BRIDGING THE GREAT DIVIDE: COMBINING ENGINEERS AND MUSICIANS, DOCUMENT DELIVERY AND CIRCULATION

Pauline Lister and Dr Grace Saw

BIOGRAPHY

Pauline Lister is currently Senior Library Technician in the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service at the University of Queensland. Pauline supervises a team of multi-skilled Library Technicians all of whom work across two sites that provide subject disciplined service to the engineering, physical sciences, information technology, music and architecture areas.

Dr. Grace Saw is the Executive Manager of the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service at the University of Queensland since April 2002. This Library branch has two sites that provide subject disciplined service to the engineering, physical sciences, information technology, music and architecture areas.

ABSTRACT

Bridging the great divide: combining engineers and musicians, document delivery and circulation.

At the end of 1999 two physically separate University of Queensland branch libraries, the Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering Library and the Architecture and Music Library, grouped under one service – The Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service. At the end of 2000 the University of Queensland Library was forced to reduce staffing levels following a reduction in income and a plummeting Australian dollar. To continue to deliver excellence in customer service, a group of library technicians, previously divided by branch location, user involvements, organisational culture, team membership and task responsibility, were brought together to become a focussed and committed multi-skilled team. This paper explains how the team confronted the issues relating to the continued delivery of high quality Library service across two disparate service points.

Introduction

The University of Queensland Library uses the term Cybrary to describe its integration of its services in cyberspace and physical space.

This paper will show how the cultures of two previously separated services were merged to form one quality service in line with the overall direction of the parent organisation.

It examines the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service and discuses key strategies employed to bring about the merging of the two diverse services.

Overview

The University of Queensland Cybrary has the largest academic collection in Queensland. It includes more than 2,110,000 journals and monographs, approximately 590 electronic databases, 16,500 electronic journals linked at a title level through the catalogue and 45,000 electronic journals accessible via the Cybrary web site.

The Cybrary comprises thirteen branches located on the St Lucia, Gatton and Ipswich campuses as well as in a number of teaching hospitals. Centralized processing, information technology and corporate services support the delivery of services through these branches.

The Physical Sciences and Engineering Library was formed in 1990 by combining several smaller branch libraries and included the C.S. Davis Mathematics Library and the Thomas Parnell Memorial Physics Library. In 1997, it was refurbished and re-named the Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering Library after the late Professor Dorothy Hill and merged with the Geology Library.

Towards the end of 1999, all thirteen branches were regrouped under three subject based information services. These services were:

1. Biological and Health Sciences (Biological Sciences, UQ Gatton, Herston Medical, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Dentistry and Mater McCauley Libraries

2. Physical Sciences and Engineering (Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering, and Architecture and Music Libraries)

3. Social Sciences and Humanities (Social Sciences and Humanities, Law, Fryer, Economics and Business and UQ Ipswich Libraries, as well as the University Archives)

"Branding" for customers

In this environment of multiple campuses and multiple branches the Cybrary has undertaken a major program of upgrading its facilities to provide an environment

supporting quality and consistent service. Customers are able to move between any of the many service points in a familiar environment where "The Look" and the "Service" are consistent.

In this environment there are no boundaries, customers and staff are able to move through the Cybrary whether that is from branch to branch, campus to campus or navigating around the Cybrary on-line facilities. The journey is a "seamless" experience.

Physical facilities

Since 1998 a continuing upgrading of the branches has been undertaken to reflect the corporate brand and corporate style. Corporate colours are used in all branches. Signage is consistent in colour, style and wording. Students can walk into a branch Cybrary on any campus and know that there will be:

- Computers for email access,
- Express terminals to quickly look up a reference,
- An eZone where training courses can be held,
- Librarian at the information desk,
- Return bins to return material from any of the 13 branches,

- Loans desk and access to high use material,
- Computers for access to databases
- Computers to access software packages such as Microsoft Office,
- Desks for quiet study and group rooms for discussion.

Electronic / Print Information

Policies, customer information and brochures are all consistent across the branches with centralised planning and policy development. At a subject based branch level, the Liaison Librarians maintain "Use Its" and "Find Its" (guides to finding and using information) in their particular area of expertise. All of this information, including electronic databases, journals, lecture notes etc can be accessed "any where, any time".

Physical Sciences and Engineering Service

In 2000 under this philosophy and culture of "Branding" and "Seamlessness" of service, the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service embarked on a trial of "sharing" library technicians between the two physically separate branches (Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering, and The Architecture and Music Branches). This grouping of the two libraries follow the University's faculty structure with the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service providing service to the Faculty of Engineering Physical Sciences and Architecture. One branch Library supports the Engineering subject area while the other branch, Architecture and Music serves the needs of customers from the Arts. This difference in professional discipline had implications that had to be considered when amalgamating service delivery. This is further discussed later in this paper.

The initial approach was to share staff between the two loans desk service points over a semester with one staff member from the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library working for part of the week in the Architecture and Music Library. Whilst this approach "planted the seed" for sharing human resources, in the beginning it was not particularly successful for the staff involved. Some of the problems they experienced were: -

- Feeling of "not belonging"
- Unsure of "local" procedures
- Time taken to introduce staff to the new environment was then lost when they finished their semester, and another staff member replaced them.

At the end of the second semester meetings were held with all staff involved in this trial with the view to finding solutions to these concerns. However other events occurred that were to change the whole approach to resources sharing and teamwork.

Local drivers

By the end of 2000, local drivers lead to a total "rethink" of how the overall staffing resources could be shared between the two service centres.

The year 2000 saw a constantly plummeting Australian dollar, and, following a 3% reduction in the Cybrary's income, it was decided that staffing numbers would need to be reduced as one part of a coping strategy. All library staff were offered Voluntary Separation Packages. The Library as a whole lost valuable knowledge and experience and whilst the people who took the packages moved on to retirement, developmental opportunities or new and challenging positions, the staff remaining were left with the challenge to continue to deliver quality customer service.

In the Physical Sciences and Engineering Service a total of three Library Technicians and one Librarian took the separation packages. Between them they had over 40 years experience of working at the University of Queensland Cybrary.

Prior to this there had been little sharing of jobs amongst the para-professional staff. Individuals had become "experts" in one particular area; many staff had been in the Cybrary for many years. Almost overnight much of this knowledge was gone, its loss left a void that had to be filled quickly.

On a Library wide scale a Workloads Committee was put in place to ensure that staff remaining did not bear unreasonably heavy workloads, whilst continuing to deliver quality customer service. However, at the micro-level, immediate action had to be taken in the Physical Sciences and Engineering Service. Two Library technicians had taken Voluntary Separation Packages from Architecture Music Library, which left only one! One library technician and one librarian left from the Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering Library.

A meeting of the remaining library technicians from both Cybrary branches obtained agreement to forming a team that would work between the two service points and therefore share tasks. This lead to the beginning of the multi-skilling program

The Service Point Roster

The first step was to set up a roster for staffing the loans desks in both libraries, this is called the Service Point Roster.

To compensate for the many issues that affected the roster some staff would often work half a day in one Library and half a day in the other. This was not particularly successful, with people not being very keen on the interruption this caused to their day and it was seen to be quite inefficient. Progressively we moved through many combinations and permutations of "getting the roster right" and I believe we now have a roster that works well, that gives staff some continuity in their working environment and one which is also "fair" to all, for example, everyone works a night shift, everyone opens the Library or works until 5.00pm.

One outcome of having this flexible roster and multi-skilled staff is that there would no longer be experts in one area. What was needed was for everyone to be experts in all tasks. Another outcome was that there would now be a pool of Library Technicians that could work in either branch library.

The Task Roster

With staff moving between two Libraries and all staff doing all tasks it soon became apparent that everyone needed to know what they were to do when they arrived at their "home" library for that day. The main functions, Inter Library Loans, Lending Services together with Collection Management and Administrative tasks were all broken down into their basic components, for example:

Function	Tasks	Tasks	Tasks	Tasks
Inter Library Loans	Handling new requests	Receipting of requests	Email reports	Book returns

A task roster was developed to ensure all daily tasks were completed so that things did not get forgotten. These included all the interlibrary loans tasks; mail, new books, circulation tasks. Like the Service Point Roster, this task roster had to be refined, making sure that not only was there some continuity for the task being done, but also that all staff got an opportunity to do all tasks.

Some of the early criticisms and concerns of multi-skilling this new team were:

- Who takes the ultimate responsibility?
- How to satisfy individual staff needs for "having and owning" a job?
- How to pass on information when you are in one Library for two days and then another for three?"

Initially not a lot of emphasis was put on these issues, it was difficult making sure jobs were getting done in a timely way, whilst realising that staff were learning new

skills, almost daily. However as time went on and staff became multi-skilled in new areas it became important to address these issues.

Responsibility

The team is responsible and owns the job, a nice theory but reality is a little different.

Initially there was a tendency for staff not to feel responsible for the outcome of on-going work. They would start a job and because they may not be in the same location for a few days someone else would have to finish it off, this lead to some frustrations and feelings of dissatisfaction.

By re-arranging the roster so that there is some continuity for staff, and from team members acquiring very good communication skills these challenges have been met.

Job Satisfaction

To ensure individuals have a feeling of "owning a job" each member of the team, under the overall co-ordination of the senior library technicians, has responsibility for overseeing a particular area, such as

- Document delivery
- Binding
- Serials

All staff are able to do these jobs but an "area of responsibility" means that someone is "keeping an eye" on deadlines, quality control, workflow etc. With all staff working on the same tasks people are encouraged to "finish a job" or liaise with other members of the team to make sure tasks are completed.

Musician's and Engineers

To achieve the "Seamless Cybrary" for the clients, staff working between two rather different disciplines had to learn and understand the different resources.

Architecture/Music Library	Physical Sciences & Engineering Library
Extensive CD collection and old record collection (that many students have never seen before) with an "interesting" classification	Books and journals classified with a classification system you can relate to
Large number of cd players, record players, slide projectors,	Just the one microform reader / printer
Students that "sing" and "hum" as they enter the Cybrary or wait in line to be served	Students that probably would rather not be using the Cybrary. Traditionally Engineers boast they did their whole degree without setting foot in the Cybrary
Students that talk to you about scores, concerts, concentus and choirs	Students that talk about sludge and sewerage, oracle and java

Training

The initial training of staff was challenging, particularly as all staff needed to expand their knowledge in most areas. Help was requested from the professional staff of both branches to improve the library technician's skills in areas like the collection and resources of the two branch libraries, techniques for searching databases for Inter-Library Loans and what databases were appropriate for the different subject disciplines. Both branches ensured that global Cybrary procedures for such things as circulation and document delivery were embraced and "local" procedures were discouraged.

Designated trainers carried out centralised training of new staff to ensure quality and consistent delivery of service over the whole Cybrary. At the Branch level the more experienced team members carried out training of new team members within the Physical Sciences and Engineering team of library technicians. The people doing the job assisted and looked after the new members.

When a new member joins the team he or she is allocated a "buddy" in their first few weeks on the job. This has allowed new members of the team to settle in quickly, to have someone to ask about job tasks, to answer questions about the campus, or who in the organisation to contact about particular issues. It also allows for an easier understanding of how the team operates between the two branches. New staff members that have joined the team in the last twelve months, since the "buddying" process began, have reported back that this has worked well.

Positive outcomes

1. The team evolved to embrace the wider culture of the "Seamless Cybrary". The team members now move physically between service points and tasks, quite effortlessly, although a lot of time and effort on everyone's part has been needed to achieve this result.

2. Staff are now multi-skilled and very responsive to change.

3. On a number of occasions they have been asked to trial new procedures on behalf of the Cybrary and they have done so with enthusiasm and skill.

4. The members of the team now have a large suite of skills that are marketable in many different areas of library operations.

5. Working across two branches has resulted in better communication strategies being developed between team members. All team members have to communicate extensively and, over a period of time, have developed good communication skills and methods, for example

- Meetings – voicing opinions, ideas and solutions,
- Creating and using email lists and electronic folders,
- White boards to leave messages and instructions,
- Notes, which are clear and concise, are left for the next team member to just "pick up" and complete an unfinished task.

6. "Roster challenges" are now handled more easily with team members being able to cover unexpected absences in either location at very short notices.

Continuing challenges

"It certainly hasn't been all plain sailing."

1. Continuity of the day-to-day activities in the two branch libraries has been a major challenge, which we continue to work at improving. Initially, the Physical Sciences and Engineering Library Service did not have a senior library technician in both Branches overseeing the workload of the team of library technicians. This was a challenge, having one senior library technician in the Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering Library allowed for an easier running of the day-to-day activities. This has recently been changed and there is now a senior library technician in both branches. However, the fundamentals of the culture of "Seamless Cybrary" and "The Team" has not been lost here and these two staff members also exchange places one day a week and work across the two branches.

2. Communication has been, and continues to be, one of the most important issues. With a team of 10 library technicians working across two physically separate buildings good communication has been essential.

Communication by email has been the most effective method, as it reaches everyone regardless of where or when they are working, whichever library they are in, or whatever shift they are doing. However, just sending out emails with new information or reminders is one thing, but knowing that what has been communicated has been understood is another. It is still necessary to question and talk to team members personally and regularly to ensure that the messages are understood.

Regular monthly meetings are held to allow the senior library technicians to report back from Cybrary wide circulation and document delivery meetings. These monthly meetings are also a forum for the team members to talk about what they have been doing during the past month, raise issues they had in their area of responsibility and where they can bring any problems they are encountering within that area to the attention of other members of the team. Problems are discussed, worked through and solutions agreed to.

It is essential that the Senior Library Technician is accessible and willing to talk to the team members when they have queries. You can never be "too busy". Discussion is encouraged between team members so the newer members of the team feel comfortable in talking to the more experienced members.

Conclusion

Over the last two years the Physical Sciences and Engineering Service has actively sought to develop a team of multi-skilled and highly flexible library technicians. This team is very adaptable to change and puts into practice, at the service level, the service philosophy of the organisation.

This paper has sought to highlight the climate, which initiated the forming of this team across two branches and the steps that were taken to build it.

As the climate of our service delivery continues to change, we are very conscious of the need to constantly re-examine and re-visit the process and outcomes of the "business we are in". We will continue to improve the service offered and the "real" benefits achieved, in the knowledge that the system now in place can be easily adapted to meet future challenges.

References

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