

Cloud-Based Options for Managing Workforce Transition

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Abstract

Library budget cuts have severely reduced library positions. Managers can prepare for unexpected changes in staffing by creating workplace instructions for each library position and maintaining these documents through cloud based technology. Low or no cost applications are explored in this article to provide an overview of technology available to library managers who are concerned about staff shortages and preparing libraries for eventual staff replacement.

Most libraries have disaster preparedness plans for weather emergencies but do they plan for unforeseen staffing shortages? One way library managers can prepare for staff cuts and shortages is to make sure there is clear and open access to workplace instructions for each position. Directions on how to do each task at the library should be written out and easily available for all library staff to access. Another way to prepare for future staff shortages and cuts is to cross train library staff on multiple tasks so that there are many people with the same knowledge about how to complete a particular job. Cross training can be an opportunity to test out the written instructions for clarity and accuracy.

Cloud computing can be an effective platform for workforce transitions. Cloud based applications are a current way that library administration can provide for future changes in staffing. One way is to develop a plan to prepare for anticipated changes in current workers statuses due to retirement, resignation or illness. According to Singer, Goodrich and Goldberg (2004), library managers “rarely receive formal instruction on how to achieve goals, motivate staff, prepare budgets, manage buildings, and maximize employee potential.” Library departments preparing for future changes can rely on free web based services to capture job specific instructions and institutional memory in the cloud making the transition of responsibilities to the successor as seamless as possible. Before implementing a workforce transition plan, a period of discussion should be held to explain reasons why workflow instructions will be written and who will be involved in the creation and maintenance of the instructions. It is important to determine the principal stakeholders in each department and meet with them to discuss the needs to create an outline for workforce transition. According to Whitmell (2005), “setting this direction

will help you identify the people and skills needed to move your plans forward.” Staff will know in detail what policies and procedures should be documented. Listening to their input will allow managers to gain an understanding of where the library is at present with instructional guides and will provide an idea of where to focus efforts when creating cloud-based guides.

It is important for managers to know and understand what staff does on a daily basis before attempting to capture that information in an instructional guide. Ask questions and listen to staff about the workflow and daily tasks that are involved with their work. Managers may not be aware of all the ways staff are keeping the department running efficiently and this time in the process is an ideal opportunity to learn the daily ins and outs of department workflow. Once a clear understanding of the tasks involved in the daily work of the department is achieved, managers should review the instructional guides each department has already written down for their own use. After the period of review, tasks that have not been addressed should be assigned to the departments for creation of thorough written procedures.

Library management must determine an approach to workforce transition and succession planning by choosing a method of hosting instructional guides. If possible library staff may want to use a shared file or folder on the library server where all staff can access the information. This may be the easiest way for all staff to share information but support from IT staff is necessary to create and maintain access to the folder or file. A shared file will not be accessible to anyone outside the library and may not have a reliable infrastructure in case of hardware failure.

Another option may be to share the information using an online cloud based

application such as PBworks or TeamLab. Both cloud based services are free for libraries and allow for file sharing, information storage, and project management. Pretlow and Jayroe (2010) found that the use of web-based services can be incorporated into traditional staff training at a low cost to the library. These applications can be used for sharing information with patrons and staff through a community wiki, coordinating staff schedules, and publicizing library events like author readings or game nights to the public or internal memos to staff such as reminders to turn in timesheets. Through either one of these free cloud based applications a library can capture its institutional knowledge and staff can refer to the instruction guides when working on a task. Each department can have its own pages and files for easy organization of information and instructional guides. Staff may consult the instructional guides when completing daily tasks such as issuing a new library card or processing new materials. Information such as problems and resolutions for the ILS can be posted to the online wiki for future reference. Job-specific lists assist in daily work whether it's for call numbers of musical instruments or databases used by a School of Nursing. Adding those lists to the online wiki for others to use will be beneficial for all who work at the library.

Additional backup storage applications to protect documents include cloud-based services Dropbox and Google Drive. These free services allow users to save files and access them through a downloadable application on one's computer or on the cloud based server. These applications are useful as all documents at each location are updated simultaneously so that the current edition of the file is on all desktops. Dropbox and Google Drive services can be used to share documents with others. Users are able to collaborate more effectively when one is able to put files right onto their computer desktops. This

may be an additional way for staff members to perpetually and consistently have the most current documents at hand during the work day. The file sharing can be limited so that only certain staff has access to limited content. The ability to share large files such as MARC records, PDFs, and PowerPoint slideshows alleviates the complications of sending large attachments through email which will benefit all library staff. Using these applications for saving large files will also allow reference librarians and distance learning librarians to share files such as journal articles and instruction videos with students anywhere Internet access is available and not have to worry about file size or forgetting to attach the most current document to an email. This is done by creating a folder, adding content one wants accessible to everyone, and then emailing the link or posting the link to an online course management system such Moodle or Blackboard.

Creating and maintaining workplace instructions eventually will become institutional knowledge and a plan for workforce transition for the library, but it may be difficult at first for current staff to accept the idea of documenting their job duties. Preparing for succession or staff cuts may concern staff who are acutely aware of the pressure and budget cuts that are affecting libraries in the current economic downturn. According to Hawthorn (2011), technical success planning emphasizes “transfer of knowledge among and between individuals.” Honest discussion about how the instructional guides can be used and the purpose of the wiki can help staff understand these efforts as preparations for the future. Be patient with staff since it may take some time to learn how to use the new cloud-based technology and contribute to the wiki. Take the time to train staff on how to use the new technology and give them the time to do the additional work of documenting workflow instructions for the wiki. Allow staff time to

work on the workplace instructions.

The constraints of library budgets have affected virtually every library, archives and cultural institution across the globe. As a profession librarians have been able to continue to provide access to information through cloud based applications. Free and low cost programs and platforms have allowed librarians to continue creating access for patrons during current economic hardships. Librarians continue to implement and promote the use of cloud based technology to enhance library services and online capabilities with a low cost burden to library budgets. The cloud based applications discussed in this article are just some of the online technologies that librarians have explored and will continue to utilize to provide better access to library services for patrons.

References

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