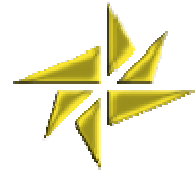




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Biography

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Tech Trials? Top'd, Turn'd and Transform'd

Abstract

In 2000, unification of the University of Western Sydney (UWS) brought together three fiercely independent Libraries and thus three previously autonomous and disparate Technical Service operations united as a single unit to support the acquisition and processing of materials and the provision of Document Delivery services for UWS' seven geographically dispersed Libraries. Staffing numbers were reduced by 25%, staffing costs by 30% and all staff were co-located to a single centralised location.

Amidst, and arising from, a turbulent background of change, cataloguing backlogs were eliminated, expenditure on materials increased by 14% in the first year following radical organisational change, with a concomitant increase in items ordered, received and processed. Processing time decreased by 70%. A massive shift of serials in print to electronic formats commenced. During this time, many Technical Services staff also undertook voluntary Service desk shifts – either Loans or Information Services as appropriate to the individual Higher Education Worker (HEW) level. How was this achieved? Staff were assigned to one of two multi-skilled teams, managing both serial and monographic materials, with each team member responsible, according to their HEW level, for the full range of 'tech services' tasks: ordering; receiving; cataloguing; end-processing and document delivery. This paper examines how it all came together – from team selection through training and development to a fully trained, multi-skilled staff. We then look at ourselves now, 6 years on. What lessons have we learnt? How have we sustained and enhanced throughput, multi-skilling and job satisfaction? Where will we go from here?

Introduction

Three into one won't go, or so the saying goes. The following case study of the unification of three independent Technical Service operations at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) proves the error of this maxim. During the late twentieth century and early into the twenty first, much has been written on the redesign or restructure of Technical Service operations to 'accommodate the evolving world of information management' (Condrón, 2001). Restructures have become the norm in many, if not most, tertiary institutions with varying degrees of success and improved outputs. The restructure of Technical Services at UWS was an ideal opportunity to move into the twenty first century with a lean, flexible staffing structure providing increased levels of productivity and job satisfaction whilst reducing processing costs at all levels.

The unique characteristics of the UWS experience are the merger of monographs and serials processing together with acquisitions and cataloguing and the inclusion of Document Delivery into all jobs for all Technical Service staff at all levels. UWS Library does not employ 'cataloguing' or 'acquisitions' staff, but rather staff who have the ability and desire to undertake the full range of tasks within the Technical Service operation. This paper outlines the background to, and describes the methodology utilised in moving from a traditional Technical Services staffing model to the

transformed, multi-skilled operation currently in existence at UWS.

Background

The University of Western Sydney was founded in 1989 to provide high quality and accessible higher education and research in a region of metropolitan Sydney historically under-resourced and under valued (Reid, 1999). For the initial ten years following its establishment as a result of the Dawkins reforms, UWS, was a 'federated network' comprising three quasi-autonomous members, Hawkesbury, Macarthur and Nepean, each part of the network and maintaining their own independent academic profiles and administrative structures. The University operated across six campuses in the Greater Western Sydney region, often competing internally for students and, at times, staff. Within the network structure, UWS also operated seven libraries, with three 'Head' Librarians, three sets of Associate Librarians, three Technical Services, Loans, Information Services, Systems and Administration units. Needless to say, the Libraries were not the only units in this position, and after ten years of operation it was clear that the structure needed to be changed. Triplication of academic and research programmes and administrative services was neither sustainable nor efficient. In 2000 the at times fraught process of unification began.

The goals of the restructure and unification were to ensure the University focused its resources on

the core missions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. In particular it sought to reduce administrative overheads by ending the triplication of services, reducing numbers of courses offered and ensuring that the best study programme UWS could offer would be available to students (Reid, 2001). From the beginning, the Library's core role in supporting the academic endeavours of the University was recognised through its organisational placement within the then Division of Education and Equity (subsequently renamed as the Division of Academic and Services). It was understood and accepted that there needed to be a Library presence on each campus to facilitate and enhance both the undergraduate and research experience.

The UWS Library experience as outlined here appears unique in its transformation of Technical Services. The recent literature abounds with tales of restructures and reorganisations yet none seem to have embraced the opportunity for a broad multi-skilled operation which restructuring offers. Branton (2004) describes the University of Southern Mississippi reorganisation which, whilst integrating workflows, maintained acquisitions, cataloguing and serials. Mastraccio (2004) discusses cataloguing alone, Glazier and Glazier (2004) examine the merge of Collection Services at Emporia (Kansas) State University Library which, whilst introducing cross-training, still retains task specific staff in acquisitions and cataloguing, Ramsay (2004) reports

on the University of Rhode Island Libraries Technical Service restructure which still maintains cataloguing, serials, monograph acquisitions and cataloguing and systems and so the examples continue. There does not appear to be a restructure along the lines of that undertaken at UWS.

Whilst there have certainly been restructures at Australian tertiary institutions, there appears to be a dearth of published case studies upon which to draw. The restructure of the Georgia State University Libraries, as reported by Davis, Demetracopoulos and Maroney (2004) is the closest any tertiary library appears to have come to the multi-skilling of all Technical Services staff. Georgia 'pooled' all para-professional staff, moving them through the various tasks within the traditional Technical Service departments. Professional staff, however, retained their more traditional role/s.

The UWS Library Technical Services restructure

Work Groups across all non-academic areas of the University were established to move forward collaboratively in devising structures which would both service the changing needs of the institution, whilst meeting significant 'cost saving' targets derived from elimination of triplication of overhead costs. Within the Library Workgroup, various sub-groups were established to formulate proposals for each of the main operational areas: Technical Services; Lending

Services; Information Services; Systems; and Administration.

The Library was well placed for a successful restructure, the independent member libraries having jointly implemented a shared ILM (Endeavor's Voyager) in late 1999. Working together during 1999 on the implementation gave all those involved a better understanding of the cultural and operational variations in play. This greatly assisted in moving forward to a unified Library system. However, the Libraries were not exempt from the fears (of the future) or distrust (of an amorphous 'management') which prevailed across the University. It was against this background that the Technical Services Workgroup attempted to design an effective and workable structure. It says much for the quality of the staff that the way forward was found.

Prior to restructure in 2000, there were forty four Technical Services staff across the UWS Libraries and the multiplicity and variation of policies, processes and methods of operation was as diverse as those of any three autonomous institutions. The need to centralise operations to reflect the 'new' and unified UWS was not only an institutional imperative, but from a pragmatic perspective also afforded the opportunity to potentially reduce the salaries budget and plough funds back into an ailing materials vote. The 2000 materials expenditure across UWS represented a mere 28% of the total library budget, whilst 56.5% was expended on salaries in comparison with the then CAUL

averages of 38% and 51% respectively. A clear imbalance required redressing.

Negotiations with major monograph and serial vendors indicated that a single centralised delivery point would also achieve significant savings in freight charges. So, a single, centralised model, located at the Penrith campus as the geographic 'heart' of the University was agreed upon for implementation. Once the decision to centralise the Technical Service operation had been taken, the next step was to consolidate varying work practices in order to minimise materials handling and enhance Technical Service processes to reflect 'best practice'. At that time, the work of inefficient Technical Services units was being outsourced at many institutions which could no longer justify retaining staff who allowed backlogs to thrive and who were not, in effect, providing value for money (Giesecek and Walter, 1997). In 1993 for example, Wright State University had completely outsourced its cataloguing department, claiming savings of around US\$250,000 per year. (Hirshon, 1996)

The Workgroup evaluated available statistical data from the UWS Libraries and discovered that unlike the Wright State University rate of around 35% original cataloguing (Hirshon, 1996), copy was available for the bulk of UWS materials, providing a significant comparative reduction in processing time and cost. Thus the Group agreed that with a decrease in staff positions and efficiencies in work practices, most

Technical Service operations could generally be provided more economically in-house than through outsourcing. It was, however, agreed that efficiencies would be forthcoming through the outsourcing of end processing of monographs and serials, to be undertaken by our major vendors. Document Delivery had been successfully located within the Technical Service units at the former member libraries, and it was agreed that this structural arrangement would continue. At UWS, Document Delivery is seen as an 'acquisition' of resources, and was thus well situated within the new Technical Services.

A fundamental premise underpinning the restructure was that all Technical Services staff would work in fully multi-skilled teams, with all staff performing a range of duties as appropriate to their HEW level. Thus, all staff would undertake the pre-order searching, acquisition, receiving and cataloguing of monographs and serials, and all staff would be involved in providing a full Document Delivery service to UWS clients, both internal and external. The multi-skilled approach had previously been successfully implemented at one of the pre-unification libraries, worked effectively at least one other University and represented the Workgroup's preferred model. Following determination of a multi-skilled team approach the optimal arrangement was agreed at a two team structure, with each team responsible for the full processing of materials for two of the four new Colleges (Faculties) being formed

within the parallel academic restructure. Each team was to comprise fifteen members at varying HEW levels, headed by a Team Leader at HEW Eight. A Technical Services Manager at HEW Nine would provide overall leadership and guidance to the area.

The Implementation

Bringing together three previously independent, autonomous and disparate operations brought its own intrinsic issues. When linked to what were for most, externally imposed massive changes in work practices, organisational structure and workplace culture, the implementation may have been doomed to failure from the outset. Yet it succeeded. Why?

Much credit must go to individual staff for their willingness to move forward, try new ideas and relinquish past practices and ideologies. These 'change champions' recognised early the value of gaining greater experience across the range of operations and encouraged and enthused their colleagues to expand base skills and develop their knowledge and understanding of the gamut of operations in the new working environment. Their interest and keenness were amongst the key motivating factors for many staff. Management of the implementation was a further key to its success. Staff were included in the implementation process wherever possible and appropriate, including the physical design for the refurbishment of the area.

Environment impacts significantly on outcomes, and the physical space into which the new Technical Services teams were to move required significant redesign to both accommodate staff and to ensure an environment conducive to collaborative multi-skilled work practices. A small representative working party was established to discuss layout with an externally commissioned architect. The only absolute was that there were to be no furnishings above waist height in the centre of the department. The proposed 'flat' physical environment was considered important in removing barriers and ensuring open communication and collaboration, replacing the traditional 'walled environment' so common in many Technical Services units, including those of the former UWS Libraries. Compact shelving was to be relocated between outer desks and walls, forming a pathway so that visitors would walk around rather than through the department, eliminating unnecessary distractions. Staff considered these 'external' pathways important for the professional conduct of the area.

Desks were to be clustered in groups of four or six and again, any 'walls' between desks were to be no more than waist height. This caused considerable anxiety for many staff as they perceived a worrying loss of privacy within the workplace. However, it is pleasing to report that in 2006 no staff wish to have barriers or high desk separators reinstated, having experienced the ease of communication, collegial interaction and benefits arising through the

removal of such barriers. In terms of physical space, the two teams were divided by a utilities area. This central space housed the multi-functional devices, Ariel equipment and stationery storage cupboards. It provides a 'common' area, and also clearly delineates floor space between the two teams.

As indicated earlier, each of the two teams were to be responsible for the full processing of orders and materials for two of the new Colleges. Staff were invited to select a 'preferred' team or subject specialisation, and with only one or two exceptions, first preferences were able to be accommodated. Adherence to both the spirit and word of the industrial agreement as it applied to organizational change, together with cognizance of understandable staff anxiety, underpinned the self selection process. We were confident that existing skills and abilities would serve initial requirements. Once the refurbishment was complete and team structures in place, the real work of creating the new Unit began.

A skills audit of each team member was undertaken to ascertain the level and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the full range of Technical Services operations. Once completed, Team Leaders then prepared a six month training programme, at the completion of which each staff member would understand all aspects of the work, and be confident in successfully completing tasks appropriate to their HEW level. During this period, team leaders undertook random checks of

staff member's work to verify competencies across the range of tasks. At the end of the six month period, around 75% of staff were deemed competent in the variety of duties now applicable to all Technical Services staff. Further intensive training programmes were prepared to enhance skill levels of the remaining 25%. By the end of the first year of operation, all staff had acceptable competency levels in the range of duties and responsibilities now included in their position descriptions.

Prior to unification, many Technical Services staff had also taken opportunities to work in Client Services, either Loans or Information, depending on HEW level and individual interest. Whilst recognising the need for upskilling in a range of new Technical Services tasks, we did not wish to discourage this cross-departmental work. The value of such cross-fertilisation for clients and staff is significant. Technical Services staff gain a greater appreciation of the use of the data they create, whilst clients have catalogue 'experts' available to assist with searching and explanation. Approximately 30% of Technical Services staff requested to continue work in either Loans (HEW three-four) or Information Services (HEW five-six). These requests were able to be accommodated and the Library and our clients benefited.

The change in roles and responsibilities for Technical Services staff was reflective of those evident in the broader tertiary library sector. In Smith and Etcheverria's

(2004) published findings on staffing trends, it is reported that with a broader range of responsibilities 'nearly all respondents reported increased levels of value in the job/viability ... market for all levels of staff.' UWS Library Technical Services staff are more highly competitive and marketable than ever before, having gained both the skills and knowledge of all aspects of library operations.

By 2005, processes and procedures were firmly embedded, with all staff able to move rapidly and confidently between acquisitions, cataloguing and document delivery as demand and workflow variance required. Further, in 2005 a number of both Loans and Information Services staff expressed interest in spending time in Technical Services, undertaking the various duties as appropriate to their HEW level. This was a first for the UWS Libraries, and in 2006 this regular interchange of staff continues.

I do not mean to imply that all was plain sailing and there were certain pitfalls we should have foreseen. With each team responsible for full processing from order to shelf readiness of materials for two Colleges, it was inevitable that a sense of rivalry would develop. Initially, this formed a healthy tension between the two teams, but the competition began to take on a more serious turn. If left unaddressed, this rivalry had the potential to turn on itself and create an unhealthy working environment, undoing gains made to that point.

We called on the services of the UWS Professional Development Unit (PDU), who devised and led a Team Development programme with all staff. This Development proved central in establishing agreed Values and a Code of Practice for the teams. We were not undertaking traditional 'team building' as the teams were well established, but rather the emphasis lay on a greater understanding of preferred work behavioural styles and how these may affect and impact upon others. We wanted to develop a recognition, respect and appreciation of individual differences within and across the teams, identifying opportunities and strategies for the enhancement of effectiveness in working together and agreeing upon core values to be translated into a code of practice for the teams. Staff were involved in setting the agenda for the Staff Development exercise, and were fully committed to the outcomes. Following the workshops, a small group of volunteers turned the work into a shared set of Values and a

Code of Practice to which staff still refer.

Throughout this period, work flows and fluctuations were closely monitored. We liaised regularly with our major monograph vendors, academic staff and liaison librarians to establish processes which would eliminate any 'end of year rush' to expend the library materials budget. We embedded structured sequential processes which would ensure the timely order, receipt and processing of materials in support of the teaching, learning and research activities of UWS. Following an inevitable settling period and upon completion of training and skills enhancement, all backlogs were eliminated. In 2005 39,551 order requests were placed, 50,209 monograph items were added to the collection, 4,238 loans/copies were supplied to other Libraries via Document Delivery and 7,037 loans/copies received, with a total Technical services staff of twenty nine.

Table 1: A comparative snapshot

2000	2005
44 staff	30 staff
3 locations	1 location
28% budget expenditure on materials	39% budget expenditure on materials
56.5% budget expenditure on salaries	50.3% budget expenditure on salaries
28,000 items added to the collections	50,209 items added to the collections
14,000 print serials	1,300 print serials
5,882 e-serials	65,000 e-serials

Throughout this period progress in the wider library world did not stop and we also, in partnership with the National Library of Australia, implemented the Research Libraries Group (RLG) Inter Library Loans software to further streamline and automate Document Delivery processes. An open URL resolver, essential in an environment characterised by extensive electronic resources (65,000 serial titles) has been successfully implemented and warmly received by clients. All serial titles are individually catalogued and accessible via the OPAC. Significant progress has been made in preparation for the exploitation of federated searching technologies. This has all been achieved whilst maintaining throughput and quality output.

In 2006, how have we fared and what does the future hold?

The University undertook a further College realignment to better meet student needs, reducing the multiplicity of courses and units being taught across the six campuses. The four College structure was reduced to three, clearly having an impact on the two team structure of Technical Services. Serendipitously, and at the same time, Technical Services staff had begun expressing a desire to be able to specialise in certain aspects of their work. All staff made it clear that they did not wish to cease undertaking the range of responsibilities within the unit, but would also like the opportunity to specialise. Up to this point, Electronic Services had been undertaken by one senior (HEW

eight) staff member reporting directly to the Associate Librarian (Corporate Services), but the close links with Technical Services together with the Library's electronic preferred Collection Development and Access policy, and concomitantly increasing volume of work were clear indication of the need to mainstream e-services, incorporating functions within Technical Services.

A three team structure was devised which would include all aspects of Electronic Services under the Technical Service umbrella. Each team would maintain responsibility for one of the three Colleges, but would also assume a specific task level responsibility. Thus the College of Business team is responsible for Cataloguing and UWS Theses, the College of Arts for Acquisitions and Document Delivery, and the College of Social and Health and Science for Electronic Resources and Serials. The other major recent change was that the teams would only be responsible for ordering materials for the designated College rather than, as previously, both acquiring and cataloguing. All received material would simply be filed in the compactus in date order and catalogued sequentially by any member of any team, a further strategy to eliminate potentially unhealthy levels of competition.

Clearly, this proposed major change in staffing responsibilities and team formation necessitated wide consultation. The UWS Enterprise Agreement requirements for staff and union consultation were followed, with the single concern

raised by staff being the fear of losing their multi-skilling! Once it was made clear that this was not an intended outcome, staff began pushing hard for the change to begin. Again, all staff were requested to indicate their team preference, and with only three exceptions, all were placed in their first preference. The remaining three staff moved to their second preference. Team Leaders were re-titled Team Coordinators, with one HEW eight (Electronic Resources and Serials Coordinator) designated the Deputy. The Cataloguing and Theses Coordinator, and Acquisitions and Document Delivery Coordinator are HEW seven level. All positions were advertised and filled internally by highly competent staff.

In order to ensure more balanced and timelier collection building across the newly reorganised teaching and research areas, we adopted the University of Newcastle materials allocation model (Anderson, 2005) for a twelve month trial. Under this model there is a central pool of funds for monographs and serials against which order requests are paid. No allocations are made to Schools and/or Colleges. Throughout the initial five years following unification, monograph funds had been allocated to Schools based on a traditional formulaic weighted EFTSU, average material price and usage statistics approach. By no longer allocating funds at either School or College level, we are better able to address the needs of monograph dependent disciplines vis-a-vis those with high serial dependence. This model recognises

the increasing multi-disciplinarity of scholarly literature and the high, ongoing and increasing percentage of funds dedicated to the provision of access to electronic resources. It has been warmly received by the academic community, is working extremely well and we hope to continue this model into the foreseeable future.

The University also hosts the Whitlam Institute, with the Library responsible for the Whitlam Prime Ministerial Library and eCollection. One member of Technical Services staff has been seconded full time to work on the Whitlam collection, comprising a significant corpus of monographs from Mr Whitlam's personal library, and speeches, letters, articles and ephemera by and about Mr Whitlam, his government and his life.

With the changes indicated above introduced concurrently and within a very tight timeframe, we realistically expected a temporary down turn in throughput. It did not happen. Why? We can only attest to the quality of our staff and their determination to continue to offer the highest quality service to our clients. By April 30 2006, approximately 13,000 order requests have been placed; 13,100 monograph items added to the collection; 1,353 document delivery items have been supplied to other Libraries; 2,006 document delivery items have been received from other Libraries; and \$1,244,016 has been spent and/or committed against the monograph budget.

Could we have moved to this specialisation model in 2000? Certainly, but it would not have resulted in the extent of multi-skilling and high productivity across the area evidenced today. The temptation for staff to stay with what they knew and were comfortable with would have been extremely difficult to overcome, and the traditional Technical Services task oriented divide would have continued, with staff locked into traditional and non-sustainable roles.

Throughout 2006, further changes and implementations will be taking place which directly involve and impact upon some or all Technical Services staff. Training in the 'new' area of Electronic Resource management is currently underway, migration to a new URL resolver is scheduled for the latter half of the year, as is the full implementation of federated search engines for both in-house and externally sourced digital materials. In preparation for the Research Quality Framework (RQF) planning for the institutional roll out of a digital repository for institutional

research outputs is well underway. Staff know what is coming, and continue to eagerly embrace the challenges which the future inevitably brings.

Conclusion

Our staff have broken the traditional Technical Services mould. They have truly 'topped, tailed and transformed' the former sacred cows of cataloguing, acquisitions, monographs and serials, bridging the dividing gulf which persists in separating responsibilities for these tasks. We no longer have cataloguers, we have cataloguing specialists, who also undertake a range of acquisitions and document delivery duties and who would not return to the old single focus days for one moment. The flexibility and adaptability of the UWS Library Technical Services staff, truly 'doing more with less' and enjoying it, is a model worthy of serious consideration for any Library desiring to achieve quality outcomes and a satisfied work force.

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