Capitalizing on Change: Developing Embedded Librarian Services for an Association in Transition

Megan Smith, MLS
American Physical Therapy Association

Background
In February 2012, the American Physical Therapy Association implemented an organization-wide restructuring. It resulted in the relocation of the library to the Communications Unit and the embedding of one staff librarian as a Research Specialist in a newly formed Public Policy, Practice and Professional Affairs Unit.

Old Organizational Model

New Organizational Model

The Research Specialist viewed the restructuring as an opportunity to rethink the delivery of information services and took a proactive approach to defining her new role.

Approach
Step 1: Draft a value statement:
- The Research Specialist has the ability to contribute insightful information to policy initiatives based on her experience locating, organizing, and analyzing relevant research and resources. Her contributions to projects can result in more informed decisions for the organization.

Step 2: Submit a proposal to conduct an information needs assessment:
- Primary goals: determine information needs of the new unit; learn about the types of resources used; identify gaps between needs and resources
- Underlying goal: inform the design services that meet the unit’s needs, promote efficiency, help control information overload, and facilitate knowledge sharing

Step 3: Conduct a needs assessment with department directors and designated staff:
- What issues does your department follow?
- What information resources does your department use regularly?
- Do you have difficulty finding information on certain topics?
- Do you have a need for additional support, tools or resources? Think big!

Step 4: Analyze the information gathered and draft a report of key findings:
- Staff need a single information conduit of readily available resources on topics of relevance to the unit
- Staff lack an efficient system to store important articles for future use
- Staff require information on the same topics but for different purposes (leads to redundant searching)
- Staff appreciate e-mails alerting them to recent news and research articles

Step 5: Design new products that meet stated needs

New Products

The Research & Policy Hub (The Hub)
Uses an existing resource, SharePoint, to provide a central place for information that can be used to advocate for the physical therapy profession.

- Wiki
  - Organizes and stores article citations, reports, and other data on topics relevant to public policy priorities in one location
  - Reduces redundant searching

News and Research Alerts
- Alerts for new resources that are customized by the user (can receive immediately, daily, or weekly)

Links
- Connects to the library catalog, RefWorks, and an issues management system

User Feedback & Next Steps

Staff in the unit were receptive to The Hub and provided positive feedback:
- 18 staff members out of 28 signed up for alerts (64%)
- Staff have provided suggestions for new Wiki pages and topics for alerts
- Staff have described the alerts as well-curated and helpful
- A Presentation Center for shared slides, an initial feature of The Hub, was abandoned after 6 months of no use

The Hub will be refined based on user feedback:
- Wiki pages and alerts will be modified and added based on unit priorities and demands
- Unused features will be deleted

Other Roles
The information needs assessment broadened communication channels and more deeply embedded the Research Specialist in daily operations. Newly identified tasks and roles for the Research Specialist include:
- Collating articles for a weekly competitive intelligence report
- Leading the implementation of an issues management system
- Actively participating in unit projects that require research support
- Taking part in a workgroup that is developing a critical appraisal tool for assessing rehabilitation research articles
- Collecting and maintaining data for research projects
- Drafting and distributing Requests for Proposals (RFPs)
- Working with staff to create a new file plan for a departmental shared drive