TRAINING NEEDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A WALL OR A DOORWAY?

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CONTACT DETAILS

New systems, new technology and new business needs require new ways of working and training. Does the way we deliver training impact on the ability of staff to take ownership of their own development? How do we empower staff to monitor their own competency levels and take a proactive approach to learning?

BACKGROUND

It would be fair to say the Content and Development team at the Charles Seale-Hayne Library is used to change. The team, which currently has over twenty members of staff, was created in 2009 as a result of the merger of the collection management section and the library development team. In previous and current incarnations it has undertaken numerous projects always with the aim to streamline and optimise library operations. For example, the team has been central to the implementations of Voyager, SFX, MetaLib and Verde; as well as the move to electronic delivery of inter-library loans, and shelf-ready acquisitions.

THE PROBLEM WITH TRAINING

Despite the continuously evolving environment in which we work, one thing that remained fairly constant over the past two years was the way we train our staff. The emphasis has been on small group learning or one to one sessions both supported by procedural documentation. This approach was very staff intensive, it diminished our ability to apply procedures consistently, and it often did not result in learning outcomes being met. One particular issue was that some staff saw training as something that was 'done to them' rather than as an opportunity to shape their own development.

Following on a perceived new period of rapid change, during which job roles and functional structures were again under review, it became apparent that we needed to look at the wider issues associated with training. This meant exploring the breadth of skills required across the team, and how these could be acquired by our staff in an effective and sustainable manner.
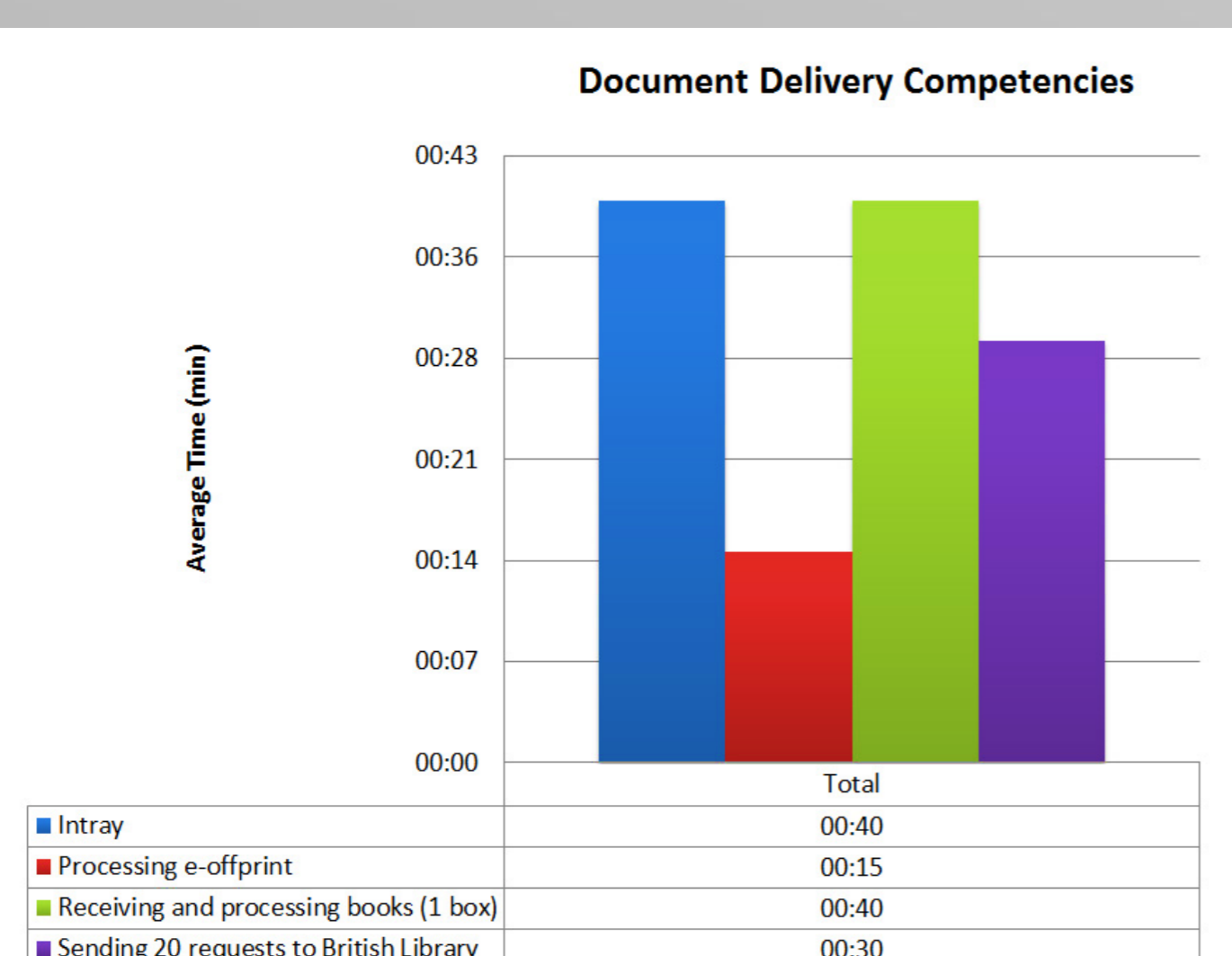
LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

In part, the solution was about changing the mindset of the team, so they could start to feel responsible and in control of their own development. To get there we first had to solve some practical issues.

Setting out expectations. We started by outlining job competencies and setting out estimated goals. This included, for example, the number of book orders or inter-library loan requests that an Information Assistant could process in one hour (Figure 1). The idea was to provide clarity of expectations and enable staff to identify where additional training might be required to become 'competent' in reaching the desired outcomes. Establishing what competencies could be measured and what the goals should be was time consuming and, in some cases, a process of trial and error, but it was also a key part of the new methodology.

Mapping competencies to skills development. Enabling staff to evaluate their own level of competency required the development of monthly competency reports which listed performance statistics for each individual. Before the reports were shared with line managers, staff were consulted to ensure that they understood the meaning of the datasets and they were comfortable with the information being shared with others.

Figure 1

Monthly reports enable staff and their line managers to monitor performance against competencies and identify skill development needs.

Document Delivery Competencies

Average Time (min)

|	Total
Intray	00:40
Processing e-offprint	00:15
Receiving and processing books (1 box)	00:40
Sending 20 requests to British Library	00:30

The ultimate goal is that, with the help of their line manager, each individual will be able to assess their competency and their associated skill development requirements.

New training materials. In order to move away from one to one and small group training we also had to find an alternative way of developing the skills needed by our staff. We addressed this by a combination of methods, using new materials and formats:

- Making use of the resources available from the Ex Libris Learning Center.
- Creating an online knowledge base ('Know') to capture useful tips and procedural information (Figure 2).
- The Learning Center inspired us to start creating our own video tutorials describing procedures that were not already covered elsewhere.

Figure 2

The Ex Libris Learning Center has become the inspiration for 'home made' video tutorials and the team's knowledge base, 'Know'.
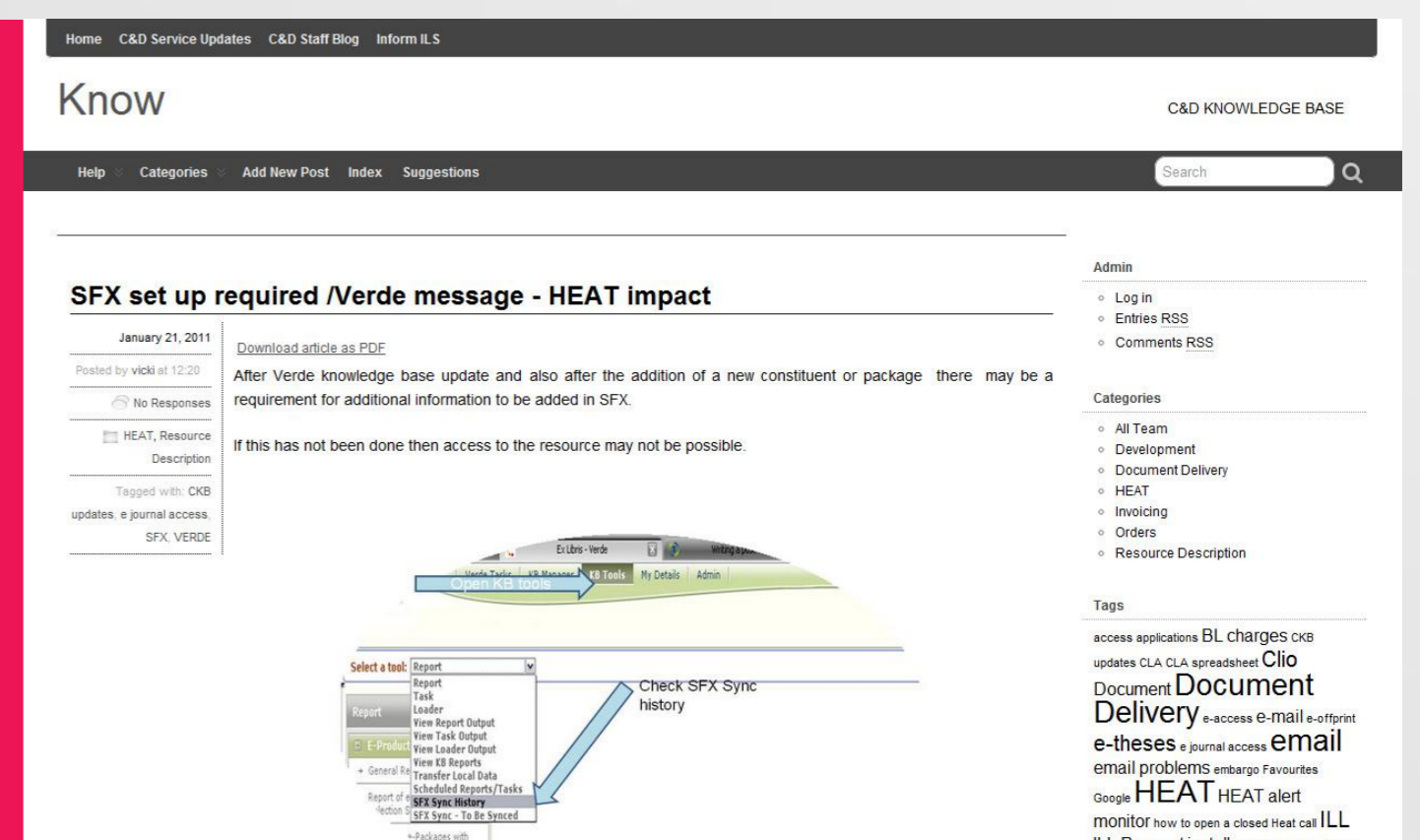
WALLS AND DOORWAYS

As we progressed through the implementation of these measures we came across several issues that may impact on effectiveness:

- User resistance / scepticism: Not all staff were keen to start using new training methods. Preference for certain types of materials, different learning styles and accessibility issues have to be considered, although we are aware that some of this may also be a question of perception or mindset. On the plus side, there are clear advantages in using electronic documentation and tutorials: they are available on demand, to be accessed as and when required and they always provide the same information which should help us to achieve consistent practice. They also enable staff to learn useful web skills.
- There is more work to be done in establishing the 'accuracy' of the competency targets. If staff are going to measure their competence against these goals, we need to be certain that the measures are fair and appropriate.
- Furthermore, how do we know that we are creating the right kind of training to develop the right type of skills? Answering this question will require the evaluation and long term monitoring of competency levels.
- As we continue to produce new training resources, we have become aware that sustainability may be an issue in the long term. Can we keep up with the pace of change? How do we review the validity of our resources?

NEXT STEPS

- Address some of the issues above by evaluating the usability of the training solutions as well as the tools that monitor competency levels.
- Carry out a competence review to establish whether we are looking at the 'correct' targets.
- Continue to produce more materials, whilst establishing methods for managing these resources effectively, ensuring that they remain up to date and valuable.

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