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An Examination of Factors

Contributing to the Reorganization of

Technical Services in Mid-Size Libraries

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Abstract

The Technical Services department has historically been an integral part of libraries because of the organization, physical processing, and the maintenance and preservation of the collection. Now the explosion of technology is threatening to change the daily operations of the department and the jobs of the librarians and staff. Some libraries are considering the reorganization of the Technical Services department into other areas of the library. What factors are making directors consider this drastic change when technology is creating new electronic resources to work with?

An Examination of Factors Contributing to the

Reorganization of Technical Services in Mid-Size Libraries

The discussion between librarians and staff concerning the reorganization of Technical Services into other departments of libraries has turned into a heated debate. Many Technical Services librarians are alarmed the reorganization might be responsible for the loss of jobs, poor performance, and different duties. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors which directors of libraries are considering when facing a possible incorporation of the Technical Services department. Some factors being considered are user focus changes, budgetary reasons, location of the library, and the changing operations of Technical Services. This study will help to decipher how these changes that are already taking place in some libraries will affect the operation of libraries and the accessibility of information. The Institutional Review Board for this study is the Head of Technical Services and the Director of the Washburn Law Library where I work. Since this study is work related, no grant is needed.

Research Problem

The Technical Services department has historically been an essential element to a library. This department plays an important role because it prepares materials, including electronic resources, in a timely manner to ensure library information seekers have access to all information.

Recently, some libraries have incorporated Technical Services with other departments of the library like Reference, Circulation, or Public Services, resulting in shrinking staff size, and a restructuring of the processing of materials. This has led me to wonder why libraries are making the decision to terminate this department and how this department is being incorporated into different areas of the library.

Research question

What factors do mid-sized academic libraries consider when making the decision to incorporate Technical Services into other departments?

Interested Parties

This study would be of use to many people because it affects the daily operations of the library. If Technical Services was to be reorganized into different parts of the libraries the system that now functions would be completely altered. The individuals that would be affected by a change like this would be other library directors and board members, librarians and staff working in Technical Services, Technical Services professors at library schools, and the patrons of the library. Directors could use this study to learn from other libraries techniques, Technical Services employees could see what future might hold, and the patrons could use this study to see how the information accessibility might change.

Literature Review

For the literature review, it was important to see how many writers were involved with the incorporation of Technical Services in their libraries. There was not much data on the actual reorganization, but mostly support for why Technical Services is important to the everyday functioning of the library. In further research, it seems that the reorganization is a fairly new concept, although several libraries have already completed the process.

Montoya (1999) explores how important Technical Services is to the functionality of libraries when he states, "Nothing seems more urgent in the field of library administration than news ways of providing access to information" (p. 1). With the information explosion, it seems like Technical Services is needed now more than ever. Montoya believes this department has

much to offer in terms of the profession but that is does have to adapt in order to keep up with the times of electronic resources.

Johnson shows us in her article how Technical Services has changed over the last 35 years. She talks about the department being behind the scenes while the other operations were always part of the front room. Johnson also focuses on a project her library is doing that extends past the regular operations of Technical Services and included making electronic resources accessible. However, Johnson (2006) also says the "ability to manage large and complex projects (often costing tens of thousands of dollars) are stretching the boundaries of traditional technical services" (p. 3). This article was important because it shows that the environment surrounding libraries is changing with the onslaught of electronic information that has to be made available for patrons. Johnson is worried that Technical Services departments have to redefine themselves with a focus on the role of the department and the contribution to the library to make it more effective for the rest of the library.

Bothmann's article is about cataloging e-books. This is not directly related to the subject of Technical Services' reorganization, but it is important in the fact that it is recognizing a need for catalogers in the department. As Bothmann (2004) states, "Cataloging in today's world is focusing more often on access and organization of electronic resources" (p. 12). Cataloging is a vital function in libraries because it gives items a history and a place in a library. Even with this explosion of electronic information, an item, whether on the shelf or on the internet, still has to have some identifying characteristics of the library. Bothmann (2004) examines how "as libraries began purchasing e-books, a whole new set of issues arose for libraries such as licensing, purchasing, and ownership, and, of course, cataloging" (p. 12). Without these catalogers, how would are these resources entered into the system?

Fessler states there is a recurring question of the future of Technical Services in her article. She believes many see no future in the department and fail to understand the important foundations and role of Technical Services. Fessler (2007) raises an important point in her article by stating, "Libraries find themselves operating in a totally new environment, one where they serve as only one source of information, not *the* source of information" (p. 139). This is a testament to the ever-changing environment in which libraries play a part. This is a very important article because it does state the libraries will still need a Technical Services department, but it will have to be renamed and reorganized. Fessler (2007) continues, "What is now called collection management and cataloging will include search engines as major information resources for the library, and technical services will organize results for the client rather than the library" (p. 143).

Taylor's article focuses mainly on the fact there will always be some form of processing to keep Technical Services needed. In this article, she wonders with all the electronic resources available, how true the rumor that Technical Services will not be needed is. Taylor (1994) states "That will be the case only if we do not quickly adapt our skills to the increasing need for organization of information in all parts of the information universe" (p. 630). Even though this is an older article, it does show transforming Technical Services has been a continuing consideration. The rumor of what will happen if Technical Services is no longer needed has started to come true in the sense that some libraries have already reorganized the department.

<div align="center">Information Gathering Method</div>

Interviews with directors of libraries that have already completed the reorganization will be the method of gathering information. These directors of three to five mid-size academic libraries will have the same questions to answer as their counterparts. These answers will be

recorded and transcribed by me, and then entered into a database where they will be compared to the other answers I receive. These questions will have to do with the restructuring process; how it was done, who benefited, or didn't, what trends did it start, and what factors were prevalent to influencing the incorporation. They also are about the work staff; what they felt, worry over staff shrinking, problems with librarians taking over more duties. Perhaps the most important question might be how the outcome of the reorganization was received by the librarians and the patrons. The interview will be a structured interview with open-ended questions. The questions, if done on the phone, will be 30 minutes at the maximum.

<div align="center">Role of the Researcher</div>

This study involved participant interaction in the form of interviews carried out by me as the facilitator. In this role, I am the researcher trying to find the factors that are contributing to the reorganization of Technical Services departments in mid-size libraries. I will work with the directors of libraries within their schedules and interview them at an agreed on time so the information can be gathered and analyzed in a specific time frame.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

To begin with, the definition of a "mid-size" academic library consists of 25,000 minimum patrons of the academic community. This is an important fact to know so the interviews can be distributed to the directors of these size libraries. The interview questions themselves are conducted in a qualitative design, rather than quantitative, so the feel of the reorganization is captured. For this project, the "insider" perspective from someone who is already familiar with this process is important.

The interview questions themselves have to do with changing user focus, budgetary reasons, location of libraries, and the changing operation of Technical Services as possible factors for the reorganization.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is the method of the data collection. I will be contacting the directors of the libraries I wish to interview and find out from them whether they would like the interview conducted by mail, over the phone, or in person. I would like to travel to these libraries anyway to see first-hand the incorporation of the Technical Services departments into other areas of the libraries, and also speak with the librarians and staff of these departments to find their reactions to the reorganization.

Data Analysis

The information I receive from the interviews of the directors will be recorded and used for the research project. I will also be setting up a database to manage my data that I have received for use of comparing the answers between the different libraries. I think it will be interesting to find how the different libraries conducted the reorganization and what results they have achieved. I will pick out what I feel has the most importance to the subject and go through my literature review to ensure I have done all my research. I will also be checking the answers of the interview questions for reliability and accuracy to the reorganization.

Timeline

September-Finalize literature review and complete interview questions

October-Interview directors of libraries (in person or via telephone)

November-Compile and analyze data gathered from interviews

December-Complete research paper and send to stakeholder to get their opinions

January-Bind final draft of research paper

Conclusion

Because this topic is important to my professional advancements, I would like to find out what factors are influencing the decision to incorporate Technical Services into other departments of libraries. What is leading directors to make a decision that ultimately affects everyone in the library? The staff of Technical Services has to learn their jobs all over in completely new ways. They might not have a job because it has been outsourced, or divided up amongst other librarians.

I would like to understand the criterion that is being used when considering the reorganization. Does it have to do with budge issues, or the changing pace of technology? If technology is the main reason, why can't Technical Services adapt to the changing needs while retaining some of its duties? Why are decisions being made to transform this important part of the library if there is so much work and new learning to be done?

Appendix-Interview Questions

How has T.S. been incorporated in the other departments, or has the actual department been done away with?

How has support staff been treated? Have they been worked in with the other departments?

With the explosion of technology, and the need for cataloging these new resources, why is T.S. being re-organized at such a time?

How has the trend of fewer students coming to the library influenced the reorganization of T.S.?

Has budgetary reasons forced the closing of T.S.? Why?

How many items are outsourced?
        If so, what is cost to outsource compared to pay staff in library?

How have librarians in the other departments felt with more work put on them?

Have other campus departments fought to keep T.S. as a reflection on the wealth of the school?

Who is taking over the preservation of books that T.S. would normally do?

Is this happening in public libraries, or just academic?

Who decides how to streamline the work flow, if there is no longer a head of T.S.?

How are the usual functions of T.S. (orders/claims/payment, cataloging, continuations/binding) split between the two remaining departments (public and circulation)?
        What is the rationalization behind the assignments of functions?
        Who deals with the online catalog?

Electronic resources are playing a big part in cataloging right now. If there is no cataloger, how are these resources, or just books for that matter, going to be put in the system for use by the public?

With the re-organization of T.S., has communication between the remaining librarians been better, or worse?

Is the library happy with the way things turned out? Why?

How has the collection and service evolution associated with technology facilitated the re-organization of T.S.?

What other factors can you think of that had to do with the decision to incorporate T.S. into other departments?

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