Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Teams Are Now Used by Many Technical Services Departments in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

Objective – An investigation of the use of teams in technical services, provision of training on team-working, characteristics of technical services teams, and the effectiveness of teams.

Design – Survey comprising of 19 closed questions and one open question.

Setting – Technical services departments in academic libraries.

Subjects– Responses were received from 322 library staff members. Of those, 294 answered the survey question about team-based technical services and 55.9% of respondents completed the full survey.

Methods – An online survey was promoted via seven technical services electronic mail lists and was conducted using SurveyMonkey.

Main Results – The survey found that 39% of technical services were entirely team-based, 18% were partly team-based, and 43% did not use teams. Information was gathered about the number of teams, team nomenclature, and how long teams have been used. This research highlighted the lack of provision of training and documentation about working in teams.

Conclusion – Many respondents have team-based technical services, and most participants found that working in teams had a positive impact. A systematic application of this survey is planned for the future.

Commentary

Survey participants were recruited via technical services electronic mail lists. This was not "simple random sampling" as stated in the paper (p. 72). Instead, participants were self-selecting. There is a strong likelihood of sample bias in this study as participants needed to both be a member of at least one of the electronic mail lists and choose to complete the survey. Unfortunately, promoting the survey on multiple mail lists means that response rates cannot be calculated, as the targeted population cannot be measured. The author does not mention if she identified multiple responses from the same institution, which would also skew the results. An approach of directly contacting institutions would have gathered a more representative, measurable set of participants, and the author states that she is planning to conduct a systematic survey in the future.

Although the survey was based on previously published research, there are some omissions in the questionnaire and in the presentation of the results. It will be difficult for organizations considering teams to make use of the data from the survey without more information about team structures. For example, participants were asked about the number of technical services teams in their organization, but not about the size of the teams or overall staffing levels. Some questions have been cross-tabulated, such as the relationship between team-based libraries and team-based technical services, but there is little statistical analysis of the results beyond reporting of percentages. The survey will have found additional information, e.g., the relationship between team autonomy and morale, but the lack of analysis means this has not been revealed.

This paper includes a large number of tables, which don't always appear next to the relevant text. Including the survey question numbering in the table captions would have improved the readability of the paper.

Some comments from participants are included in the narrative of this paper. These must have been gathered via the open "any other comments" question. It would have been beneficial to include further open questions in the survey as this would have gathered extra qualitative information about the use of teams. Although the survey found "more and more" technical services were forming teams (51 had teams more than 10 years ago, while 63 had formed teams in the last 10 years) this finding may have been affected by the self-selecting nature of the survey (p. 80). Future research should consider if any technical services have abandoned a team structure.