

Quality

Endeavors

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Work Teams at Penn State: Many Approaches

When we think about teams at work, the first to come to mind may be continuous quality improvement (CQI) teams, which have been used at Penn State since the early 1990s. Working as a team – having a shared responsibility for a common goal – can take many other forms. This newsletter describes ongoing team-based work structures in the University Libraries and the Office of Student Aid that have been sustained by organizational culture since the mid-1990s. It also describes how the College of Agricultural Sciences has used project oriented teams to develop the College's strategic plan and then implement shorter term priorities in that plan.

Self-Directed Work Teams in the University Libraries

To reduce the number of levels in the organization, in the mid-1990s, the University Libraries implemented self-directed work teams in three units. The Cataloging, Interlibrary Loan, and Serials and Acquisitions departments each have several self-directed work teams.

In *Self-Directed Work Teams: A Primer* (Pfeiffer and Co., 1990), Torres and Spiegel define a self-directed work team (SDWT) as one in which the work team “share[s] responsibility for production ... [and also has] authority to plan, implement, control, and improve...work processes” (p.3). Within a self-directed work team there is some sharing of roles and responsibilities, some flexibility in who does what task, and breadth as well as depth in skills within the team. Team members view each other as peers, and supervision and direction come from within the work team (they are semi-autonomous) rather than from an external source. Members of a self-directed work team share leadership and decision making within the team.

Within each of the Libraries' self-directed work teams, management of daily administrative tasks, such as initial review of incoming e-mail from students and faculty using the Libraries' various services, is rotated on a regular schedule. Frequency of the rotation varies from monthly to quarterly, with various titles, such as Administrator of the Month (or AOM), used for the individual with the responsibility. The team members plan the AOM rotation and determine on a daily basis how they are going to manage their work and what they

are going to do within their area of responsibility. How individual tasks are managed within the team varies with each team. In Interlibrary Loan's Borrowing team, all jobs are rotated among the team members. In other teams, due to the specificity of functions and complexity, each individual has specific responsibilities and these are not rotated.

The teams meet with their Department Heads or Assistant Heads once or twice a month. Teams identify special projects and contribute to the unit's tactical plan development and implementation, and have input on the hiring of new team members. Heads and Assistant Heads assist the teams in prioritizing special projects. Staff Review and Development Plans are individual-based, and are prepared by the Heads and Assistant Heads. Heads and Assistant Heads also manage any human resources issues.

The units have found that those working within the self-directed work teams are able to fill all needed roles within their unit, effectively manage meetings, and work effectively on project teams throughout the Libraries. Unit Heads have also observed lower turnover within their units.

For more information contact:

Cataloging - Rebecca Mugridge, Head, Cataloging and Metadata Services, rlm31@psulias.psu.edu

Interlibrary Loan - Barbara Coopey, Assistant Head of Access Services, bmc4@psulias.psu.edu

Serials and Acquisitions - Bob Alan, Head, roa1@psu.edu

Team-based Structure in the Office of Student Aid

The Office of Student Aid began its move toward a team structure in the early 1990s, also as part of an effort to flatten the organization. While not a formal self-directed work team structure, there are parallels to the Libraries' teams. There are six teams within Student Aid, based on functions within the Office (Administrative Services and Special Programs team, Application and Eligibility Services team, Federal, State and University Programs team, Campus and Professional School Services and Training team, Communications and Student Services team, and Computer and Technology Services team), with each team led by a Director. Each team meets weekly, and the Office of Student Aid gathers each week for a full staff meeting which they call 'huddle.' Directors meet with the Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Education and Executive Director for Student Aid twice a month, and serve as a communication link between the Assistant Vice President and their teams.

Many of the services in Student Aid are provided through contact with students and their families, either face to face, on the phone, or through e-mail. Schedules for these activities are developed by a cross-functional, cross-unit team. Directors are included with their team members on the schedule, with time on the schedule for each unit proportional to the total number of staff in that unit. When students have to wait longer than 20 minutes for service at Student Aid's front desk, each unit's representative on the intake planning team contacts the rest of their unit to call "all hands on deck" and have more staff, including directors, available to serve students. Another project addressed in this way, with a cross-unit team representative of all six units and all levels of staff within Student Aid, was the recent transition to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephone system.

The Staff Review and Development Plan (SRDP) process in Student Aid is team-based, and feeds into unit planning. Initially, each of the six units had a goal in the Office's annual plan for which it was responsible. Progress toward this goal, and supporting strategies, was the basis for a team SRDP. As the Office worked with this model for several years, it evolved to a model in which each unit was responsible for components of each goal in the Office's annual plan. Now for the Office's annual assessment, each team writes its own

input, and the draft Office document is reviewed and edited by a representative group from the Office. This assessment becomes the starting point for the plan for the coming year.

For more information, contact Bob Snyder, Director, Administrative Services and Special Programs Team, Office of Student Aid, rms5@studentaid.psu.edu.

Project Teams for Strategic Planning and Implementation in the College of Agricultural Sciences

The College of Agricultural Sciences used several different types of short term project teams in developing and implementing its 2005-2008 strategic plan. In the spring of 2004, five study groups (Animal Science, Plant Science, Social Science, Food Science and Natural Resources) consisting of faculty and extension educators were established. The charge to the study groups was "To identify areas of opportunities for innovation over the next 10-15 years, and to identify how we need to adapt or modify what we do to sustain or build these areas of innovation." Study groups were asked to think creatively and examine all aspects of the college, including the structure and organization of curriculum, disciplines, and administration.

Each of these five study groups met for three hours every two to three weeks over a two-month period with an external facilitator. During this time, they reviewed the current situation, developed recommendations for change, and identified priority areas. The teams used data from surveys and broad input from other faculty and extension educators, industry representatives, alumni, students, staff, and administrators to develop their findings and recommendations. Once the five study groups had completed their work, a sixth study group synthesized the five reports and integrated other stakeholder feedback.

During fall 2004, the reports from the six study groups, along with input from other external stakeholder groups, were used by a college strategic planning team (including faculty, extension educators, staff, students and industry representatives) to identify college-wide goals and strategies. These strategies were prioritized by the college leadership team in spring 2005 and several were identified for short-term completion.

To develop action plans for the specific short-term strategies in these areas, five new study groups (Environmental Curricula, Plant Sciences Graduate Curricula, Communications and Marketing, Data and Assessment, and Information and Technology Assessment) made up of faculty, extension educators, and staff were created. These teams were responsible for analyzing data, developing recommendations for change, implementing policies, programs or services to achieve the goals in each area, and submitting final reports to the college leadership team during the 2005-06 academic year.

Information on the specific results from two of these teams is featured at <http://qualityspotlight.psu.edu/>. For more information on the work of these teams, contact Ann Dodd, Assistant Dean for Strategic Initiatives, ahd2@psu.edu or visit www.cas.psu.edu/strategicplanning/.

As Penn State has looked for ways to provide more responsive student-centered services, more flexible organizational structures have evolved. As units have developed plans, teams have been involved in identifying goals and strategies and implementing actions. Teamwork may take place as part of routine staff meetings, or on special project teams. What makes the team a team is members' shared responsibility for a common goal.

INNOVATION EXTRACTS: *Managers as Facilitators*

In *Managers as Facilitators: A Practical Guide to Getting Work Done in a Changing Workplace*, (Berrett-Kohler, 1997), Richard G. Weaver and John D. Farrell identify a new role for many leaders and managers as organizations move toward more team-based structures. In addition to the leadership role and responsibility of doing the right thing, and the managerial role and responsibility of doing things right, they identify a facilitative role and related responsibility to assist others to work together more collaboratively and productively. Weaver and Farrell identify four components of this role:

- Task - clarify the work a group needs to complete
- Self - know and understand oneself and recognize how one can intentionally help groups be more productive
- Group - understand group dynamics and specific elements of a work group, and help the group become cohesive and productive
- Process - understand planning, solving problems, and related tools to help the group get its work done

The authors define facilitation as 'boundary management' and identify boundaries related to individuals, groups, work, and the environment. Weaver and Farrell also address the boundaries between leadership, managerial, and facilitative roles, and emphasize that it is critical that the leader/manager/facilitator make it clear to the group when they are changing from one role to another.

To learn more or borrow the book, visit the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment library in 502 Rider II.

NEW! QUALITY SPOTLIGHT: Proactively Enhancing Curricula, College of Agricultural Sciences

The College of Agricultural Sciences was faced with multidimensional changes, including the needs and expectations of related industries, state and federal funding requirements, increasingly complex global issues and their impact, and lower student enrollment in some programs. They proactively found ways to meet their land grant responsibilities in agricultural sciences and maintain the integrity of disciplines and basic science while reaching across interdisciplinary lines. For more information, visit <http://qualityspotlight.psu.edu/>.

NEW! INNOVATION INSIGHTS #16: Facilitating Teams for Organizational IMPROVEment

A facilitator can be a useful resource for an improvement, innovation, or project team. Innovation Insights #16, *Facilitating Teams for Organizational IMPROVEment*, at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/innovation/>, briefly addresses the role and responsibilities of a facilitator, contracting with a client, group dynamics, and conflict and consensus.

SUPPORT FOR PLANNING, IMPROVE- MENT, AND ASSESSMENT IN YOUR UNIT

The Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment is available to consult with units and facilitate the implementation of Penn State's strategic priorities. It is the Office's mission to support the University's efforts to plan, assess, and improve programs and services. The Office uses organizational change tools to help units assess their needs, develop strategic plans, improve key processes, and develop collaborative team environments. There is no charge for the Office's consultation services. If you would like to discuss the planning, quality, or assessment needs of your unit with one of our consultants, please contact the Office at 814-863-8721 or e-mail les1@psu.edu.