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***Library Philosophy and Practice* 2011**

ISSN 1522-0222

Redesigning Nebraska's Libraries Technical Services: Creating a Climate for Change

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Introduction

The Technical Services Department at UNL had undergone organizational changes over the last few years, and space allocation and workflow no longer reflected the changes in functionality or technological advances that had occurred. The workflow had changed from a top down cataloging and acquisition model, with professional librarians directing the work of paraprofessionals to a more team-oriented scheme, in which professional librarians acted as team members and resources for paraprofessionals. Library administration and the Technical Services chair wanted to move the department from a "cube farm" to a dynamic work space where materials and information flowed through the department and collaboration replaced the more formal model. Initially, we thought that could be accomplished by simply changing the physical space. As we moved through the process of re-allocating and clearing out space, we also re-discovered the importance of involving staff in decisions involving their work space and work assignments. This provided the re-vitalization of the staff in the area. Over the years, staff had seen their numbers reduced and the work re-allocated with apparently little consideration or consultation with them. By involving them in the process of space re-allocation, we were all reminded of the importance of collaboration and using the learning organization model.

Background and Need for Change

Technical services departments in today's academic library are under increasing pressure to change and adopt new approaches to acquiring and making accessible dwindling print and growing electronic resources. As noted in a recent article (Eden 2010) on the future of technical services, academic libraries need to not only redesign workflows and procedure but to also retool staff competencies.

Over the past several years, the UNL Libraries has systematically reallocated resources to address user needs, streamline operations, and adjust for decreases in library funding and purchasing power. University budget reductions and reallocations, as well as increasing prices for materials, have resulted in a decrease in the number of positions in the Libraries. The number of faculty and staff positions in the Libraries dropped from a high of 157 FTE in to 136 in 2010. Other cost cutting measures include: a decrease in operating budgets, a decrease in the number of monographs purchased each year and a

decrease in serial subscriptions.

Smaller, less comprehensive changes had been made in Technical Services over the years to address specific staffing issues, but at this juncture, the Libraries administration felt that a full-scale "reinvention" of the space needed to be done. With changing technology and the loss of positions, both physical and task-related aspects of Technical Services operations needed to be reviewed.

The Technical Services department is located on the 3rd floor of the south side of the Love (Main) Library. There were several empty office spaces due to resignations and budget reductions. Those spaces were being used for storage or just left vacant. There were also several card catalogs, filing cabinets, serial files, bookcases, and other pieces of equipment that were no longer an integral part of the Technical Services workflow. The "footprints" these spaces occupied could be converted into useable space for remaining staff and operations.

In addition to space allocation issues, many Technical Services tasks had been re-apportioned or were no longer needed, due to changes in technology, services, or completion of time limited special projects. As the result of a Libraries wide reorganization a few years ago and a recent Acquisitions manager resignation, the Libraries Preservation unit (located in the south basement) became administratively tied to a manager located on the 3rd floor. Libraries administration were interested in making sure that the Technical Services managers were located closer to the staff they supervised, and that those staff members had the opportunity to work as a team by being re-located as a group to as great an extent as physically possible.

Another factor considered in the redesign project was the rapid and continuing growth of the Libraries Center for Digital Research (CDRH), located adjacent to the Technical Services department. As office spaces needed in the CDRH area grew, room for meetings in existing office spaces nor and space for project or staff meetings diminished. Although there is a conference room adjacent to Technical Services, it was often in use when needed by CDRH. As a result, the department chair requested more project space adjacent to their area.

Framework for Change

To survive in the continuously changing information environment, libraries must find ways to become agile, flexible organizations. (Giesecke and McNeil 2004). The UNL Libraries adopted the Learning Organization model in the mid-1990s, conducting annual staff development activities to share principles and skills based on shared vision, personal mastery, group learning, mental models, and systems thinking

As part of the Learning Organization practice, the Libraries also utilized the Gallup Strength Finder to help faculty and staff identify areas of strength upon which to build. More recently, the Libraries completed the ClimateQUAL survey, another tool that is helping the Libraries reflect and build upon areas of strength. Use of these tools and approaches enable the Libraries to recognize and address areas needing attention and change. Technical Services was such an area in this case.

Project management is the application of knowledge, skills and techniques to execute projects effectively and efficiently. The decision to use Project Management to plan and implement the redesign was based on the fact that this strategy had been used very successfully in previous projects undertaken by the Libraries.

Project Management as practiced in the UNL Libraries involves four phases:

1) Initiating the project ® assess the size, scope, and complexity of the project and establish procedures to support project activities, including the core project team, stakeholders, operating and documentation procedures.

2) Planning the project ® define clear, discrete activities and work needed to complete each activity within the project, including project scope, tasks, resources needed, schedules, budget, communication, standards and procedures, risk assessment, and baseline project plan.

3) Executing the project ® put the plan into action, monitor changes and progress, maintain documentation, and communicate project status.

4) Closing down the Project ® bring the project to an end, including communicating project outcomes,

successes, and lessons learned to stakeholders, finalize documentation. Then celebrate the results.

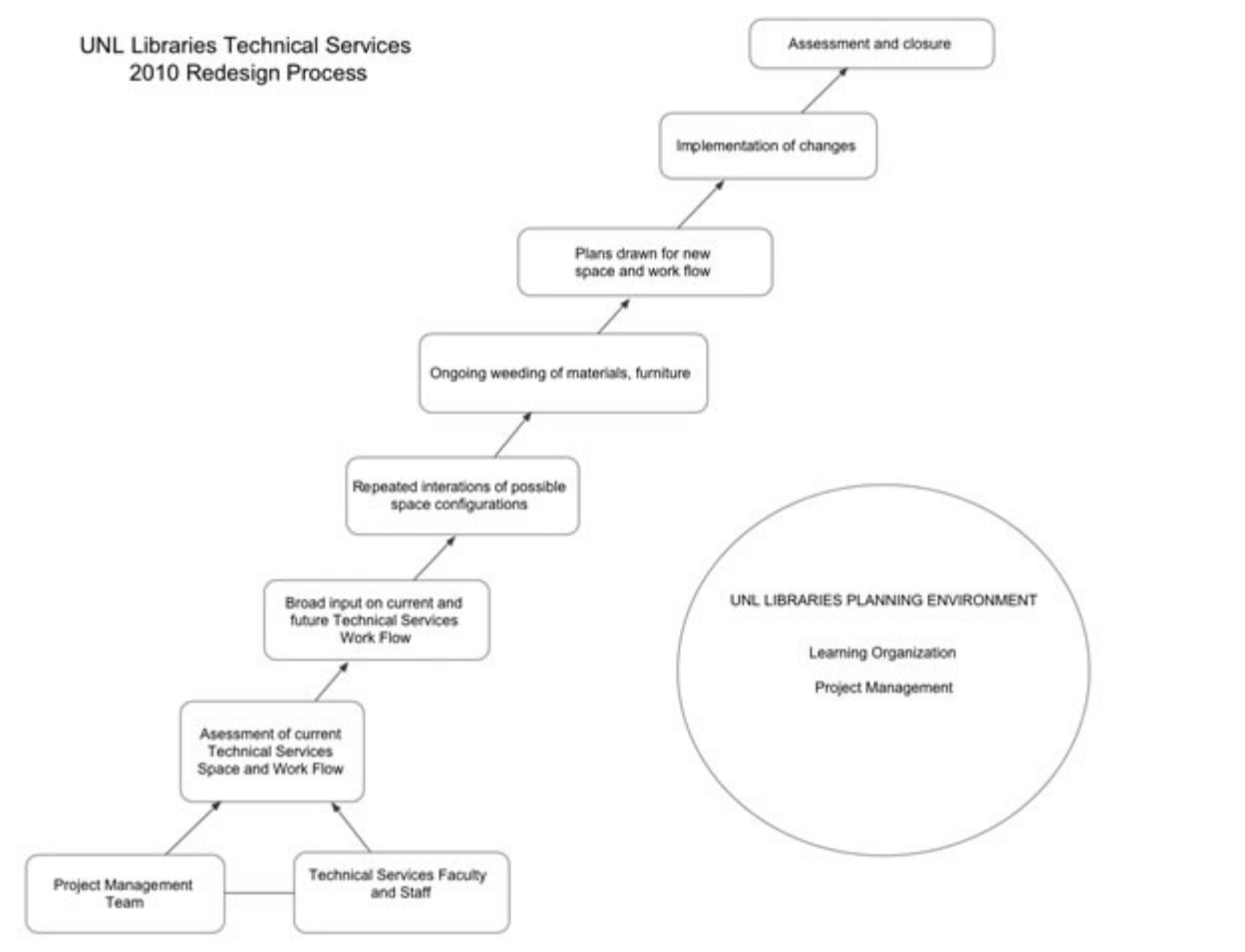
Stakeholders were easily identified, both to serve on the project team, and as sources of information and advice outside of the team. The libraries participation in ClimateQUAL was helpful in identifying staff members both as stakeholders and project team members. Libraries administration developed a clear set of criteria, goals, and parameters, such that the project could be easily parceled into action items and time sensitive goals. Accountability was also an issue that the Project Management model addressed. This was accomplished by having action items attached to each set of minutes and running through them at the beginning of the next meeting. This kept the group on track and helped identify any unexpected obstacles and address and resolve them quickly.

Key elements of organizational ecology (Becker & Steel 1995, p.12)

- Decisions about physical settings where work is done
- Decisions about processes used to plan and design workspace
- Decisions about how space, equipment, and furnishings are allocated and used

Forming the Project Management Team

The Libraries Facilities Manager was designated to convene and lead the Project Team that gathered information from Technical Services staff, and planned, coordinated and supervised execution of the move of more than 30 faculty/staff members. The makeup of the Project Team was critical and needed to include the areas represented as well as take into consideration the interpersonal dynamics of the team members and team members' abilities to communicate with other faculty/staff. A Project Team with diverse talents and backgrounds germane to the project was less likely to overlook important aspects of the project.



The Project Team consisted of:

- A representative from the Libraries computing department to make sure that computers, printers,

scanners, and other equipment could be moved to new locations with a minimum of port activation or purchase of additional equipment.
- A member of the staff from Technical Services was selected because of her communication and organizational skills and her familiarity with challenges regarding space and workflow.
- The chair of the Technical Services department served to make sure that Project Team ideas were workable within the "big picture" for the department.
- A staff assistant from the Libraries Dean's Office was included because of her experience and skills in working with office furniture sales representatives in planning and recommending solutions for office spaces. This staff assistant also facilitated orders, worked with the Technical Services staff member to gather measurements of space and sought feedback from Technical Services staff on ideas generated by the Project Team.
- A member of the Preservation unit that was part of Technical Services, but physically removed from the area was chosen to make sure that staff in Preservation were represented in any space or personnel moves considered.
- The Facilities Manager chaired the team. Her job was to coordinate the activities of the team and work with campus facilities staff as needed.

Project Criteria

- To construct a plan that would provide managers with better access to the people on their teams.
- To de-clutter the Technical Services area, including working through problem materials that had been languishing on cubicle bookshelves for years.
- To devise a plan that would encourage more professional communication between colleagues and create a more dynamic, nimble work environment.
- To foster positive morale in the Technical Services department.
- To create a conference room/project area that had been requested by our Center for Digital Research in the Humanities.

Planning the Project

Project Team meetings went remarkably well from the beginning. All committee members were invested in the project and eager to start re-planning the space. Project Team members agreed that since the project was on a short time line, meetings should be held every other week to make sure the process did not start to lose focus or lose its sense of urgency. The Project Team agreed that each meeting would end with action items that could be accomplished, for the most part, by the next meeting.

At the initial meeting, the Project Team discussed the project criteria and devised a communication plan. The team knew that the success or failure of the redesign depended on to what extent its members could get "buy in" from the Technical Services staff. The linchpin was communication. The team settled upon the following methods of keeping everyone in the loop:

Wiki. The Project team wanted to ensure that Technical Services staff had as much information as possible about what it was thinking about in terms of who to move where and why. One method chosen was to make use of the existing departmental wiki. Faculty and staff were already consulting the wiki for updates on projects, minutes of meetings, etc., so it was easy for them to check it periodically to see what the redesign team was doing. It was also decided that while the committee would have fairly detailed minutes of the meetings, including specific requests or concerns, a more generic version without names of staff members but with their suggestions should be posted on the wiki

Mobile white board. A mobile white board was moved into a vacant Technical Services office area. The Technical Services staff team member was charged with bringing any suggestions and concerns noted on the board by department faculty and staff to Project Team during meetings.

Suggestion box. An old-fashioned suggestion box was installed in the vacant office area as well. The same Technical Services staff member also collected comments from the box and shared them with the team. Suggestions and white board comments were read at the beginning of each meeting.

Conversations. Project Team members were encouraged to visit the Technical Services department and solicit face-to-face input from faculty and staff members.

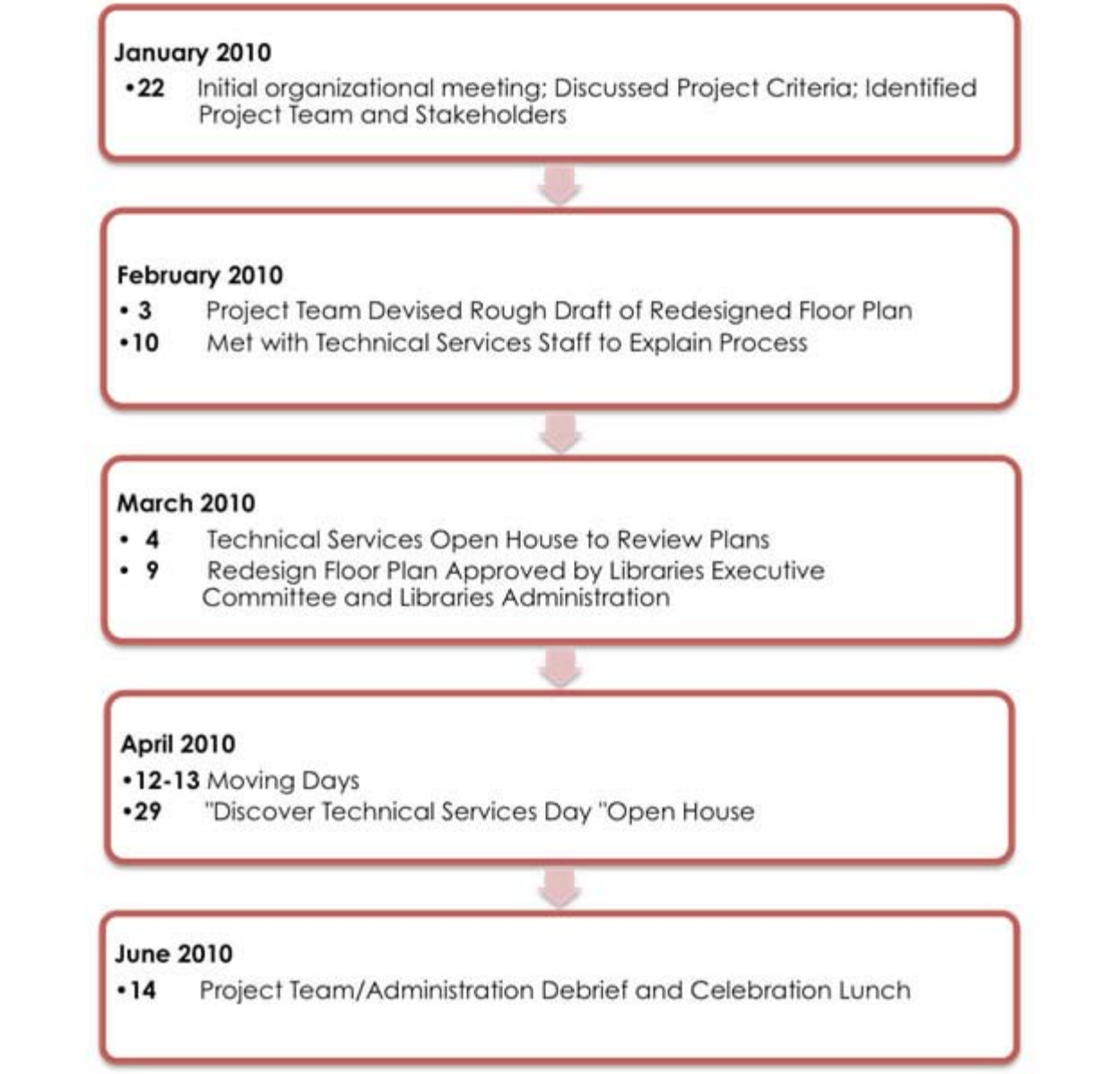
E-mail. Technical Services staff were invited to e-mail any member of the committee. An e-mail account was set up into which suggestions or comments could be sent anonymously.

Staff meetings. The chair of the Project Team was invited to a TS all-staff meeting to kick off the project. She explained the purpose, the time line and addressed initial concerns.

Open House. An open house was held to share the new office locations with the staff and address any concerns that arose as the project developed.

Members of the Libraries Executive Committee also received updates on the project progress at their bi-monthly meetings. Additionally, the Associate Dean who supervises the Technical Services chair was included on all Project Team e-mails, including meeting announcements and minutes distribution. The Associate Dean also had access to the wiki so she could review what information the Team was distributing to the library faculty and staff.

On the Fast Track: UNL Libraries Technical Service Redesign Project Timeline



Implementing the Project

The Technical Services area was filled with furniture and equipment that no longer facilitated efficient, effective workflow. The first challenge the Project Team identified was ridding the unit of clutter, both physical and process or policy-driven.

The clutter was not only physical items, but also policies and procedures that discouraged innovation and creativity. A logjam of issues that had been retained for years because no one thought it was their job to ask why a process or policy was still in force.

The Technical Services department also still harbored several card catalogs and serial check-in files. Once this issue was made obvious to the department chair, she did some investigation with various faculty and staff and quickly came to the conclusion that much of the attachment was sentimental rather than based on the workflow. The chair made an "executive decision" that since the vast majority of the information was available electronically, the physical catalogs and files could be removed from the department. Similar conversations took place regarding hanging files, 3-ring notebooks, manuals, filing cabinets and miscellaneous boxes of papers, cards, and other equipment and materials. Besides reclaiming valuable space, this decision helped staff continue the transition from paper-based to electronic-based records retention.

To begin to address the issue of clutter, a deadline of approximately six weeks was set for staff to go through their areas and identify items that could either go to Inventory or be recycled elsewhere in the Libraries.

Serendipitously, at the time of the redesign project, the university was also encouraging participation in a campus wide Recyclemania campaign, so faculty and staff had the added incentive that cleaning out desks, files, and so forth contributed to the green efforts of the university. Many staff also noted how liberating it felt to be able to take the time to work through and resolve problems and backlogs that had collected on bookcases or filing cabinets in their office areas for years. Some of those monographs and serials were re-integrated into the collection; others were identified as no longer necessary and contributed to Recyclemania.

A few staff were not comfortable with managers coming to their cubicles to help them make decisions about items that had been living with them for years. Those employees were assured that the consultation was not considered a failure on their part, but simply the result of many years of department wide indecision that happened to land on their shelves. The first phase of the project, decluttering, went exceptionally well. The next task was to reinvent workspaces in the Technical Services area.

Libraries administration and the Project Team felt that the department staff and the organization as a whole would benefit from moving from a mindset of cubicles and stability to a more dynamic, nimble, collaborative group of professionals working toward a common goal. Initially, thought was given to creating a more physically open space by removing modular panels currently used to divide space into staff cubicles. This idea met with vigorous and vocal disapproval from staff in the area that felt that such a "non-arrangement" would create more noise and would eliminate any feeling of private space. Taking that into consideration, the committee suggested retaining the office spaces while creating a variety of non-assigned workspaces which would provide opportunities for managers to meet with team members to work on projects, team members to gather to talk about and work on projects, or for one or two staff members to work on a project that required space to spread out physical files or to gather around a computer. A scanning area within the newly defined Technical Services Reference area was also put into place. Although Technical Services is still working on how to integrate scanning into the work of the department, planning a space to grow that process seemed lie a sensible decision.

Technical Services Reference and Scanning Area

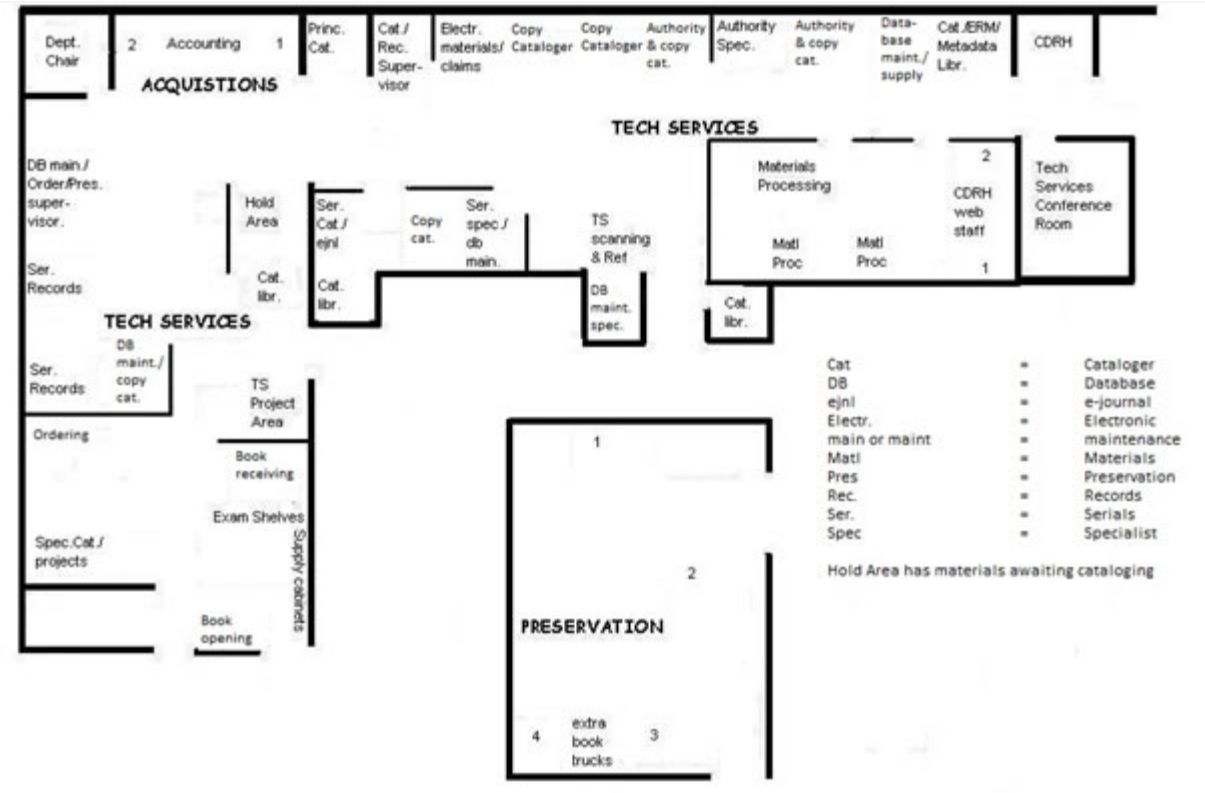
One of the Project's goals was to locate work teams in the same general area. To meet that goal, and be able to devise a workable floor plan the Project Team needed to identify who did what and how the work flowed. Initially, the chair of the Project Team suggested creating a "bubble chart

As it turned out, the strategy that worked best was to use a rough sketch of where people were currently placed and start re-arranging workspaces based on input from the department chair and members of the Project Team who were in Technical Services. Using this method, a first draft of possible placements was generated by the end of the Project Team's second meeting, well ahead of our timeline. This method also helped identify work flow issues, related tasks, areas that probably should not be moved, as well as tasks that could be done better in a different area or with different equipment, or staff members that could perform at a higher level if they were relocated.

Another factor the Project Team took into consideration was the university-mandated space allocation. Based on this theoretical space allocation model, each level of staff was allowed a basic number of square feet with additional space provided for computers, printers, and other equipment and furnishings. The Project Team's initial concern was that Technical Services would have to abide by those standards, perhaps reducing the amount of space staff had previously had. Fortunately, the standards did not need to be used to allocate space. Instead, all but one staff member ended up with as much or more room than they had previously. The Project Team was careful to provide managers with as equal amount of space as possible. Only one faculty member did not have a private office, so the decision was made to construct a modular office for her. By doing this, another initiative was completed: to provide all Technical Services faculty with a private office.

Once a draft floor plan was together, the Project Team initiated "gathering input by wandering around." As members of the Team wandered though the Technical Services area looking at the draft of possible re-locations, conversations easily occurred with faculty and staff members who reviewed what was being considered. By and large, they were interested and very forthcoming with ideas and sharing examples of bookcases, carts, tables, and other times that they really did not need or want and would be glad to dispose of. The Project Team was pleased with this response. The team's expectation had been that more selling of the ideas would be necessary

Finalizing the floor plan:



After further consideration of the plan based on suggestions from staff and clarification of job assignments from managers and the department chair, the Project Team decided it was time to formally present our ideas to the whole Technical Services faculty and staff. To do this, the Team invited faculty and staff to an 'open house' in their departmental conference room For the most part, faculty and staff were happy with the plan. After a final perusal by the team, the floor plan was presented to the Libraries Executive Committee where it was approved.

Refining the Plan

"Organizations, like any other dynamic ecosystem, continuously make adaptations in response to changing internal and external conditions." (Becker & Steele 1995, p.49).

The initial floor plan was a very minimal document basically indicating who would sit where and did not note office dimensions or actual placement of office furniture within the workspace. After the basic plan was approved, two of the Project Team members prepared a detailed plan that included exact dimensions of each office space, whether or not modular panels would need to be relocated, and which staff wanted to continue to use bookcases or cabinets for space separators. This made the task much easier for the representative of the office furniture supplier to estimate how many panels her crew would have to move and how to position the new modular office for a faculty member. The more precise measurements also reassured staff that most of them would actually be gaining space rather than losing it. And, that not having extraneous furniture and bookcases in their area would provide even greater space and flexibility for them.

In actuality, few staff actually had to physically move from one space to another. In most cases, modular panels were moved to provide staff with more space. Most of the proposed moving was re-purposing bookcases and other furnishings either to someone else's area or out of the department or to university inventory. A balance between open space and private space was sought, allowing for staff to easily see and be seen, yet have more private area for activities requiring concentration or work related conversations.

Another major change for the department was moving all the supply cabinets into a central location. The supply clerk went through the six large, double-sided supply cabinets to consolidate office supplies, specialized supplies into five cabinets, which were moved to a little-used area of the department. This change simplified his job, and provided staff with only one place to look when searching for supplies. Should we note that since then, some staff have indicated this is not the best way to go.

Moving Day

The Project Team decided that University Moving Services and the office furniture movers should come the day before the staff move to move out items bound for University Inventory and to remove modular panels that were attached to the walls. This proved to be a great idea as it provided staff with the tangible result of their efforts to clean out their areas and divesting themselves of filing cabinets, work tables, and other unneeded items. Most staff commented on how much larger the area in general seemed.

The Project Team member from the Libraries computing department also started moving staff computers to their new areas. Staff were encouraged to have their personal effects and bookcases cleared off so that Moving Services could quickly move them to their new positions. Both moves went remarkably well. The two moving crews did not get in each other's way. The moves were done in four to five hours and everyone was busy re-arranging their new space by early afternoon, and back at work the next day. This success is a direct result of the extensive planning and measuring done by Project Team members, and the work of Technical Services faculty and staff in weeding and planning their personal and collective workspaces.

Closing Down the Project

The entire project was completed prior to the date the Libraries Dean had requested the preliminary floor plan. The only minor rearrangement needed was in the Marking and Labeling area: the floor plan had not left enough space for book carts, so a few pieces of furniture had to be moved. In the midst of planning, a faculty member resigned her position and another faculty member moved to that office, leaving a workspace vacant. That space has become temporary out-of-the-way housing for carts, which gives the department an even more uncluttered look.

In order to re-introduce the new space to the rest of the Libraries faculty and staff, Technical Services hosted a "Discover Technical Services" day during which a general informational session was held in order to give Technical Services staff the opportunity to share how their tasks had changed over the last few years. After the session, Libraries faculty and staff were invited to tour the re-arranged area and ask questions. Food was also provided. This allowed non-Technical Services faculty and staff to locate the work areas of Technical Services faculty and staff with whom they work on a regular basis and to become acquainted with the area overall.

Poster designed by Technical Services faculty member to highlight redesign results

The Project Team met with the dean and both associate deans over lunch to debrief and discuss why this project had been successful, what did not work, and what could be done in the future to build on the success of the project. Observations included the importance of having the right group of people to work on the project, as well as explaining to staff why the project was needed and what the roles of each team member were. Good and continuous communication through a variety of means was also listed as important. This point referred to communication within the team, providing affected faculty and staff with opportunities to provide input and suggestions, as well as responding to suggestions and ideas quickly, instead of staff never hearing about them again.

An interesting point was made during the debriefing regarding the psychological aspect of having space formerly occupied by staff whose positions would not be refilled repurposed into new office or project space. The Technical Services department chair, who was on the Project Team, noted that having the space redesigned based on current staffing and workflow helped Technical Services staff realize that change is inevitable and can be handled in a positive way. The chair also felt that getting rid of extraneous equipment and furniture helped the faculty and staff move from old patterns to more streamlined operation. Technical Services staff members who were on the Project Team noted practical aspects of better airflow in the area and the ability to see around the area without being blocked by bookcases and card catalogs. One of the Team also mentioned that the "furniture exchange" had the feel of a garage sale which injected some fun into the project and allowed people to re-purpose items to make their offices more efficient.

The dean concluded the debriefing and celebratory lunch by thanking the Project Team for their work and congratulated them on a job well done.

Technical Services east wing demonstrating open, flexible arrangement

Did the Project Team Meet the Project Redesign Criteria?

1) Construct a plan that would provide managers with better access to the people on their teams.

The Project Team was able to move most members of work groups closer together. The Preservation unit remained in the basement, with the supervisor located on 3rd floor, but there was never an expectation that this arrangement would be able to change with this redesign. Shortly before the completion of the project, a re-organization resulted in Government Documents being assigned to Technical Services. Their offices and workspace were not re-located, as space had not been allocated for the faculty and 2 staff and most of their work does not involve physical interaction with TS staff.

2) De-clutter the Technical Services area, including working through problem materials that had been languishing on cubicle bookshelves for years.

This was perhaps the most successful aspect of the project. As noted in the body of the paper, we were able to deal with years of back files, monographs, and serials. Additionally, Technical Services got rid of no longer used or needed furniture, including card catalogs, supply cabinets and various and sundry filing cabinets.

3) Devise a plan that would encourage more professional communication between colleagues, as well as a more nimble, dynamic environment.

The two Technical Services workspaces created for managers and the new Technical Services Reference and Scanning area were put into use immediately. With the closer proximity of colleagues and managers working on similar projects, faculty and staff are more comfortable approaching them for a quick consult or question.

4) *Foster positive morale in the Technical Services department.*

Although we do not have any real way to measure achievement of this goal, the Project Team had very positive feedback from faculty and staff regarding the improved workflow, the cleaner look of the area, and the extra space in their workspaces.

5) *Create a project area that had been requested by our Center for Digital Research in the Humanities.*

Although this space was not initially fully furnished, it has been well used by the faculty and staff in the Center.

Was the Project Management Model Successful?

Overall, the model worked very successfully. The team members worked well together, did a good job of identifying and soliciting input from stakeholders, and the communication methods that the team identified worked well, for the most part. Everyone used all the forms, some more than others. As usual, the best input was given through informal conversation, but the white board and e-mail options also provided valuable input as well.

Other residual outcomes:

The current periodical sorting area was also revamped over the years and the serial reductions, the number of sorting tubs had been reduced by at least two A wire rack on wheels was purchased for the tubs that were still needed and Princeton files were used for the branches whose periodical collections had dwindled to the point that a tub was totally unnecessary.

Both of the departmental managers were provided with larger offices of nearly equal size. With the additional office space, they each have a small conference table in their office so they can meet with one or two staff members to work on projects. One of the managers opted to keep a smaller office space and use the project area for non-private meetings.

Some staff were relocated, at their request, to provide them a quieter workspace. While not part of Technical Services, two staff members whose job is to maintain our web presence were originally placed right inside one of the main set of doors into the department. After analyzing their needs, a space was created for them in a much quieter area, adjacent to two conference rooms, which are not in constant use, and a faculty member's office. They found this space much more conducive to accomplishing the work they need to do.

Although no substantive changes were made in the Preservation area, located in the basement, staff there felt involved in the process. After an extensive tour of the area, it was clear that the equipment and processes were not transportable, so the decision was made to leave things as they were.

Not all changes worked. An example of a possible negative outcome was the team chair's suggestion that the exam shelves and related tasks (unpacking/packing boxes, processing titles accepted for purchase or refused) be moved to the Preservation area. While the affected staff were willing to make this work, it became evident after a short conversation that this was not a good idea and would result in more work for the staff rather than less. An idea that looked workable on paper really wasn't

Although the dean's office had budgeted some money to facilitate purchase of whatever the team might suggest, most of the cost was to University Moving Services to come and move desks and other furniture around and remove items to inventory, a crew from our local office interiors partner to move panels and other modular installations, purchase of two new whiteboards and the modular office for a faculty member. As a matter of fact, we ended up getting rid of one phone line altogether and shutting off several ports, thus saving the library approximately $500.00 per year in telecommunication costs.

The project took much less time than anticipated. From the first meeting to moving day was approximately twelve weeks. The dean's office had given the project team eight weeks to come up with a plan and longer to implement it. Obviously, library administrators were pleased with the work of the committee and the willingness of TS staff to buy into the process. Some cost savings were also made here, as staff involved were able to get back to their regular duties sooner than anticipated.

Since the completion of the project, as noted previously, a minor re-structuring of the libraries has taken place and our Government Documents reporting line has moved from Access Services to Technical Services.

In December of 2010, the chair of the Project Management Team polled Technical Services staff to see how the changes were working out after six months of living with the new layout, and what, if anything, they would like to see changed. On the whole Technical Services faculty and staff were very satisfied with the changes. In a few cases, although satisfied with the new space, staff feel the need for additional square footage for some functions. Centralization of the supplies were seen by some as less convenient than each area having their own supply cabinet. Another staff member that was relocated to a new area felt that they needed to be quieter in their conversations since they are now located closer to other staff. Positive feedback was also received on use of the two new project/scanning areas created as part of the redesign. New equipment continues to be added to make both of these areas functional and flexible for ongoing projects.

UNL Libraries are practitioners of a learning environment. Some of our ideas that looked reasonable on paper would not have worked in practice However, those "missteps" are not considered to be failures, bit rather an opportunity for reconsideration and exploring other options. Practicing the principles of project management, learning organizations, and appreciative inquiry enabled the UNL Libraries to make significant improvement in technical services workflow, redeploy valuable workspace, and to demonstrate to all Libraries employees that creating a climate of continuous assessment and change can be a positive experience.

Conclusion

Staff reductions and changes and technological upgrades had left the technical services staff unsure of their place in the organization. Their space was cluttered with empty desks and relics of a more print-based workplace. A project originally proposed to deal with better utilization of physical space became an exercise in team building and revitalization. By identifying and exploiting the talents and skills of the staff, the department reformed itself into a collaborative unit that is ready to move forward as a cohesive department rather than a collection of skilled but disparate staff.

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