

Recipe for Change

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Abstract

Interlibrary Loan staff were suffocating under a heavy burden of an ever increasing workload. Was it possible to change from an environment where the process controlled the staff, to an atmosphere where staff control the process?

Interlibrary Loan had to get ready for change. Staff needed time to shift from being apprehensive about change, to embracing it as solution for a better workplace. A Continuous Quality Improvement Team was formed, out of which emerged a new culture and a new structure. The reorganization formed two process teams (Borrowing and Lending) and a management team (Coordinating).

Interlibrary Loan had to get set for change. Reorganization into teams removed many familiar routines and structures that apply meaning to one's job. Each team member sought to define his role as he learned to work unsupervised in a team-directed atmosphere.

Interlibrary Loan changes. Interlibrary Loan staff members successfully moved from an environment where the process controlled the staff, to an atmosphere where staff control the process. During this transition, staff members gained invaluable experience in teamwork and developed quality service guidelines. Equipped with these new skills, ILL Teams are prepared and empowered to meet the challenges of continuous change.

This is Penn State Interlibrary Loan's recipe for incorporating change. This is what worked for us. Instead of trying to make our department fit into a textbook team structure, we took the concept of teams and teamwork and applied them to our office culture, working within the University Libraries' hierarchical structure.

Ready For Change

Antiquated procedures could not keep up with increasing volume of requests. Budgetary constraints resulting in decreased acquisitions and a hiring freeze compounded the problem. Patron's shortened tempers and poor staff morale were commonplace, and timely service suffered. The 1991 ARL/RLG ILL Cost Study indicated that our interlibrary loan operation was expensive compared to other research libraries. Our Associate Dean proposed a CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement) Team to examine the borrowing of nonreturnables. This team laid the foundation for a new way of thinking in all of ILL. Was it possible to transform from an atmosphere of powerlessness, fatigue, and antiquated processes into one of creative, proactive and energizing cooperation?

Complaints:

- Six weeks backlog? You're kidding!
- We can't take on one more thing.
- Too much to do and not enough time.
- It takes forever to get materials.
- Everyone wants everything yesterday.

Set for Change

Familiar routines and the old structure were gone. ILL Teams struggled with discovering a new sense of identity and clarifying their purpose and mission. Confrontations and "gripe sessions" slowly healed past wounds. An emphasis was placed on communication, cooperation, and developing interpersonal and interactive skills. Each team searched to define its role as it learned to work unsupervised in a team-directed atmosphere. Meetings and teambuilding sessions seemed endless. Dedicated staff members realistically improved processes and their working relationships.

Recipe Cards: Techniques that worked for us

- Seek administrative support and guidance. Requires special handling
- Utilize individual strengths. Everyone gains
- Get staff buy in. Challenging but worth the effort
- Work within library organizational structure. Crowd pleaser
- Take practical approach to teamwork. Somewhat easy
- Drop team buzz words. Good for company
- Let go of the past. Somewhat difficult

Spice Bottles: Attributes and skills acquired to build successful teams

- Celebrate
- Coach
- Commitment
- Listen
- Patience
- Respect
- Reward
- Support

Tasting Spoons: Putting our training to the test

- Communication
- Cooperation
- Empowerment
- Meetings

- Ownership
- Teambuilding
- Training

Measuring Cup: How are we doing?

- Forums
- Staff morale
- Job satisfaction
- Turnaround time
- Customer surveys
- Streamlined processes
- Initiate new ideas and services

ILL Changes

ILL staff successfully traversed from an environment where the process controlled the staff, to an atmosphere where staff control the process. Team members have commitment and pride in their job. The invaluable experience of focusing on teamwork and process improvement has equipped members to face future challenges in a continually changing work environment.

Four-Star Reviews: Feedback from customers has been overwhelmingly positive.

- Your good work and diligent hunting for difficult items has greatly advanced my research. Thanks! -Interlibrary Loan patron
- If the processes are excellent, the results will be superb! -Gloriana St. Clair, Associate Dean, Information Access Services
- We control the process, the process doesn't control us! -Mark Leskovansky, Interlibrary Loan Borrowing Team
- Really a very fine office -- perhaps the best department in the library -- which is saying a lot because all are fine. -Interlibrary Loan patron

See us at our web site at:

<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/iasweb/ill/illmain.htm>