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Communicating Effectively in Rapidly Changing Times

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Communicating Effectively in Rapidly Changing Times



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Great Recession & Higher Education



- ❧ Public support to higher ed declined in USA by 3.8%
- ❧ Private colleges & universities lost endowment funds
- ❧ Academic library budgets decreased or flat
- ❧ Forcing rapid changes
 - ❧ Elimination of positions
 - ❧ Cancellation of subscriptions
 - ❧ Inability to replace technology
 - ❧ Reduced hours of opening

Effects of Rapid Changes



- ❧ Fear
 - ❧ Low morale
 - ❧ Decreased productivity
- ❧ Don't understand what is happening
 - ❧ Alienation
 - ❧ Believe they have no voice
- ❧ Does effective communication make a difference?

Communication



- ❧ Exchange or sharing of information
- ❧ To achieve shared meaning or mutual understanding
- ❧ Internal: within the library organization
- ❧ External: with outside stakeholders

Research Design & Methodology



- ❧ Multiple case study
- ❧ Three public academic libraries in California and Michigan
- ❧ Personal interviews
- ❧ Focus group interviews
- ❧ Analysis of documents

The Three Cases



Institutions	A	B	C
Enrollment - Fall 2010	35,000	25,000	8,400
Budget - FY12	\$25 million reduction	Flat	\$12.5 million reduction
Number of libraries	1	1 central, 1 branch, 5 departmental	1

Communication at Case A



- ❧ Open communication a high priority
 - ❧ Director informs staff and stakeholders
 - ❧ Director seeks feedback regularly
- ❧ Methods
 - ❧ Library-wide meetings
 - ❧ Department meetings
 - ❧ Email
 - ❧ Blog
- ❧ Style engenders confidence among librarians/ staff

Communication at Case B



Methods

- Management team meeting minutes
 - E-mail announcements
 - Library-wide meetings
 - Department meetings
- Managers communicate with each other
 - Managers communicate within departments
 - Some decisions made quickly without non-managerial input

Communication at Case C



- ❧ People don't always perceive a message in the way it is intended
- ❧ Multiple methods of informing and seeking input
 - ❧ Posted meeting minutes
 - ❧ Department meetings
 - ❧ Semi-annual library-wide meetings
 - ❧ One-on-one formal and informal meetings
- ❧ Librarians participate in decision-making
- ❧ Staff ideas listened to and implemented

Discussion



- ❧ Open communication appears to be important
- ❧ Where it is evident
 - ❧ Staff morale is good
 - ❧ Priorities achieved
 - ❧ Services intact
- ❧ Where there are breakdowns
 - ❧ Confusion
 - ❧ Lack of ownership in the process

Change is Everywhere!



- ❧ Academic libraries are changing rapidly
- ❧ Effective communication may
 - ❧ Develop buy-in from librarians and staff
 - ❧ Assuage fears of job loss/change
 - ❧ Contribute to productivity and innovation
- ❧ Further research possibilities
 - ❧ Connection between open communication and success navigating rapid change

Contact



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