Management Practice Changes in Academic Library Technical Services Departments during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many unexpected changes for academic libraries. Technical services departments were especially disrupted due to the nature of their responsibilities and library operations. In response to these pandemic-induced changes, technical services managers were tasked with maintaining a high level of operations while also navigating sudden workforce changes including evolving job demands and employees working off-site. This study documents and analyzes the responses of technical services managers during the pandemic. Documenting these practice changes will help inform current managers looking to compare themselves to peers and future managers who may experience a similar event that causes a sudden shift in operations. Overall, managers reported a high incidence of change to their typical management practices. Managers made the biggest changes in communications and practices related to work-life balance. A significant theme emerged from the analysis that shows technical services managers adding several new practices to support and care for the mental health of employees.

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought disruption to all areas of life in 2020. Every industry across the globe was forced to rethink how and where they conduct business. The world of academia, and its academic libraries, were no exception to this monumental shift. Many academic library technical services departments suddenly found themselves being forced to work off-site while tasked with many responsibilities that typically require on-site activity including working with physical materials, managing mail rooms, and other services to keep the backend of their library running smoothly. In addition to these new proximity-related challenges, several additional challenges arose due to the massive pivot to online learning including pressure for rapid acquisition of e-resources to support course needs, an influx of technology and/or e-resource help requests, and an avalanche of temporary free e-resources from vendors. These changes brought about significant challenges for technical services employees and managers.

An important takeaway from the COVID-19 period, and the changes forced upon technical services departments, is understanding how managers altered their management approach, style, and practices to support employees dealing with new job demands, a changing work environment, and their own personal health and

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other related issues due to the pandemic. This information may prove critical should technical services departments once again find themselves forced into remote work due to a future pandemic or local event that disrupts normal operations (e.g., fire, flood). These management changes should also be considered at the present time as libraries seek to find a new normal for their operations, learn from both the positives and negatives that came out of COVID-19 induced work challenges, and develop new standards for employees in workplaces changed by the pandemic.

Literature Review

A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, as the adage goes, is both a challenge and an opportunity. A department can take this time to re-think workflows and may discover that the pre-pandemic way of doing certain tasks may no longer be necessary, even after the return to on-site work.[1] As Newman points out, "crisis can highlight the leadership weaknesses and inability to embrace the opportunity for growth and development" or it can show that good leaders can also learn and grow to face new challenges.[2] The pandemic is not over, but the impact on public, academic, and special libraries is already appearing in articles and columns. Library research on low morale and burnout was increasing before the pandemic. These problems are certainly exacerbated by COVID-19 and library shutdowns.[3] Researchers have approached the pandemic and its impact on libraries from different angles. Some studies and articles concentrate on what libraries can do for the community.[4] A few articles concentrate on technical services in general and technical services management issues in particular.[5]

This study focuses on COVID-19 induced changes in the management practices of academic library technical services managers within four areas of the manager's scope of influence: practices related to communication, practices related to providing resources and support to employees, practices related to the characteristics of the job, and practices related to work stressors.

- Communication practices are the actions a manager takes related to sharing information with employees (e.g., providing feedback, practicing transparency, and holding meaningful meetings).
- Providing resources and support to employees are the actions a manager takes to ensure employees have additional resources to be successful in their role (e.g., skill acquisition training, mentoring, and time-management assistance).
- Characteristics of the job practices are the manager's actions related to adding, removing, or modifying aspects of an employee's work experience based on their hired position (e.g., autonomy level, work-life balance policies,

and clearly documenting job role responsibilities).
- Practices related to work stressors are the actions a manager takes to reduce any negative aspects of the job, both physical and mental, that impact employees (e.g., providing flexible deadlines, workload management, and work environment issues such as non-ergonomic furniture).

There are several other factors (e.g., home life) that impact employees and their interactions with managers. This study does not analyze these other factors because they fall outside of the manager's direct scope of influence. However, this analysis of management practices ties back to these critical areas for employees through considering how managers impact constructs such as work-life balance.

Communication

Communication between managers and employees is undeniably critical. The pandemic added several additional topics to communicate about (e.g., fluid work arrangements, needed supports, and personal health issues) and modes for those communications to take place (e.g., online chat, video conferences, and increased informal interactions). Newman notes that communication during the COVID-19 pandemic was a priority for library leadership and clear communications can help to build trust, increase a sense of community, and reduce anxiety.[6] Salvesen and Berg's research on the early pandemic experiences of academic librarians in New Jersey found communication to be a frequently mentioned issue overall and lack of communication to be a point of frustration librarians had with library administration.[7]

Many leaders found that their communication was most helpful when it was flexible and personalized. Stein et al. share how communication within technical services at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette was strengthened through utilizing differing formats (e.g., email, video, and online chat) and considering individual preferences such as accommodating staff members who preferred smaller groups, or even one-on-one meetings, as opposed to large online group meetings.[8] Managers should also consider creating opportunities for employees to communicate and express themselves across different dimensions (e.g., physical, social, and emotional) while leaving space for those that may not want to participate in these other types of sharing opportunities.[9] Creating space for social communication amongst team members during a quarantine can help strengthen relationships and enhance the overall wellness of employees.[10]

Mazur was happy to discover most of their technical services department's duties could translate smoothly into off-site work arrangements but quickly found communication to be an important area of needed focus.[11] Mazur notes that informal communications are an important part of technical services departments and a lack of visual clues (e.g., body

language) can be a communication tool that managers lack in the virtual environment.[12] Rysavy and Michalak led teams that smoothly transitioned to work from home arrangements due to already using popular online tools such as Slack, Share-Point, and Notion.[13] Despite access to these existing tools, they introduced daily usage of FlipGrid (an online tool for leaving short video messages) to help facilitate missing face-to-face interactions and important drop-in style conversations that are a valuable part of daily communications.[14]

Providing Resources

The typical routine and normal flow of office life can make it hard for employees to find time to engage in training and other continuing education activities. Budgets can often serve as an additional barrier managers must overcome when providing resources that aid in employee success. Some managers used the COVID-19 work from home period as a chance for employees to invest time in professional development including continuing education that would allow staff to prepare for projects that would start after the return to campus.[15] Corbett's library went through an integrated library system (ILS) migration right before the start of the pandemic which meant their training, creation of new workflows, and documentation had to be completed remotely.[16] These examples illustrate the opportunities for professional growth during a work from home situation and the value returned to managers who provide resources for such employee opportunities.

In addition to professional development, managers can provide resources to assist employees in many other ways. Something as simple as maintaining accurate procedures documentation can be very important for employees. The ability to be successful while working remotely in technical services is strengthened by easily accessible updated documentation about workflows and practices.[17] Managers during the COVID-19 period also looked for ways to help employees handle change. Freudenberger describes how one public library director started a weekly training and discussion series to help employees cope with the almost constant changes they were facing.[18] Although that director began this encouraging weekly meeting, she still felt she could have provided more resources to help employees handle the stress caused by change. Leaders can also be an example and model good behavior by encouraging a positive attitude within their team.[19] A manager's time management skills and healthy relationship with work can encourage employees to engage in similar practices. In this way, and many others, one of the most important resources library managers can provide are themselves.

Characteristics of the Job

Remote work for technical services employees and managers is not a new concept, but the practice was not widespread

before the pandemic.[20] Most of the COVID-19 literature about remote work in libraries focuses on descriptions of how specific libraries handled the swift pivot to remote work. Working from home, and being called back on-site, have both caused adjustments in workflows and employee patterns.

Workload, especially when increased due to changes in staffing levels, seems to be a fairly common issue in academic libraries that was exacerbated by the pandemic and work from home arrangements. Workers who remained on-campus, and those that may have rotated on-campus duties, reported additional responsibilities as a challenge.[21] Technical services workers may have been particularly susceptible to this added job stress due to the number of duties that needed to be completed by whoever happened to be on-site (i.e., opening mail, physical processing, etc.). Remote workers also faced challenges related to the changing characteristics of their jobs including isolation from the team, duties being difficult or impossible to complete off-site, and much more. Hudson-Vitale and Miller Waltz report the need for managers "to think creatively to develop a supportive work environment for remote personnel" during this difficult period.[22]

Trust is a theme that comes up numerous times in the COVID-19 library literature.[23] Although trust is an important part of any aspect of the supervisor-employee dyad relationship, trust that an employee can and is doing their job, especially in the remote work setting, is critical. Salvesen and Berg discuss another type of trust in the workplace that impacts employees—the trust that others are following safety guidelines and standards so that they do not bring the virus into the workplace.[24] This is one example of the many ways COVID-19 altered characteristics of the job that led to new work stressors.

Work Stressors

Living through a pandemic, and all of the related work changes it caused, was incredibly stressful for employees. Stress for library workers went beyond the obvious challenges raised by remote work and changing workflows. Individuals grappled with other issues including worries about job insecurity and furloughs, loss of co-workers, fear of illness, and budget cuts. Newman states that employee safety is the first priority for a library leader: "While all stakeholders and commitments are important, the first priority is employee safety. Addressing employees' concerns must be the top priority at every stage of the pandemic as the goal must be to reassure employees and help them feel as safe as possible."[25] Library leaders also had to find a way to balance the needs of patrons with the needs of employees while providing library services during the pandemic.[26] Finding this balance is difficult and can bring stress to employees who may be uncomfortable returning to work and being around coworkers and/or patrons during a pandemic.

An important part of protecting employees includes protecting both their mental and physical health. Hudson-Vitale

and Miller Waltz give wellness and support strategies including meeting free Fridays, limiting meetings to forty-five minutes or less, and taking action when team members express needs that would reduce their stress such as schedule flexibility.[27]

Some departments were better prepared than others to go remote. In Corbett's case, all employees went home with their office computers or laptops, other needed equipment, and office chairs so that they were prepared for success working from home.[28] This was good foresight to get ahead of many common stressors that can arise when quickly turning your home into a new office. An added benefit of modern technical services work is that we rely on software that is easily used remotely or can be downloaded to be used from anywhere. Rysavy and Michalak found the stress and disruption of their departments moving to remote work was lessened due to already using digital tools and systems to accommodate the various schedules of their team members.[29]

A library director from Freudenberger's investigation into library re-openings stressed the importance of a few practices which may help reduce work stressors including checking-in on each other, relaxing deadlines and schedules, and not losing sight of how much work has been accomplished by libraries who have reinvented themselves and their services multiple times through the pandemic.[30]

Methodology

The authors' sought and received institutional review board (IRB) approval prior to recruitment and distribution of surveys. Data for this study were collected alongside data for a larger study on technical services management practices related to burnout.[31] While collected simultaneously with other burnout data, participants were instructed to answer questions for this study only about their typical management practices and how those practices have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were recruited for this online study through email distributed to eight academic library and technical services email lists (ALA Core, ACRL Tech Srv, ACRL ULS, AUTOCAT, Eril-l, OCLC-CAT, OVGTSL, and Core Metadata) during the summer of 2021. A total of 126 participants provided complete usable data. All participants were made aware of their rights as research participants, provided relevant IRB information, and gave informed consent before the survey began.

Participants

Participants included 126 current academic library managers who supervise employees working in traditional technical services roles. Traditional technical services roles were defined as including, but not limited to, cataloging, acquisitions,

collections, electronic resources management, and preservation. This sample of managers skewed towards females, roughly matching the overall profession, with 87.27% reporting female and 12.73% reporting male. The self-reported race of participants in the sample included African American or Black (1.71%), Asian (3.42%), Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin of any race (0.85%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0.85%), White (88.9%), and two or more races (4.27%). The average age of participants is 49.41 years old with a range of 24 to 70 years old.

The academic librarian work experience of participants ranged from 3 to 40 years with an average of 18.34 years of experience. Participants total years in their current supervisory role ranged from 1 to 30 years with an average of 8.17 years. The average number of employees supervised is 5.83 employees. The range of employees supervised is from 1 to 38 employees.

Participants work at both public (62.7%) and private (37.3%) higher education institutions. A majority of participants are employed at a four-year institution that offers doctorate degrees (71.43%), followed by four-year institutions that offer graduate degrees (17.46%), four-year undergraduate institutions (7.94%), and two-year institutions (3.17%).

Measures

The survey questions used in this analysis were developed by the authors. The goal of the survey is to understand how the management practices of academic library managers changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were instructed to answer all questions about how their typical management practices (i.e., pre-pandemic practices) have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an important distinction as data was collected close to one and a half years into the COVID-19 pandemic and after many lockdown mandates were put in place.

The survey focuses on four broad management categories that can be influenced by managers: communication, providing resources and support to employees, characteristics of the job, and work stressors. Participants were asked if they had made changes to their management practices within each of the four management categories. Participants indicating they had made a change due to the COVID-19 pandemic in a given category were prompted to provide information about those changes. These open-ended answers were reviewed, standardized, and coded as distinct management practices.

Results

A total of 95 participants (75.4%) reported making at least one management practice change in at least one of the four management practices categories.

A total of 11 participants (8.73%) reported making at least one management practice change in all four management practices categories.

Results reported about specific management practice changes in the following categories are expressed as a count of total incidences of the practice change across all participants. An individual participant can be represented more than once in a category if they reported more than one specific practice change within that category.

Communication Practices

A total of 83 participants (65.87%) reported making at least one management practice change related to communication. The three most common changes in management practices related to communication were starting to use video conferencing (38), increased written and email communication (20), and increased frequency of meetings (18). The full list of management practice changes related to communication can be found in table 1.

Providing Resources and Support Practices

A total of 49 participants (38.89%) reported making at least one management practice change related to providing resources and support. The three most common changes in management practices related to providing resources and support were increased promotion of online training/webinars and encouraging employees to take advantage of these resources during work time (24), promoted and provided work time for use of resources available through the organization (e.g., stress management) (11), and reducing or fully eliminating paid professional development due to budget cuts (7). The full list of management practice changes related to providing resources and support can be found in table 2.

Characteristics of the Job Practices

A total of 37 participants (29.37%) reported making at least one management practice change related to characteristics of the job. The three most common changes in management practices related to characteristics of the job were allowing remote work arrangements (25), expanding and/or changing job duties to better suit work from home arrangements (5), and providing flexible scheduling (3). The full list of management practice changes related to characteristics of the job can be found in table 3.

Work Stressors Practices

A total of 37 participants (29.37%) reported making at least one management practice change related to work stressors. The three most common changes in management practices related to work stressors were providing flexibility around

Table 1. Management practice changes related to communication.

Incidences	Management Practice Changes Related to Communication
38	Started using video conferencing
20	Increased written and email communication
18	Increased frequency of meetings
13	Started using online chat
9	Increased informal "check ins" with employees
8	Increased communication (general)
8	Increased social support and non-work chat with employees (e.g., discussing personal issues)
5	Held formalized meetings because typical informal communication wasn't possible with work from home arrangements
4	Manager scheduled time within their day for employees to talk with them about anything (i.e., manager "office hours")
3	Started using text messaging within department
2	Managers made themselves available via their personal cell phone
2	Added a new departmental meeting
2	Held meetings even if there were no agenda items as a means to bring the department closer together during distanced work
1	Increased carefulness around messaging due to the majority of communications now being documented in writing
1	Delivered information across several modalities for clarity purposes
1	Implemented a shared daily log of activities for each employee
1	Adjusted meeting frequency for each employee based on their needs
1	Decreased frequency of meetings
1	Decreased spontaneous meetings

Table 2. Management practice changes related to providing resources and support.

Incidences	Management Practice Changes Related to Providing Resources and Support
24	Increased promotion of online training/webinars and encouraged employees to take advantage of these resources during work time
11	Promoted and provided work time for use of resources available through the organization (e.g., stress management)
7	Reduced or fully eliminated paid professional development due to budget cuts
3	Identified and promoted resources to help cope with pandemic-related stressors
2	Documented work procedures in writing
2	Managers increased the amount of time they were available to employees
2	Increased paid professional development for non-faculty employees through repurposing unspent travel budgets
2	Developed individualized plans for work tasks and duties for employees working from home
1	Increased transparency in decision making process
1	Developed individualized transition plans for return to work based on employee needs
1	Provided needed technology to successfully work from home
1	Decreased workload and productivity expectations
1	Decreased expectations for participation in professional development activities
1	Encouraged employees to take breaks and downtime while working from home
1	Advocated for accessibility needs of employees working from home (e.g., closed captioning during online meetings)
1	Developed new job duties and work procedures to avoid layoffs
1	Utilized group registrations to extend professional development opportunities to non-faculty employees

Table 3. Management practice changes related to characteristics of the job.

Incidences	Management Practice Changes Related to Characteristics of the Job
25	Allowed remote work arrangements
5	Expanded and/or changed job duties to better suit work from home arrangements
3	Provided flexible scheduling
2	Set firm and realistic boundaries for workload and job role expectations
2	Expanded job duties to cover furloughs and/or layoffs
1	Relaxed productivity expectations
1	Increased flexibility within existing pre-pandemic work from home arrangements
1	Expanded an employee's job duties to avoid layoff
1	Required employees to report and log tasks
1	Allowed employees to assist in other library departments that matched their interests
1	Required employees to take on new duties without the typically needed training and an adequate amount of time to ease into those new duties

work expectations and deadlines (17), providing flexible scheduling (12), and conducting well-being checks and meetings (6). The full list of management practice changes related to work stressors can be found in table 4.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to measure and understand changes in the management practices of academic library technical services managers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, managers recognized the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and were willing to make changes to their typical practices as evidenced by the 75.4% of managers in this sample reporting making at least one change in a major management practice category. Although likely a small incidence, managers reporting no management practice changes may work in states that did not have stay at home orders and/or at institutions that continued to operate in their typical manner. Our findings also show that some managers found it necessary to respond to the pandemic with broader changes as 8.73% of managers in this sample reported making changes

Table 4. Management practice changes related to work stressors.

Incidences	Management Practice Changes Related to Work Stressors
17	Provided flexibility around work expectations and deadlines
12	Provided flexible scheduling
6	Conducted well-being checks/meetings
4	Protected employee's time and workload
3	Provided needed technology to successfully work from home
2	Advocated for continued remote-work even post COVID-19 mandates
2	Provided ergonomic office furniture and accessories
1	Increased amount of praise provided for good work
1	Increased meetings for information sharing and transparency purposes
1	Provided accommodations for employees with pandemic-related family loss
1	Decreased expectations for new skill acquisitions
1	Practiced mindfulness with respect to employees' experiences and took extra steps to assure a healthy work environment
1	Encouraged the use of "mental health" days
1	Included employees in the process of creating COVID-19 safety procedures
1	Allowed employees to use paid time off with very short notice
1	Equally distributed lower-level tasks previously completed by student workers
1	Reduced general support and accommodations for dealing with worsening work stressors due to lack of budget and reduced staffing levels

in all four of the management practice categories analyzed. These reported rates of change in management practices demonstrate an overall trend in academic library technical services managers of adaptability and conscientiousness towards the needs of their department and employees. By far the most common area of management change occurred in communication.

Communication was clearly a management practice area that managers relied on to make needed changes. Changes in communication practices were reported by nearly two-thirds of the sample (65.87%). Communication was the only management practice category with over half of participants indicating they made at least one change in their practices. This is an expected finding considering the importance of communication to the supervisor-employee dyad relationship and early publications on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted communication problems between employees and library administrators.[32]

The most common change in communication management practices was the introduction of video conferencing. This makes sense as products like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Webex have become ubiquitous and were positioned perfectly to meet the communication needs of unexpectedly distanced work teams. Despite being the most common communication practice change, the overall number of managers reporting adoption of video conferencing was just thirty-eight. This study only focuses on new management practices adopted due to the pandemic, but it seems a safe assumption that some of the managers in this study may have already

adopted video conferencing prior to the pandemic. Increased written and email communications was the next largest reported change. The pandemic caused a disruption of normal communications such as day-to-day chats, hallway catch-ups, and the quick office drop-by. Managers seemed to rely on the more traditional written and email communication channels for information sharing during the pandemic. This was undoubtedly a necessity for some managers although formal communications in technical services can suffer from a lack of the informal cues and interactions which are important to how most departments communicate.[33] Interestingly, one manager reported increasing the carefulness of their communications as many more interactions were now documented in writing. The third most prevalent communication change was to increase the frequency of meetings. This change could have served many purposes including increasing opportunities for information sharing, checking-in on employee progress, and trying to maintain a sense of team among employees. One participant in the study reported decreasing the frequency of meetings.

An interesting observation from the communication practice changes are the reports of managers sharing their personal cell phone information and starting to use text messaging with employees. It is the authors' experience that these are normal and relatively common practices in academic library technical services departments. These reported changes may underscore the gravity of the communication challenges managers faced during the pandemic. Management concerns related to communications may have

convinced some holdouts to take the step of sharing their personal contact information with employees.

Providing resources and support to employees is a management practice category that had a little more than one-third (38.89%) of managers make at least one change. The most common change in practice, with more than double the incidences of the second most reported change in this category, was increasing the promotion of online training/ webinars and encouraging employees to take advantage of these resources during work time. The pandemic period brought about a plethora of online training and webinar opportunities, many of which were offered for free. Our findings suggest managers wanted their employees to take advantage of these professional development opportunities. A definite factor in the increased promotion of these resources to employees is the fact that working remotely may have afforded some extra time to devote to professional development because some of their normal duties could not be completed remotely.[34] The second most common change in this area was increasing promotion of the resources available through the organization (e.g., human resources training opportunities) and providing work time for employees to take advantage of those opportunities. This is another example of managers turning to training and professional development to help employees through this challenging period. Interestingly, the third most common change was to reduce or fully eliminate paid professional development opportunities due to budget cuts. While some managers leaned in for more professional development, others were forced to cut back. This highlights the vast and divergent COVID-19 work experiences that occurred across the profession. It is certainly possible that training provided by the organization and free professional development may have helped lessen the impact of reduced budgets. Future world events and/or organization-wide budget cuts will certainly impact libraries at some point. In the face of these cutbacks, it is important for managers to protect professional development funds when possible as they can play a crucial role during tough times.

Characteristics of the job is a management practice category that roughly 30% of technical services managers made at least one change in. This category was dominated by one common management practice change: allowing remote work arrangements. It is no surprise that remote work arrangements made up 58% of the total responses in this category and were the only management practice change with more than five reported incidences. Safety protocols required many libraries to close their doors, employees to isolate due to illness or exposure to the virus, and many other situations that made it impossible to conduct normal technical services work on-site. It is curious that only five managers reported expanding or changing job duties to better suit work

from home arrangements while many more reported providing such working arrangements. This could possibly be due to technical services duties being more easily translatable to remote work than expected and/or a real-world example of the adaptability required of employees who work in modern day academic library technical services departments. It is plausible that technical services workers may have an easier time making the adjustment to remote work when compared to other areas of the library such as public services. Relatedly, and another example of divergent COVID-19 work experiences, the data shows one manager was forced to increase an employee's job duties to avoid a layoff while a different manager reported allowing an employee to assist other library departments that matched their job interests.

Work stressors is a management practice category that roughly 30% of technical services managers made at least one change in. The most common change in management practice related to work stressors is providing flexibility around work expectations and deadlines. In the same vein, the second most reported management practice change for work stressors is providing flexible scheduling. Increasing flexibility around deadlines and providing scheduling autonomy seem to be appropriate changes for addressing work stress. It makes sense that managers turned to these tactics as they are easily implemented, cost-free, and very practical for employees working remotely. Managers seemed to be aware and concerned about added work stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the third most common change was conducting well-being checks/meetings. It speaks volumes to the considerable work stress in academic library technical services departments, and the added stress of the pandemic, that a trend emerged where managers made a point to check in with employees on how they were doing with work stress. These meetings provide opportunities for employees to make the manager aware of issues, ask for help, and/or let out some frustration. These meetings can benefit managers too as they can only help employees address work stressors if they know about them. It is noteworthy that there is an overlap in the reporting of management practice changes related to work-life balance issues within the work stressors category and characteristics of the job category. These results suggest that some managers view aspects of employment like scheduling as something related to part of the job while others view it directly as a work stressor.

The COVID-19 management literature features many examples of things managers can do to create better work environments and assist employees with work stress.[35] While these articles provide ample suggestions, it must be acknowledged that not all managers have the needed resources or are in a position to implement best practices, let alone suggestions from the academic library management literature. This is exemplified by one manager in this study

who reported their COVID-19 induced management practice change related to work stressors was to reduce support and accommodations for employees dealing with worsening work stressors because the library simply did not have the staffing levels or budget to do anything about it. It is important to remember that library managers are people too, and they are impacted by increasing work stressors and the same pandemic-related issues that library workers struggled with in their own professional and personal lives. While this study aims to provide managers with practical takeaways to implement either now or in response to future disruptive events, it is important not to lose sight of the stress and obstacles that managers also faced.

A theme emerged from these results that shows managers taking on the role of caring for the mental health of their employees. This theme is not unexpected as mental health appears across several studies in the COVID-19 library literature.[36] Managers mentioned many changes to their typical practices, across every management practice category, that were related to the mental health of their employees. In terms of communication, managers reported new practices that included increasing social support, setting aside time for non-work personal chat, providing office hours to employees who needed to talk, and working to foster a stronger sense of team. In terms of providing resources and support, managers reported specifically seeking and promoting resources to help cope with pandemic-related stress, encouraging employees to take breaks and downtime at home, and developing individualized transition plans for employees returning to work in person. Managers reporting changes to management practices related to characteristics of the job often mentioned practices related to work-life balance and practices that may help with job satisfaction and burnout such as setting a realistic workload, relaxing productivity expectations, and allowing employees to assist other departments that more closely match their personal interests. Managers looking to alleviate work stressors deployed new practices such as well-being checks, encouraging "mental health days," and in some cases provided accommodations for employees dealing with pandemic-related family loss. Whether intentional or incidental, it is clear academic library technical services managers added several new practices focused on the mental health and well-being of employees due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Limitations and Future Directions

Participants were clearly instructed to answer survey questions about how their typical management practices have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, data for this study was collected as part of a larger study on academic library burnout which may have primed participants to focus on and/or more heavily report burnout related management practices. It should also be noted that this focus may be reasonable due to the impact of the pandemic on library workers.

This study did not ask managers if their department's working arrangements, environment, and so on, had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is a relatively safe assumption that the pandemic caused such changes to occur, it is possible that managers reporting no changes in behavior could have been employed at a place that did not have a work from home mandate or otherwise conducted business as normal.

The future research directions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic libraries are expansive. Studies looking to analyze the performance and reaction of library managers to the pandemic have a few important questions to address. First, did the pandemic-related changes to typical management practices have an effect on employee performance, address organizational needs, and successfully contribute to the well-being of employees? Second, would it be beneficial for academic libraries to permanently adopt the common changes to operations and the management of employees that were utilized by managers during the pandemic including increased scheduling flexibility, work from home arrangements, and intentionality given to strong communication practices?

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic forced academic library technical services departments to rethink their responsibilities, services, and workflows. These disruptions caused many changes for employees including evolving job duties and working offsite. Technical services managers responded to these changes by modifying their management practices across several areas. Management practice changes were most prominent in communication where managers increased levels of communication and diversified information sharing channels. Managers also adopted several work-life balance practices (e.g., remote work and flexible scheduling) to improve conditions for employees. Technical services managers also adopted many new practices in support of employees' mental health. As academic libraries continue to move towards a full return to pre-pandemic operations, technical services managers will need to balance their old expectations with the working situations and new realities that employees became used to during the pandemic.

References and Notes

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