

Reconfiguring Service Delivery

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

As the web emerged during the last decade, technological change continued to influence deeply, rivaling growth as a constant in many libraries. As a result, library administrators confronted such phenomena as the increased provision of online content (particularly journal content in the sciences), such demographic phenomena as staff retirements and the graying of the profession and, in many cases, reduced budgets. A time of great uncertainty for research libraries, the purpose of this spring 2011 survey is to assess the impact that such factors had on the service provision in ARL libraries. Of particular concern in this study are two broad categories of library-staffed service points, staffed service desks and branches (defined broadly) that report to main libraries. While we acknowledge that a trend towards consolidating and reconfiguring library-staffed service points indeed existed before we started compiling the data for this SPEC Kit, with this study we hope to collect, document, and reveal some of the newest changes in order to better characterize and explore what is emerging.

The survey instrument asked respondents to provide background by considering changes in their staffed service points during the last three years. Having done that, respondents then were asked to provide details pertaining to one or two of their changes. Next, respondents provided comments on whether the drivers for the change were one or more of the following: a physical or philosophical change, a change in financial or staff resources, an opportunity afforded by changing technology, or an opportunity to increase collaboration and/or outsourcing. Questions about user participation in the creation and assessment of each change followed. There were

ample text boxes for further explanation included with most of the questions. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they anticipated any further changes during the next three years and to briefly characterize these future changes. Additional comments and/or supporting documentation such as articles, related organizational charts, or other documents and/or websites were also sought.

The survey was conducted between May 9 and June 13, 2011. Sixty respondents at 59 of the 126 ARL member institutions completed the survey for an overall response rate of 47%. Forty-three replies came from public universities, fifteen from private universities, and one from a national research institution. Six of the public universities were Canadian; the rest of the respondents were from institutions in the United States. All were distributed geographically throughout both countries. Because the respondents did not respond to all the questions, readers may detect discrepancies in the numbers reported that need not be cause for alarm.

Definitions and Methodology

As library administrators continue to focus and hone the services offered, the definitions of the service points themselves also may change. As recently as 2003, when Joan Kreitz was collecting the data for her *Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, a service point was defined as “a fixed location within a library or information center staffed to provide a specific service to users, for example, the circulation desk, reference desk, serials desk, interlibrary loan office, etc.”¹ and a branch library was defined as “an auxiliary service outlet in a library system, housed in a facility separate from the central library, which has *at least* a

basic collection of materials, a regular staff, and established hours, with a budget and policies determined by the central library.”²

For the purposes of this survey, the authors decided to study ARL libraries’ *staffed* service outlets, service desks, and branch libraries, to learn whether they are being newly added, closed, consolidated, or otherwise reconfigured during the last three years. The authors learned that the concepts of added and closed are relatively straightforward, but the concepts of consolidated and otherwise reconfigured are not. Although Kreitz does define consolidation as “the merger of two or more separately administered libraries, or organizational units within a library, into one unit under a single administration, usually for reasons of efficiency and/or economy or to improve quality of service,”³ survey respondents often described their library’s changes by using verbs that more adequately defined what they were describing including *integrate*, *combine*, *merge*, and *expand*—a situation that somewhat complicated comparisons. Many libraries mention integrating service desks (where integrating and consolidating seemed to the authors to be roughly synonymous), but when discussing branch libraries, integrating them seemed to be a very different thing from consolidating them (where integrating meant to interfile all the books in LC call number order and consolidating meant moving and housing more discrete pieces).

Kreitz’s dictionary defines reconfigure in terms of systems terminology “to change the way the data is structured in a computer system”⁴ that has been borrowed and broadened in the present day to encompass library organizational systems. In the survey, respondents reported additional service point and branch library reconfigurations ranging from a change of hours or aesthetic remodeling to more drastic rearrangements that reflect changes in the nature of the service such as changes in staffing, organizational reporting structure, or replacing a physical service desk with a virtual one.

To study all of the changes in staffed service points that this survey afforded, the authors both read each respondents’ answers as a case study and also considered the compilation of responses in total as is reproduced in its entirety for readers as the Survey

Questions and Responses section of this document. A comparison of variables such as size of library, enrollment, budgets, number of staff, and even total number of branch libraries and/or staffed service points was beyond the scope of this analysis.

Changes in Library Service Points and Branch Libraries

The survey first asked whether any staffed service point in the main library or a branch library that reports to the system had been added, closed, consolidated, or otherwise reconfigured during the last three years. Fifty-two respondents (88%) answered yes; seven (12%) answered no. When asked to quantify changes in their libraries, 47 respondents reported 149 changes to service points, and 27 reported 53 changes to branch libraries. The changes were both minor and major in scope. The respondents who changed service points reported more consolidations (56) and reconfigurations (53) than closures (27) or additions (13). The respondents who changed branch libraries were more likely to close them (27 branches) than to consolidate (11), reconfigure (9), or add them (6).

Each of the fifty-two respondents provided details for one service delivery configuration (questions 3–17). Twenty-one of them provided details for a second service delivery configuration (questions 18–32).

Although the survey recorded reconfigured changes made in the last three years, there was diversity in the changes that the respondents had made. While seven respondents reported that no changes to either service points or branch libraries occurred during the last three years (and two of the seven did not anticipate changes in the next three years), on the other side of the spectrum, several respondents confirmed that changes in service points and/or branch libraries have been a constant feature in their organizations for at least 15 or more years.

Additions

The authors looked closely at the many changes reported for trends that could be considered typical, but instead found very unique changes that fulfilled the library mission and reflected the nature of the institution. In considering service points, the most common change reported was the addition of a consolidated

service desk by combining reference with circulation and/or more services such as interlibrary loan, reserves, periodicals, technology assistance, or media services. Proponents of the consolidated service desk believe that it centralizes patron service. Because consolidated service desks are staffed with paraprofessional staff and even students in many instances, the librarians who take appointments or serve on-call are freed from the demands of frontline service to more closely engage with patrons and work on the strategic directives of the institution.

The second most common addition in service points was an information commons. This approach couples a technology-rich space, specially equipped for collaboration and group work with library and other university services that may include advising, math or writing tutoring, career placement, or study abroad services. The information commons is generally coordinated virtually through a web space although some have service desks attached as well. Respondents were very enthusiastic about these additions and quick to note how popular they are with students.

Although not quite as prevalent as consolidated service desks, consolidated/central research desks were the third most common addition. This configuration may result from combining reference desks with other research desks such as government publications, or the consolidation of two-or-more subjects' reference services (e.g., science or music reference) to create a consolidated approach. Proponents of consolidated/central research desks note the librarians who staff these desks provide excellent service to patrons taking advantage of the range of available expertise. This mixing that occurs among the specialists amounts to effective cross training and efficient triage of patron questions.

The fourth most common addition in both service points and branch libraries was a small, but very interesting category that the authors tagged notable innovations. Only a small group at present, notable innovations may be harbingers of future service configurations to come. Examples include virtualizations (defined as replacing a service point or branch library with its virtual counterpart) of many kinds—library collections, service points, and embedded library

service providers for strategically targeted groups of users. Although the ownership for these virtualizations most likely will be the library, the ownership of a virtualization may be shared or even owned by a department where a librarian only participates instead of being a wholly owned subsidiary of the library.

There were only a few additions of branch libraries in new educational facilities consistent with the lean budgets that most institutions experienced; in one case, the library took over the management of a branch library from a university department.

Closures

The most common service point closure reported was a reference or service desk closed in the making of a consolidated service desk followed by a service or research desk closed as a result of the creation of a consolidated/super research desk. Interestingly, closures as a result of consolidated media service points appeared often enough to make special note. In some cases, media service points were closed after the media was moved from a closed stack to an open access arrangement. In other cases, media services were closed as a result of a consolidation with circulation desks or other “older” library technologies such as microforms, periodicals, or music media.

In terms of branch library closures, science branch library closures outnumbered other branch library closures even though several respondents didn't distinguish a field other than “branch library closure.” Because some respondents also reported a connection between the easy electronic delivery of scientific periodical literature and diminished gatecounts at branch libraries, the authors observed a trend in these science library closures.

Consolidations

The most common service point reconfiguration, the numerous consolidations figured prominently into all of the additions, closures, and other reconfigurations reported. As noted previously, the word, consolidate, may not be standardized in library lexicon as respondents often used other terms such as integrate, combine, merge, or expand for consolidate. Also, there seemed to be a nearly limitless way that library service points could be consolidated, although library

collections could be either integrated into a precise order or consolidated into many open and closed stack arrangements.

As noted in the additions and the closures, the most frequently consolidated service points were service desks, media service desks, central research desks, and expanded research commons service points. Other notable innovations include the consolidations inherent in replacing service points with virtualizations of all kinds. Likewise, many ARL libraries reported consolidations in their science branch libraries, consolidating the smaller ones into the larger ones or into the main library.

Otherwise Reconfigured

The possibilities for tweaking library service points and branch libraries are nearly limitless. Each retooled aspect of a service point or branch library's operation may be considered a reconfiguration qualifying it for an additional inclusion in this survey. The authors created four categories of "otherwise reconfigured" from the many reported by respondents. These are staffing reconfigurations, hours reconfigurations (of which there were many), organizational reconfigurations, and aesthetic remodeling.

The many configurations of newly consolidated service points and branch libraries encourage changing staffing patterns to take advantage of all the local resources, including retirements, and even serendipity in lean times. Each service point and/or branch library closing frees personnel to be reassigned to other areas. Library staffs pushed to the brink of barely covering the multiplicity of service points of an old configuration are finding relief in these newly reconfigured spaces, making institutions really able to accomplish more with less.

Consolidated service points that combine reference services with circulation and/or other service points commonly included a plan for downsizing the needed staffing. In many cases (but not all), paraprofessional staffing and/or students provided the frontline staffing in these new arrangements freeing professional librarians for more collection development, liaison, instruction, and/or other pursuits. Mechanisms to provide "on call" professional assistance and/or appointments with librarians completed the change.

Another reconfiguration, consolidated/super research desks, also benefits from the work of many to provide improved staffing. The approach taken in the provision of service might be an improved triage of customer needs at one service point guided by consultants within the space or offsite, or two previously separated reference services on one floor electing to share the staffing.

Because patrons have virtual 24/7 expectations for service that are very difficult to maintain in the physical world, library administrators are experimenting with the provision of open hours for a given service. At every library service point or branch library, the hours can be increased or reduced; each also may be augmented or supplemented by other services to create a unified whole. The more creative and intricate the scheduling, the more difficult it becomes to communicate all the many possibilities in open hours. Online newsletters, blogs, personal email, and RSS feeds are all virtual means employed to improve communication.

Organizational changes figured prominently into the service point and branch library reconfigurations that the respondents reported. Often the result of a library strategic plan to realign the structure of an institution, organizational changes also emerged through opportunities in the relationships that have developed. Examples of the organizational changes that accompanied reported reconfigurations include new or realigned structures to manage new functions or new reporting relationships created to reflect the new service point or branch library changes made. Examples of organizational changes that emerged through opportunities include learning commons collaborations, faculty and departmental relationships resulting through their embedded situations, or the changing management of departmental library facilities (respondents reported both situations of the library assuming the management of a departmental library or reading room and a university department choosing to maintain a previous library space).

Lastly, aesthetic remodeling figured prominently in this category. Examples include actual changes to the counter space of service points or a service point's location, enhancements to existing learning commons installations, whole branch library remodels, changes

or improvements to the technology offered, or patron-friendly improvements such as comfortable reading room furniture or more group study rooms.

Driving Factors in Service Delivery Reconfigurations

In addition to looking at the types of reconfigurations that ARL libraries have experienced in the past three years, the survey asked respondents to consider the driving factors that served as the impetus for the reconfigurations that were described. The survey listed a broad range of factors that reflected external, more concrete drivers such as changes in physical facilities, financial or staff resources, and/or the availability/application of new technologies; internal, less tangible drivers such as changes in service philosophy or responding to user demands; and drivers beyond the library such as collaborating with a partner outside the library or outsourcing delivery of a particular service. Finally, respondents were provided the opportunity to briefly describe other factors that might have influenced the reconfigurations they had described (see questions 4 and 19). In the vast majority of cases, respondents indicated that more than one of these factors were significant drivers in the decision to reconfigure library services. See Figure 1 below for the percentage of responses for each driving factor.

Physical or Philosophical Change

Given the current economic downturn, changes in financial and/or staff resources might be expected to be the most significant driver in the decision to reconfigure library services. Based on the responses received, though, ARL libraries are driven most by a changing service philosophy to provide better customer service. Just under three-quarters of the libraries that responded to this question indicated that a change in service philosophy was a driving factor in reconfiguring services. Additionally, slightly more than half of the responding libraries indicated user demands are a driving factor. Frequently, descriptions of a change in service philosophy accompanied the physical reconfigurations reported, such as creating an information commons/research commons space approach, providing centralized, one-stop service points for users, making services more user friendly, and making the best use of librarian time by changing to a just-in-time model as opposed to a just-in-case model. A change in service philosophy could also be expressed in a library's internal organization, documentation, or routines. One responding library noted a changed service philosophy in its development of baseline expectations of levels of reference service in various subject areas so that service desk staff will know when to refer users to subject specialists.

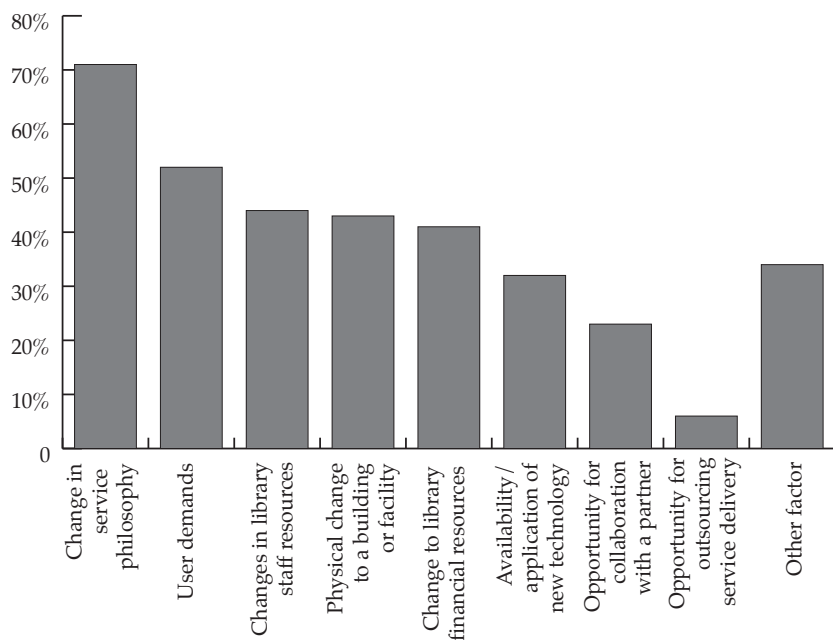


Figure 1. Driving Factors in Decisions to Reconfigure Service Delivery

Forty-three percent of the respondents reported a wide variety of physical changes to buildings or facilities, making this the next most significant driver of service reconfiguration. A few fortunate libraries managed to open new facilities in new or renovated building spaces. Several libraries relinquished space to other departments by closing or consolidating branch libraries. Other libraries relocated service desks, created learning or collaboration spaces, or provided more seating, all with an eye to better serve their constituents.

Financial Resources or Staff

A little more than 40% of the responding libraries reported that changes in financial resources or staff resources were significant drivers of service reconfiguration. But libraries that experienced stagnant or diminished funding far outnumbered those that received augmented funding. The majority of responding libraries have seen continued budget reductions for the past three years. Staffing levels in several libraries have been diminished by retirements without replacements, recapturing salary funds to cover budget reductions. Some libraries indicated that the number of hourly/part-time employees had also been reduced to help cover budget cuts. Other libraries have relocated/reallocated positions to provide new services needed by constituents. Consolidation of service desks appears to be a major method of freeing librarian time to be able to spend more time in faculty departments or provide more research-intensive services.

New Technology

Although new technologies seem to be surfacing daily, about one third of the responding libraries indicated that the availability or application of new technologies is a driving factor for service reconfiguration. Accounts of projects throughout the survey responses describe technology-rich services being developed by some of the libraries. Multi-media equipment and software are being added along with collaborative working spaces to meet the needs of students and faculty. Examples of some imaginative application of new technology include the use of web-based software to schedule appointments with library faculty, the addition of software to produce library instruction, subject

specialist and collection information, integration of library services into course management systems, and providing multi-media hardware and software in designated spaces within the library. Several of the responding libraries indicated that the availability of archival collections of serials and/or the movement to online collections has greatly enhanced service capabilities, helping to move the library “presence” outside the physical building.

Collaboration and Outsourcing

The opportunity to collaborate with a partner outside the library was a significant driving factor for about one quarter of the responding libraries. Most commonly that partner was the information technology unit of the parent institution. In other cases libraries partnered with discipline-specific departments, student services, and/or the provost’s office to develop ideas and generate funding for projects to reconfigure library services.

Fewer than 10% of the responding libraries indicated that the opportunity to outsource a particular service was a significant driver in the service reconfiguration process. One library transferred responsibility for student printing to the university’s information technology unit. Another library was able to merge the billing part of the access services unit into the university’s billing system, allowing users to pay library fines and replacement charges through that system. Two libraries reported that they also participate in collaborative 24/7 chat reference services that provide users with around the clock reference assistance.

Other Factors

Slightly more than a third of the responding libraries chose to describe other factors that were significant drivers in the decision to reconfigure their library services. The common theme to nearly all of these is the more effective and/or efficient use of library spaces. Whether it is the need for more collaboration space, more space for computers in a learning or research commons, returning branch library space to specific departments, or merging public services into one service desk, nearly every library that responded to this question is dealing with space issues at one level or another.

Impact of Service Delivery Implementation on Personnel

The impact of changing service delivery on personnel was central to the survey and deserves special consideration here. The most common impact (reported by 68% of the libraries responding to questions 8 and 23) was that existing staff, regardless of staff level, was being moved to a new service point. The next most common impact was reassigning personnel within the library (46%). One quarter of the responding libraries reported that the number of positions in the library had been reduced through attrition. Slightly fewer than 10% reported that staff work hours had been reduced. A fortunate few, slightly less than 20%, reported that staff had been hired to fill newly created positions as a result of the reported reconfigurations. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, support staff have experienced the most impact in all categories but one, that of new hires, in which librarians were the benefactors.

The descriptions of impacts on library personnel varied across respondents although there were a few

common threads. By far the most often cited impact was the need for training. For example, support staff members were trained in providing reference service, including activities such as the reference interview and use of sources. Some librarians serving at consolidated service desks were instructed in the ins and outs of circulation, interlibrary loan, reserves, and other activities that commonly are transacted at the circulation desk. As previously noted, this cross training eliminated silos and helped personnel develop insight into and appreciation of how the “other guys” work.

Both moving staff to new service points and reassigning existing staff to other positions within the library created some imaginative reporting relationships, including dual-reporting lines for some of the staff. If reporting relationships were not changed to a different unit, at least new organization chart relationships were established.

For librarians, a general trend was for fewer hours of reference desk coverage while moving to either a consultation or appointment mode for more in-depth

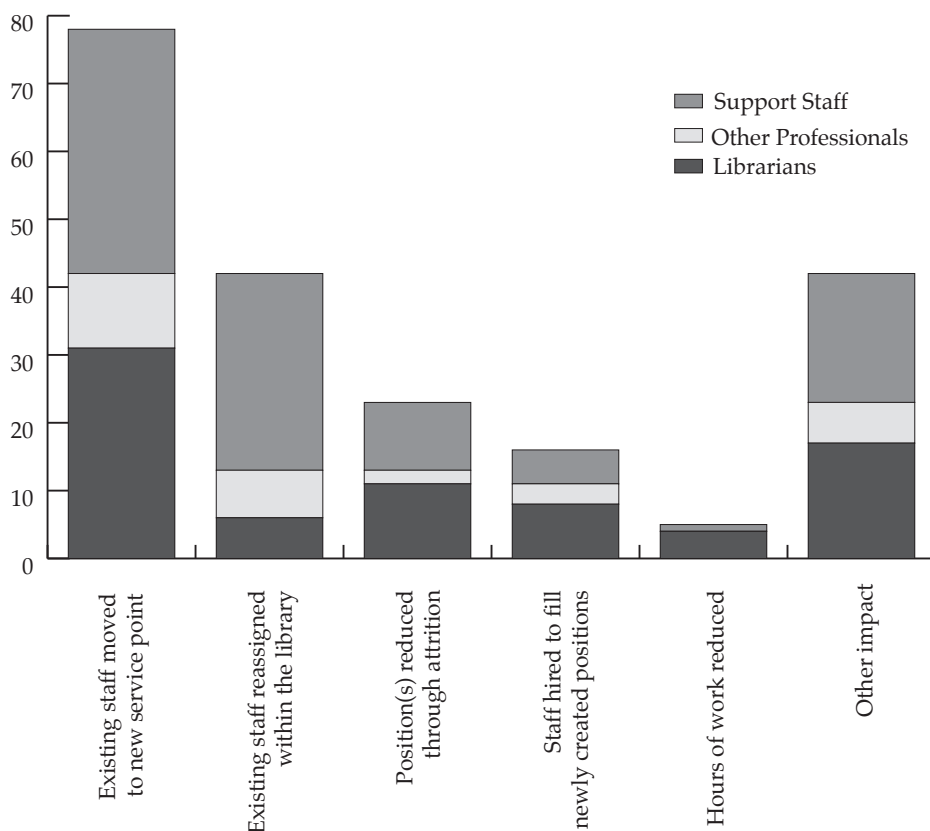


Figure 2. Impact of Service Delivery Implementation on Personnel

reference questions. Several respondents reported that librarians' time had been freed to concentrate on development of new or additional services.

When asked to describe other types of impact on permanent library staff, respondents' varied perspectives were much the same as outlined above. Training or cross training in procedures and technology was again the most frequently mentioned impact. Better use of permanent library staff time was a close runner-up.

Opportunities for User Participation in the Planning, Implementation, and Assessment of Reconfigurations

Questions 14 and 29 asked whether user participation factored into three phases of a service delivery reconfiguration: planning, service implementation, or assessment. Overall, slightly fewer respondents engage users in various aspects of the reconfiguration process than don't. At the libraries that do, users most frequently participate in planning and assessment activities.

Planning

Based on the descriptions of methods used to engage users in the planning process, it is clear that working with focus groups was the most frequently used method. Several of the libraries have student or faculty library advisory groups that were involved at one level or another in the planning processes. Working with faculty in specific departments was the method of engagement most often mentioned when the reconfiguration involved either the addition or closure of a branch library. Other methods described included using LibQUAL+® data, online and in-house surveys, informal discussions with students, and observation of use patterns and questions asked.

Service Implementation

Only a few libraries involve users in implementing service reconfigurations. One library had assistance from a department for the physical movement of the collection in a branch library. Other respondents indicated that departments provided funding to hire students for various aspects of the service implementation process.

Service Assessment

Perhaps understandably, this category received the most comments from respondents. By far the most frequent method used to obtain service assessment from users was surveys, either library-developed or including questions on reconfigurations in ongoing assessments such as the LibQUAL+® or COUNTER surveys. Libraries reported a varied frequency of delivering surveys ranging from six months to three years. One library performs an annual action-gap survey for each of its service desks to learn what services are most valued by users, which those users believe are accomplished the best, and what areas of service need improvement. Other methods include using focus groups, providing comment cards at service desks, and analyzing various data collected through other channels.

Respondents reported several different methodologies for completed or planned-for assessment of service reconfigurations. While a few of the service changes were too new to assess, none of the responding libraries reported negative reactions from users. Respondents reported increased usage of collections and services, users staying longer in visits, and more favorable/positive comments from users as well as diminished numbers of complaints. Several of the respondents provided descriptions of assessment methods specific to their particular reconfigurations.

Regarding future assessment techniques, respondents reported including assessment of their reconfigurations in LibQUAL+®, Balanced Scorecard, and service gap analysis as well as other regular ongoing assessment activities. Additional methods of assessment included creating focus groups on the reconfigurations, measurement and analysis of usage data, user feedback through various mechanisms including listening sessions, and anecdotal data from staff interactions.

Benefits and Challenges of Service Delivery Reconfiguration

The survey asked respondents about both the associated benefits and challenges of their service delivery reconfigurations. In general, the responding libraries weighed in heavily on the side of benefits that resulted

from reconfiguration. Benefits appeared to accrue both for the user and for the library and its personnel.

Visibility of service, service points or particular collections that had been relocated was the user benefit most frequently mentioned. One-stop shopping, with several services combined at one service desk, was listed as a major benefit by many of the respondents. They pointed out that both of these benefits have led to less confusion for their library users. Improved study spaces, collaborative and/or well-equipped student workspaces resulted at several of the libraries responding to the survey. Reference service appears to have become more personalized and individualized for users. Other libraries indicated they were able to expand hours of operation for users through the reconfiguration of their services. One library stated that the library was now “a draw for students who had never been there before.” In sum many responses to this question indicate that the reconfigurations have created spaces and services that are more welcoming and less intimidating for users, that these libraries are striving to provide services their users want and need.

Many benefits from the library operation viewpoint were listed as well. Cost savings was evident in the responses that stated student/hourly budgets were reduced to save funds. It appears that in many cases the reconfigurations have resulted in more effective and efficient use of personnel. Librarians and staff have been cross-trained or retrained and the result is more flexibility for the library and a better understanding by library personnel of each other’s knowledge and capabilities, helping the libraries to put those skills to use for best advantage. The additional training also has resulted in more consistency in the answers users get for the questions they ask. One respondent commented that librarians working at a single service point desk were able to serve as mentors and model good service behaviors for staff.

Several respondents pointed out that a librarian advantage was spending less time at a reference desk. The operating efficiencies provided by service reconfigurations allow personnel time to be redirected to other activities such as classroom teaching, outreach to departments within the home institution, advanced reference service through appointments and question

referral, librarians becoming “embedded” in subject discipline offices to provide services on-site, creating online learning materials and credit courses, pursuing more assessment activities, and establishing new services such as an institutional repository. Improvement of “back room operations” was noted by several respondents, as was the ability to provide better workspace for library personnel.

Unlike benefits that were achieved for both the libraries and their constituents, the bulk of challenges seemed to accrue to the library side of the equation. For constituents the challenges were adjusting to physical rearrangements or being philosophically opposed to the changes (e.g., branch library closures). Respondents reported that library personnel also had some difficulties adjusting to the reconfigurations. Several mentioned that getting staff buy-in or overcoming resistance to change has been a difficulty. Helping staff adapt to the changes and maintaining staff morale were noted as areas that needed a great deal of attention. Training and retraining were noted as being both labor-intensive and disruptive to providing services. Some respondents acknowledged that the physical arrangement of the service points turned out to be not as beneficial as anticipated. In the case of branch library closures, the integration of library collections was noted as time consuming and complicated, requiring physical relocation of materials and adjustments to bibliographic and location records in the libraries’ catalog systems.

In balance, the benefits noted far out-numbered the challenges. It is left to libraries considering reconfigurations to consider the impact of both when planning to make significant changes such as those described here.

Anticipated Additions, Closures, Consolidations and Other Reconfigurations

In the final segment of the survey respondents were asked if they anticipated reconfiguring a branch library or staffed service point in the next three years. Forty-nine (83%) replied yes. Forty-seven of these anticipate a total of 70 service point changes and 40 branch library changes. As with completed service point changes, they expect more consolidations (33) and reconfigurations (21) than additions or closures (8

each). While respondents indicated that only one additional branch would open and 12 would close within the next three years, they anticipate 16 consolidations and 11 other reconfigurations.

Conclusion

This survey investigated recent trends in service point reconfigurations in main libraries and branch libraries, the driving factors behind the changes, the impact such changes had on personnel, opportunities for user participation in the projects, the associated benefits and challenges, and future plans for anticipated additions, closures, consolidations, and other reconfigurations during the next three year.

The most common reconfigurations are the consolidated service point, the information commons, the consolidated/central research desk, and virtualizations of many kinds. Virtualizations are exciting to consider as brand new innovations and perhaps harbingers of service point reconfigurations to come. Additionally, science branch library closures, in particular, seemed to out-number other branch library closures and may reflect the easy electronic dissemination of journal literature in the sciences.

Philosophical changes appear to be the most important drivers for service delivery reconfigurations, followed by user demands. Interestingly, respondents noted that a change in service philosophy often accompanied a physical change such as consolidation of a service desk or the creation of an information commons, emphasizing the new method in which the service is provided.

The impact of service delivery reconfigurations on staff is considerable. Because staff often don't have continuing appointments in the same way tenured librarians might, they are in the most vulnerable positions for elimination or reassignment. Although

there are benefits to the mixing of staff from various service points, including the sharing of expertise and elimination of silos, respondents noted that training is a significant challenge.

According to the respondents, the level of user engagement in each project varied because some of the reconfigurations were mandated by physical or financial situations beyond the control of the library. Several of the respondents described imaginative and creative methods for obtaining user's views and suggestions. Although some of the reconfigurations were too new to assess, most libraries have determined a strategy for assessment over time.

Given the breadth and depth of the types of reconfigurations described by survey respondents, it is obvious that ARL libraries have become dynamic microcosms proactively responding to the needs of their environments. In these days when the death of the research library is bandied about more than ever, it is refreshing to note that libraries such as those responding to this survey are continuing to strive to provide the materials and services their constituents require. Libraries, and particularly ARL member libraries, have always been in the forefront of applying new techniques and technologies to provide better service to their users. The responses to this survey indicate that is still the case, now more than ever.

Endnotes

- 1 Reitz, Joan M. *Dictionary for Library and Information Science*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), p. 653. (Also online at ODLIS Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_A.aspx
- 2 p. 102.
- 3 p. 172.
- 4 p. 596.