasks they consider basic. The only way to truly assuage these fears is by developing a well-thought out training program, that addresses the needs of staff who are uncomfortable with computers as well as those who are tech-savvy.

There were several important topics that this chapter did not address. How do you strike a balance between providing enough training and continuing to serve patrons at the same level? How does a manager deal with employees who are resistant to new technology, or convinced that any change will create a huge inconvenience for library staff? While the authors do note that it is important to make sure that all employees are comfortable with new technologies, they do not focus their discussion on how to go about doing so. However, a little bit of searching will produce a fair amount of information on training programs.

Designing a Training Program #1

Cuddy, C. & Medeiros, T. S. (2002). Designing a Library Staff Computer Training Program: Implementation of Core Competencies [Electronic version]. *Information Technology in Libraries*, 21(2), 87-90.

This article outlines the steps taken by a medical library to design and implement an “ongoing, mandatory, formal training program for all library staff” (p. 87). It first outlines the steps taken by the program planners, who reviewed pertinent literature and adopted an existing model for their program. Next they used a variety of methods to gather information to determine what areas and topics would be most useful for the staff in their library. These methods included review of e-mails sent to the computer support team, logs kept near the public access computers, and interviewing and observing staff in action. The authors note that, though the computer skills of the staff varied greatly, the courses covered basic topics and material, but were designed to be fast-paced so those who already understood the topic at hand would not be bored.

One of the most useful notes in this article was that the planners kept the training goals simple: to help staff learn how to troubleshoot their own problems before calling for support, and to improve the service provided to patrons using the public access computers. These two goals tie together nicely, as library employees who can troubleshoot their own problems can transfer those skills to the public access computers when necessary.

In addition, the explanation of the data-gathering phase was useful as a starting point for a manager looking to plan a similar program. This is the most important, and most difficult, phase of developing a training program, and the program’s planners were thorough without going overboard. They realized that monitoring e-mails sent to the computer support department would not catch every computer-related question from a patron, so they kept a log at the information desk for a short time. Finally, they interviewed and observed library staff using computers, though they did note that it is difficult to get good information using these methods.

This article, though brief, was packed with good information. However, it left me wanting more details on how the planners went about developing the individual course modules.

Were there particular resources they found helpful? Did they rely heavily on their own knowledge? Did they reach out to the institution that houses them, or to the community at large?

Also, it seems that they did not utilize the talents of staff who already possessed some of the skills being covered. Rather than forcing these employees to take courses covering material they already understand, I think it would be more useful to put them to work. They could help develop parts of the course modules or perhaps act as tutors to staff for whom the material was brand-new.

Designing a Training Program #2

Waterhouse, J. (2005). Technology Training Can Be a Piece of Cake [Electronic version]. *Computes in Libraries*, 25(8), 16-18, 20-21.

This article also focuses on creating a computer training program for library staff, but this particular program was designed differently. The training program was broken into four areas: basic computers (including hardware), basic network skills (Internet, etc.), software and databases, and task-based training. The author's goal for each section was "to present simple content and relate it to everyday examples from work or home" (p. 16), an approach that takes abstract concepts and grounds them in employees' reality. This article focuses more on the content of each course module than it does on the overall structure of the training program, thus providing a useful counterpoint to the piece by Cuddy and Medeiros.

The author presents a lot of useful ideas for material to include in each of the courses. She had the students handle actual pieces of computer hardware as she spoke about them, a practice that turns an abstract concept into something real. For the task-based training, she procured laptops for the students to use, enabling them to work along with her. In addition, each course included a review of what came before, and she repeatedly states that she kept the

concepts simple. In addition, Waterhouse notes when she used resources other than her own knowledge, and names them in the article—a useful starting point for library managers who want to implement a program similar to this one.

This article does leave some questions unanswered. For example, Waterhouse does not address how she determined what material needed to be covered in her particular library. As the information technology librarian at her library, she was probably the first stop for any technology-related problems or questions, but she does not note whether or not she used any formal mechanism to gather information, other than a meeting to which she invited several other employees and managers.

Toward the end of the piece, Waterhouse mentions that some employees seemed confused during the courses, and others acted as though they did not want to be in attendance because they already knew the material. However, she does not explain how she addressed either of these problems. It would be helpful to know whether or not she spent extra class time on concepts that confused some employees, or whether she worked with them one-on-one, at another time. In addition, much like the training program designed by Cuddy and Medeiros, she does not seem to have utilized the talents of employees who already had the skills being taught. Again, it seems wasteful to force these staff members to sit through the training when they could perhaps be assisting her in conducting the class or offering tutoring on the topics being covered.

READINGS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT: ASPECTS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Essential Principles of Good Staff Development

Any list of essential principles of staff development should include the following:

- an organizational culture that supports and encourages continuous learning and training

- an expectation that employees at all levels will participate in training and continuing education activities
- a clear explanation to employees of what those expectations are, and what the organization will do to help employees meet them
- time built into each job position for continuing education or training activities
- a requirement that employees who attend off-site conferences or workshops share what they learned in a formal way when they return to work
- a commitment from management to keep tabs on the employees' development activities to ensure that everyone is participating
- regular or ongoing evaluation of staff development policies and expectations, as well as evaluation of off-site programs attended by employees
- a well-executed, thorough annual or quarterly review process for employees and managers

Avery, et al.'s *Staff Development: A Practical Guide* was particularly helpful in developing this answer.

Information & Materials Essential to Staff

Information and materials that are important for staff to have at their fingertips include clear explanations of all of the organizational policies that govern staff development. This may encompass information covering:

- what kinds of activities constitute staff development
- reimbursement policies
- information on local or state institutions that offer library-related programming
- the procedure for procuring coverage at work if necessary, and
- evaluations of programs employees have previously attended

In addition, access to reference and training manuals for library procedures and technology should be kept up-to-date and well-organized, and employees should have easy access to professional journals and newsletters.

Again, Avery, et al.'s *Staff Development* was helpful in developing this section.

Useful Approaches & Programs

A library manager at the beginning of creating or revising a staff development plan should remember that there is more to staff development than internal training classes and

reimbursement for continuing education programs. Some staff development can be conducted on a one-on-one basis by coaching employees. Particularly in a library with a large staff, employees may feel like cogs in the works, and may not understand the role they play outside of the very narrow context of their own day-to-day activities. In this sort of environment, it is easy for an employee to give up and stop working up to his or her full potential. Metz (p. 2) notes that “. . . coaching facilitates the individual’s understanding of the work to be done and his or her part in accomplishing the work. . . . What improves performance is helping people understand what is expected and why and helping them visualize what success looks like.”

Coaching is time-consuming and requires that the coach (in most cases, a supervisor or director) be skilled in facilitating difficult conversations. However, this approach lends itself well to implementation on an as-needed, day-to-day basis. For example, if a coach overhears or is informed about an employee who provides poor customer service to a patron, the coach can simply approach the employee to discuss what happened and help the employee see things from the patron’s point of view. This discussion could lead into a conversation on the library’s goals and benchmarks for customer service, and how the coach can help the employee to meet them and perhaps further develop his or her customer service skills. In addition, coaching has the added bonus of underscoring for employees that library supervisors and managers do care about the employees as people, not just as workers—an important factor in employee levels of morale and job satisfaction.

Particularly helpful in addressing this question were Metz’s *Coaching in the Library* as well as Dickinson’s “A New Look at Job Satisfaction.”

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