Flyer 232

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Use of Teams in ARL Libraries

INTRODUCTION

Current ARL library environments are characterized by constant and turbulent change. As a result, library staff are required to be more agile and creative in responding to a growing number of challenges in the technological environment, parent institution programs, and available resources. Whether ARL libraries are mounting electronic reserve systems, supporting distance learning programs, or making collections dollars stretch farther, there is a strong movement toward meeting these challenges through new and more intense collaborations, both within the library and externally with partners. Inside the library organization, a significant trend appears to be toward the use of teams, occasionally manifesting itself in the form of a totally team-based reorganization. The purpose of this SPEC survey was to get a more specific sense of this apparent trend and study how extensively ARL libraries are either making selective use of teams or reorganizing into team-based organizations.

To bring consistency to survey results, a commonly accepted definition of teams was used: ". . .a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 1992). Though there can be wide variation among team roles and responsibilities, teams are usually distinguished from other kinds of groups in our organizations by these key criteria:

* greater degrees of autonomy and self-governance;
* shared leadership, often expressed in consensus decisions; and
* team leaders who lead through facilitation rather than traditional command and control methods.

SURVEY RESULTS

Eighty-three libraries (69%) responded to the survey, with 47 respondents (39%) completing the entire survey. The survey results indicate that teams are at least being experimented with in most ARL Libraries. Of the 47 respondents, only five described their organization as "team-based" in the sense that teams, as opposed to

departments or other kinds of traditional units, constitute the major organizing principle for the organization. Fifty-three (64%) of the total response group reported having at least one permanent team in their organization, while 58 (73%) reported having at least one project team. Most libraries also have cross-functional teams. This SPEC Kit, however, focuses on teams as a permanent organizational mode.

Seventy-two percent of the responding organizations have had teams for five years or less, suggesting tremendous recent growth. The number of teams reported in any single organization ranges from one to 29, with an average of eight. Teams are used for a variety of purposes, covering almost every function in the library. Examples include: bibliographic services management team, library services assessment group, COPY project coordinating committee, regional depository outreach team, web oversight team, document delivery team, Japanese studies team, and digital collections team. Thirteen of 29 respondents (45%) do not use the term team, preferring to use group or task force, or even more traditional names, such as committee, department, or section, even though these groups function as teams. Only 16% of respondents use a written definition of team, with units in some organizations creating their own definitions.

Training. More than half of the libraries have instituted special training for staff related to teams. Training programs vary greatly. Most contain content on what teams are, how they function, and how they differ from other kinds of groups, as well as on more specific subjects such as consensus decision making, conflict management, and facilitation skills. Training on issues such as process improvement is less commonly found. In at least one organization, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was administered and discussed within teams as a team building strategy. Training tailored to team leaders is much less common. While 95% of the responding libraries report that they have team leaders, only 26% provide training specifically for team leaders, and only 31% have written documentation on team leader roles and responsibilities.

Characteristic Features. The use of teams in ARL libraries varies widely: in some organizations they look very much like traditional work groups, while in others a significant transformation has taken place which includes changes in core functions such as performance evaluation, compensation, and rewards. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the following features were found often or almost always in their teams.

Feature	% Occurrence
Clear purpose and goals	95%
Shared decisions and consensus	81%
Mutual accountability in the team	70%
Set their own goals	63%
Make decisions related to their own work	60%
Evaluate their own progress and performance	42%
Share team leadership/rotational leaders	40%
Team accomplishment rewarded by organization	40%
Compensation/reward system for teams	2% (1 library)

Effectiveness of Teams. One of the most often asked questions about teams is: Do they produce the desired results? Respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their teams according to nine outcome criteria. The following list indicates the percentages of organizations who reported that these criteria were somewhat true or very true of their use of teams.

Criteria	% Occurrence
Positive effect on morale	85%
More staff involvement in problem-solving	85%
More creativity in problem-solving	82%
Improved quality in problem-solving	80%
Increased productivity	77%
Improved quality of work	77%
Staff more adaptable to change	74%
More effective decision making process	58%
Improved accountability in the organization	50%

Eighty percent of respondents report that the overall impact of teams in their organizations has been at least moderately positive, with 26% claiming strong positive impact. No respondents suggested that the overall impact had been negative.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Overall, the survey results indicate that while teams are a fast-growing feature of ARL libraries, there remains a reluctance to totally restructure into team-based organizations. This reluctance may be discerned in many organizations' hesitance to use the term team even though their groups function as true teams.

There are many possible reasons for this reluctance. True teams represent a very different way of working and thus a profound change for most organizations and their staffs. The command and control cultures that team-based cultures replace are quite persistent, and the transition to teams can be especially difficult for middle managers, who may perceive it as a loss of power and influence. Moreover, there are many apprehensions about teams—a fear that teams will mean much more unproductive time in meetings, mediocre decisions, and a decline in quality and productivity. And yet management experts tell us continually of the demonstrated power of teams, and the perceptual evidence from our own organizations appears to confirm that power.

It is very likely that many more teams and team-based organizations will appear in ARL Libraries as we move into the 21st century. The transition to teams will continue to be difficult for those organizations choosing this path, but the benefits are likely to be viewed as more and more compelling as time goes on.

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