Using Cross-Departmental Project Work Teams to Innovate Library Services

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Today's Presentation

- Project work team defined for this presentation
- A little background on our university and our library
- The case study (or story)
  - The impetus to innovate
  - The starting point
  - Using Project Work Teams
  - Successes
  - Lessons learned
  - Where we are today
- Conclusion
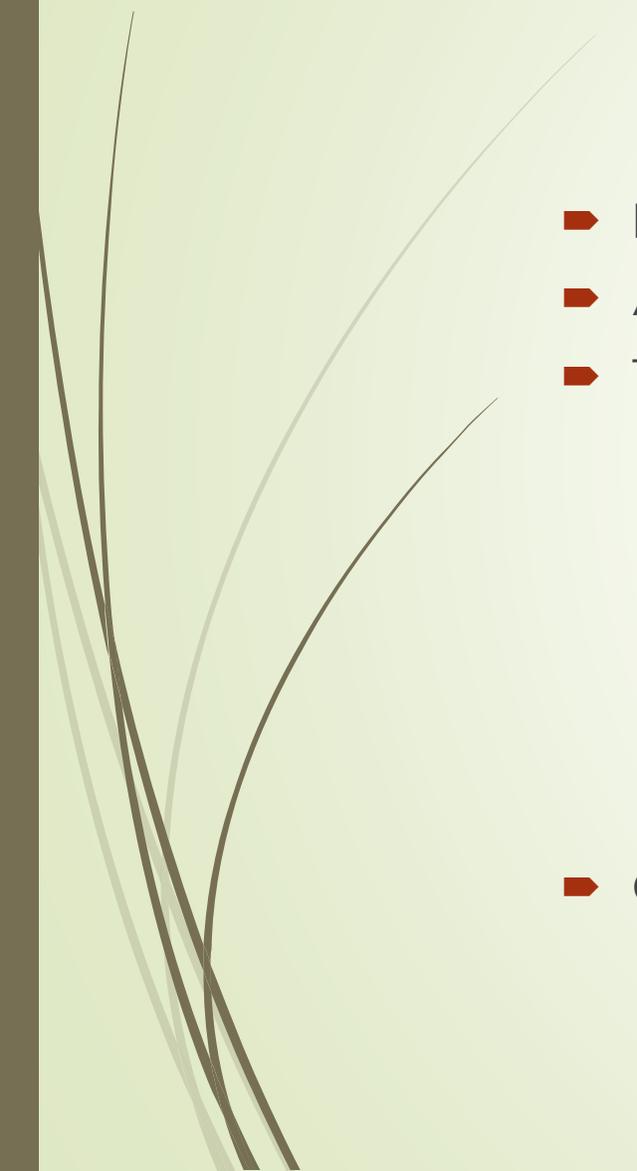
Cross-Departmental Project Work Teams Defined

"Relatively independent and empowered clusters of employees possessing the required skills and 'decisional independence' to efficiently accomplish a well-defined project or task" (Castiglione, 2007, p. 380).

Teams (continued)

- Variety of terms
  - Self-managing work teams
  - Autonomous self-managed work groups
  - Leaderless groups
  - Self-regulating work teams
  - Self-directed work teams
- When utilized in libraries
  - Expand programs
  - Increase customer focus and satisfaction
  - Contribute to employee empowerment and satisfaction

External Team Leadership

- Teams require oversight or leadership to be successful
- Critical component of successful teams
- Important leadership skills
  - Leading without dictating
  - Leading without interfering with group autonomy
  - Linking team to others in the organization
  - Building trust
  - Possessing a broad understanding of organizational mission
  - Supporting shared governance

Examples in Library Literature

- University of Michigan Taubman Health Sciences Library

    - Reorganized into liaison teams to innovate, expand roles and increase community engagement

- George Washington University Libraries

    - Moved to a team-based approach to collections to introduce flexibility and collaboration

    - Accomplished stated goals and exposed librarians to new modes of work that brought value to the organization and helped them develop new skills

- Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library

    - Developed a team approach to deliver large-scale library instruction

    - Taught more students and increased teaching skills and learning outcomes

The Case Study

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

- Headquartered in Daytona Beach
- Three campuses
  - Daytona Beach residential
  - Prescott, AZ residential
  - Worldwide – primarily online
- Degrees range from Associate's to PhD
- Specialize in Aerospace and Aviation fields
- Two libraries
  - Hunt Library in Daytona Beach
  - Hazy Library in Prescott

How the Story Begins…

- Hunt Library supports Daytona Beach and Worldwide campuses
- Hired as Director in June 2009
- Hunt Library organization when I arrived
  - Highly valued for customer service and aviation resources
  - Successful interim leadership for 3.5 years
  - Moderately staffed and funded
- Why recruit for a new director?
  - Library wanted a new direction
  - Needed to innovate but not sure where to start

2009-2010 Academic Year Data

- Daytona Beach enrollment – ca 5,000 residential (no PhDs)
- World Wide FTE – ca 8,000 distance learning and online students
- Hunt Library Staff -- 37
  - Professionals – 21
  - Technicians – 16
- Standalone three-story library building
- Hunt Library Responsibilities
  - Physical Library
  - Virtual Library

Setting a New Direction

- Developed a strategic plan
  - For one year
  - Staff suggested activities
  - Activities rolled up into goals with metrics
- Some activities easy to accomplish
  - Simple
  - Belong to one department
- Other activities complicated and crossed departments

Tackling the Complicated Activities

- Organizational issues
  - Department heads managed busy operations
  - Uncertainty among department heads with activities that crossed departments
  - Resistance to change
    - I want you to set a new direction for the library as long as you leave me and my department alone!
- Logistical issues
  - Not enough staff
  - No additional funding
  - Resistance to change
    - That's not how we do things here

Cross-Departmental Project Teams

- Why would the Hunt Library take this approach to innovation?
  - Staffing levels could not accommodate one department spearheading a complicated initiative
  - Strategic plan goals rolled up from staff suggestions
    - Staff had a vested interest is accomplishing activities
- Heard a great presentation years ago on the use of project work teams in a public library to drive innovation
- Successful ILS work teams in most academic libraries
- Experience in a previous library

Beginning of the Project Work Teams

- Built around two of the strategic plan goals:
  - Investigate new avenues for marketing and outreach
  - Investigate how to preserve special and unique print collections digitally
- Management Team authorized formation of two teams
  - Marketing Team
  - Preservation Team
- Volunteers were solicited from each department and approved by supervisors
- Regular meetings set to begin planning
- Library Director chaired new teams initially

Evolution of the Teams

- Developing project plans was not intuitive
  - Team members had disparate and sometimes competing ideas
  - Some voices were stronger than others
    - Technicians deferred to librarians
    - Everyone deferred to the director
- Slight recasting of team directions after a few months
  - Natural leaders on both teams were asked to chair
    - Both were technicians
  - Teams were required to choose one or two initiatives and develop practical plans to implement them

Successes – the Marketing Team

- Library marketing became more focused and more powerful
  - Staff were invited to send ideas to a News section of the library website
  - The library started planning displays to coincide with ALA events such as Banned Books Week
  - The team discussed social media and launched a Facebook page
- Marketing became larger than one team could handle and launched new teams
  - Events Team
  - Social Media Team
  - Video Tutorial Team

Successes – Preservation Team

- Preservation focused on two initiatives
  - Special Collections
    - Secured university funding for a professional assessment
    - Donated or applied preservation techniques to collection
  - Digitization
    - Sought university partners to secure funding for an institutional repository
    - Implemented Scholarly Commons
- New Teams formed to handle the institutional repository
  - OER Initiative Team
  - Scholarly Commons Oversight Team

External Leadership is Critical

- Teams are anchored by members of the Management Team
  - Director or Associate Director is team member
  - Team chair reports out to Management Team supervisor
- New initiatives and budget approved by Management Team
  - Events
  - Collaboration outside the library
  - Marketing
- New employee team membership
  - Must be approved by supervisor

Lessons Learned

- Personalities Matter!
  - Staff might have the technical skills to chair but may not be leaders
  - Some people cannot get past hierarchical thinking
  - Some people like each other so much, progress is slower
- Priorities Matter!
  - The job someone is hired to perform comes first
  - Team assignments carry the same weight as work assignments
- Failure is an option

Yesterday versus Today

2009 – 2010

- DB enrollment – ca 5,000
  - 0 PhDs
- WW FTE – ca 8,000
- Hunt Library Staff -- 37
  - Professionals – 21
  - Technicians – 16
- Standalone building
- Responsibilities:
  - Physical Library
  - Virtual Library

2020 -- 2021

- DB enrollment – 7059
  - 7 PhDs
- WW FTE – 9210
- Hunt Library Staff -- 35
  - Professionals – 23
  - Technicians – 11
- 1 1/2 floors in the Student Union
- Responsibilities:
  - Physical & Virtual Libraries (computer lab)
  - Institutional Repository
  - University Archives

Teams in 2021

1. ILS Team
2. OER Initiative Team
3. Worldwide Instruction Team
4. Scholarly Commons Faculty Support Team
5. Scholarly Commons Oversight Team
6. Archives Team
7. Assessment Team
8. Events Team
9. FAQ Team
10. Social Media Team
11. Video Tutorial Team
12. Strategic Planning Team
13. Website Refresh Team

Teams are Part of the Culture

- Management implements teams to address new initiatives
- Candidates for open positions ask about joining teams
  - Because current staff talk about their team involvement as an important part of their jobs
- New employees are generally placed onto teams that fit skills and interests shortly after starting
- When handed something new, we think, "Form a Team"
  - One last story – how we ended up with an Archives Team this year

Conclusion
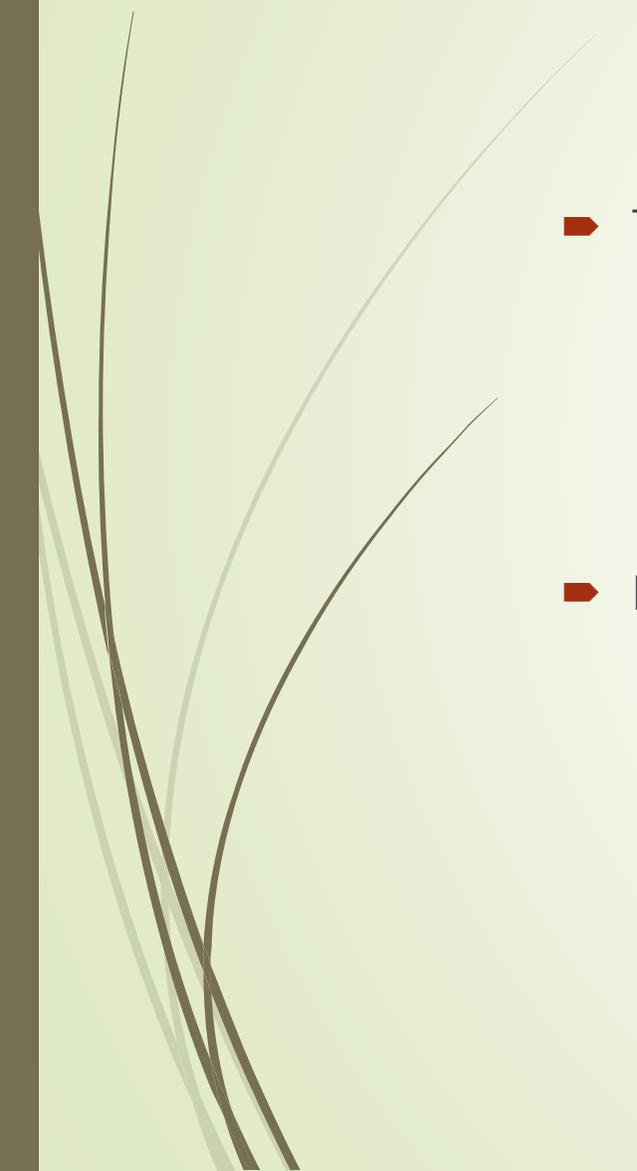
- Teams support innovation and staff development
  - Capitalize on skills and interests
  - Get perspectives from different departments
  - Allow technicians and newer librarians to develop leadership and management experience
- No one-size-fits-all
  - Be flexible
  - Work within the organizational culture
  - Connect with long-term or strategic planning
  - Be willing to fail and start over

One Final Thought…

"Developing a workforce for the twenty-first century requires offering staff with a variety of talents, skills, interests, and expertise opportunities to work in new ways and new environments" (Stoddard, Gillis, & Cohn, 2019, p.495).

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Questions?

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