

Teamwork: an essential change management strategy for university libraries in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Teamwork is well practised in firms in Japan and in the West. Gigantic culture and religious monuments, irrigation constructions coupled with a long standing ethical and value system bear testimony to teamwork and teamwork culture inherent in Asia. This study examines how teamwork can effect the work environment of the university libraries in Sri Lanka. The objectives of the study are to examine whether teamwork is an essential requirement for a university library and to investigate the attitude and response of professional staff of university libraries in Sri Lanka towards teamwork. The method used for the study was descriptive research and the population of the study was the professional staff of the university libraries. The application of teamwork in such areas of the library as cataloguing and classification, information technology and reader services were ranked very high. It is proposed that teamwork has to be organized on a departmental basis or on a divisional basis in university libraries. Teamwork management approach is yet to be undertaken particularly in academic libraries of Sri Lanka.

Introduction

The performances of organized forms of groups like committees, task forces, circles, forums, and units, and particularly the teams would be better than those of the informal groups. Large scale projects like irrigation schemes, buildings and road construction, and other programmes, productions, equipment and manufactures etc. are a result of human intervention as well as collaborative work of human beings. Collaboration, cooperation, communication, mutuality, self-help, common goals, definite objectives and leadership are some of the concepts and practices

more important in work groups than in organized teams. Hall further suggests that leadership training, staff selection, and communication with part-timers and the skills of open communication are prime requirements for teamwork university libraries in UK.

Diaz and Pintozzi (1999) express the reorganization of the Arizona University Library which took place in the 1990s, which focused on the human resources component of the changes as well as the human impact on the staff. They identified the areas viz. communication, empowerment and evaluation and assessment as suitable for a new team-based management structure.

In order to meet its continuing and future needs, the University of Kentucky Libraries (UKL) initiated a team-based process with the intent of re-designing the libraries' organizational culture and structure towards achieving change management. Library faculty and staff who were involved in the project were fully trained in team management. Replacement was introduced for the traditional Divisions and Departments in libraries using a team-based model. McLaren (2001) while studying UKL, states that this programme has served in gaining much productivity and favourable outcome in libraries.

Virtual team work is a new concept endorsed by Knecht (2004) and exposed that teams of librarians, library technicians and information systems specialists from various libraries could work cooperatively via electronic media evading geographical barriers to finish the assigned projects in libraries.

Yoon (2005) studying the team-based organization in academic libraries in South Korea using major areas like the introduction of the team approach, team empowerment, leadership of team leaders, open communication, and the director's commitment illustrated that there had been a negative attitude on the image of the team-based system, poor training in team management and inadequate support for their staff in the process of adopting to a team-based system were evident.

Martin (2006) in his study on team effectiveness of three academic medical libraries of USA, revealed that communication, leadership, personality and behaviour, and relationship building were the five major conditions for team effectiveness.

Librarian gives leadership to each section and unit as a team leader. Each section's role is akin to a group work. This group work has to be converted into teamwork using the above mentioned core skills and characteristics. The researcher did a detailed investigation of the Human Resource Management (HRM) in ULSL. It is evident that the attention and application of HRM in different organizations in Sri Lanka, particularly in the government sector is yet to be increased and the libraries attached to universities in Sri Lanka, recognize that HRM is an extremely significant area for developing human resources in order to provide an efficient and an effective library and information service. The researcher used two approaches in order to identify a better HRM framework for the ULSL. One is a policy approach and the other is a change management strategy. The researcher found that teamwork is the best change management strategy among six strategies namely *teamwork; development of competencies; job design and redesign; Appropriate Information Technology (AIT); succession planning, organizational and staff qualities and norms*. The study highlights the team management in ULSL.

Objectives of the study

To gain a clear view on teamwork

To identify whether teamwork is an essential requirement for ULSL

To examine the present status of teamwork in ULSL

To investigate the attitude and response of professional staff of ULSL toward teamwork

To explore to what extent teamwork is required and to find the areas where teamwork is needed.

Literature review

The literature review on management revealed that few studies have been done on teamwork in Sri Lanka. Jayaratne and Reade (2002) conclude that there is a positive relationship between team effectiveness and the number of team roles available in a team. This study was based on the Meredith Belbin's theory of positive correlation between the contributions of team roles for team effectiveness. Team management is a significant area in librarianship in Sri Lanka

more important in work groups than in organized teams. Hall further suggests that leadership training, staff selection, and communication with part-timers and the skills of open communication are prime requirements for teamwork university libraries in UK.

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As discussed earlier, the work and atmosphere in a university library is very conducive for applying teamwork. Library counter, helpdesk, reference and information service units are some of the places where teamwork is practised very frequently but implicitly. Even other Departments like, acquisition, serials, reader services have the potentiality in applying the teamwork concept. Mutuality is one of the advanced human qualities visible in Asian cultures. National culture peculiar to Asian countries is a very favourable indicator and a grounding factor for developing teamwork and teamwork culture. National events and festivals peculiar to Asia which are based on cooperative efforts of the people provide an encouraging background for teamwork. Stupendous cultural and religious monuments, irrigation constructions coupled with a long standing ethical and value system bear testimony to teamwork and teamwork culture inherent in Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka. This trend could be used when managers want to apply the teamwork approach in their organizations in the Asian countries. The identification of priority areas where teamwork has to be applied for has to be decided.

Research methodology

The method used for this study was the descriptive research. Survey technique was used in order to collect data. The population of the study was the professional staff working in ULSL. There was no necessity of using a sample, since the population was finite.

Primary data was collected by circulating two structured questionnaires among 14 Librarians and 71 Assistant Librarians (ALs) and Senior Assistant Librarians (SALs). Only 10 Librarians (71%), 46 ALs and SALs (65%) responded. Altogether, 85 questionnaires were delivered and 56 (66%) had responded.

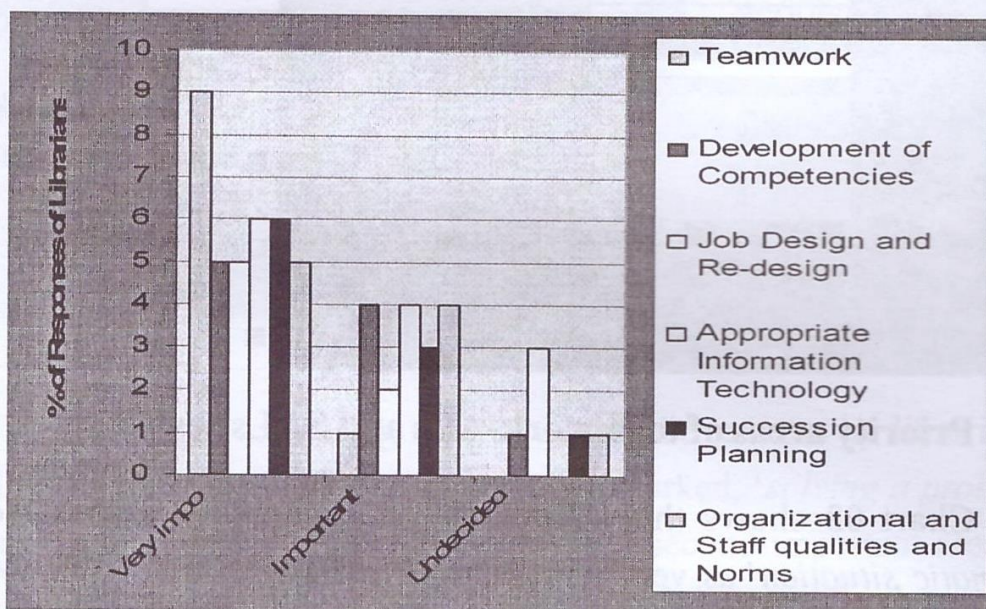
Results and discussions

Teamwork-most significant change management strategy

The researcher applied the change management approach in managing human resources in ULSL. For this purpose, (Chart 01) six strategies were utilized. Out of six strategies, teamwork was marked by the university librarians as the most important strategy among all. Chart 01 illustrates that the most important change

management strategy is *teamwork* which scored 90%, and the second important strategies are the *Appropriate Information Technology (AIT)* and the *succession planning* which both scored 60%. All the other three strategies like *development of competencies*, *job design and re-design*, *succession planning*, *organizational and staff qualities and norms* received the same preferences i.e. 50%. Scoring 90% *teamwork* indicates that it is the well-timed HRM requirement for the university libraries. Scoring 60% AIT indicates that libraries should upgrade their IT application, and the IT policy formulation.

Chart 01. Important change management strategies suitable for ULSL-Librarians' responses



Librarians, ALs and SALs choices for teamwork

All librarians, ALs and SALs in both categories were very willing to work as teams in ULSL. Librarians' responses were 100%, while ALs and SALs responses were 93%. This means, that most library professionals are willing to work as teams. (Chart 02).

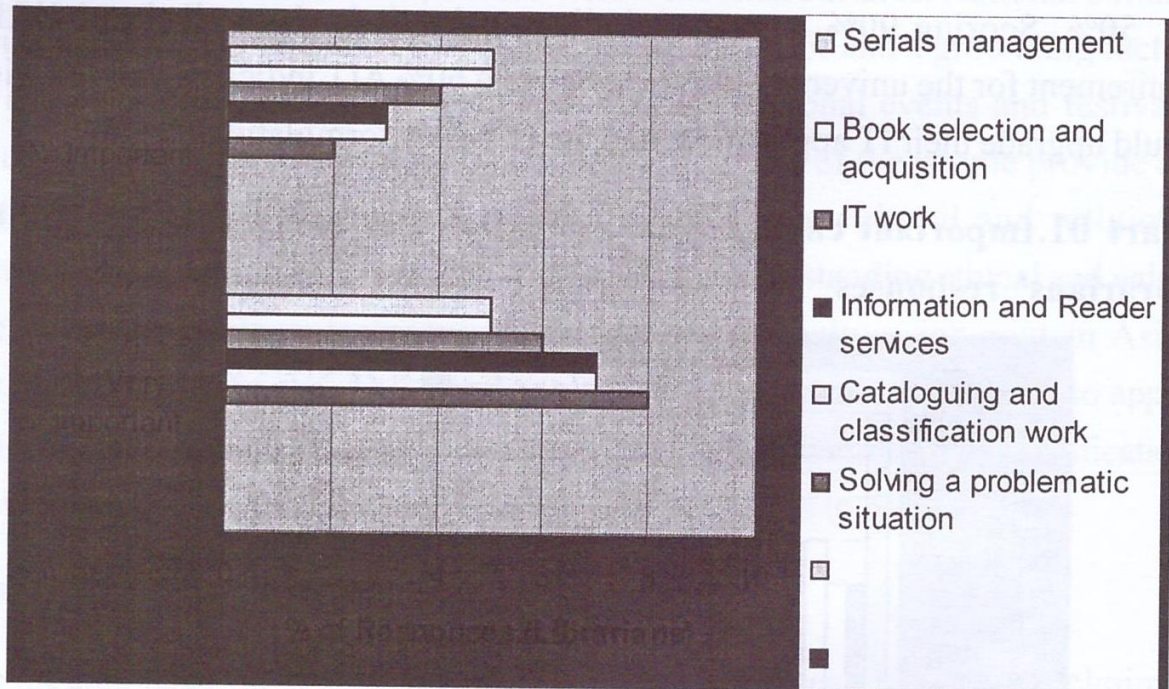
Identification of priority areas of teamwork

Priority areas of teamwork-Librarians' responses

Four questions were asked from the librarians with regard to priority area. They show that 80% of the librarians responded to the area, *solving a problematic*

situation as very important. 70% of librarians marked the areas viz. ‘*cataloguing and classification work*’ and *information and reader services* as very important. Both areas, *IT work*’ scored 60% while the ‘*book selection and acquisition*’, received 50% responses each.

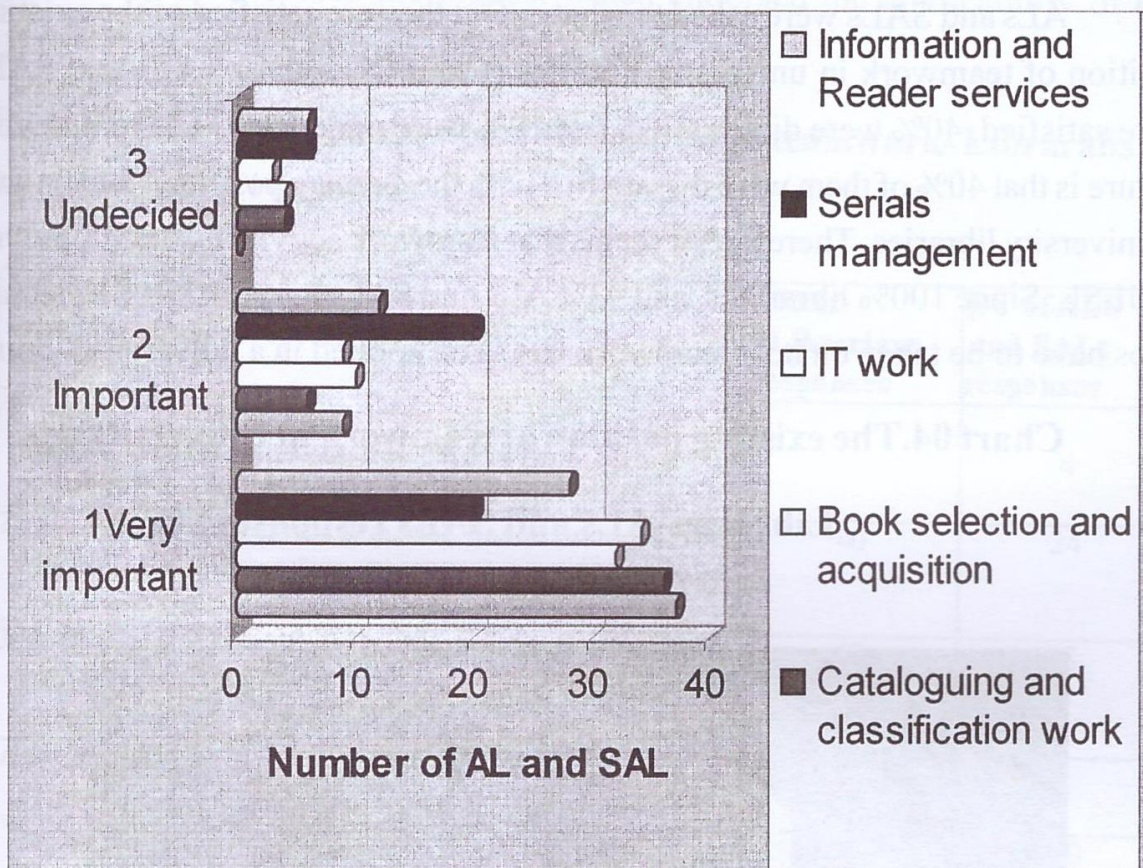
Chart 02. Priority areas of teamwork-Librarians responses



Priority areas of teamwork-ALs and SALs responses

Chart 03 shows that ALs and SALs marked the area ‘*solving a problematic situation*’ as very important for teamwork and, it received 80%. The area *cataloguing and classification work*’ received 78%. ALs and SALs(73%) marked the area ‘*IT work*’ as very important for teamwork. The *book selection and acquisition function* received 69%. Finally 60% of ALs and SALs marked the area for ‘*information and reader services*’ as suitable for teamwork .

Chart 03. Priority areas of teamwork-ALs and SALs responses



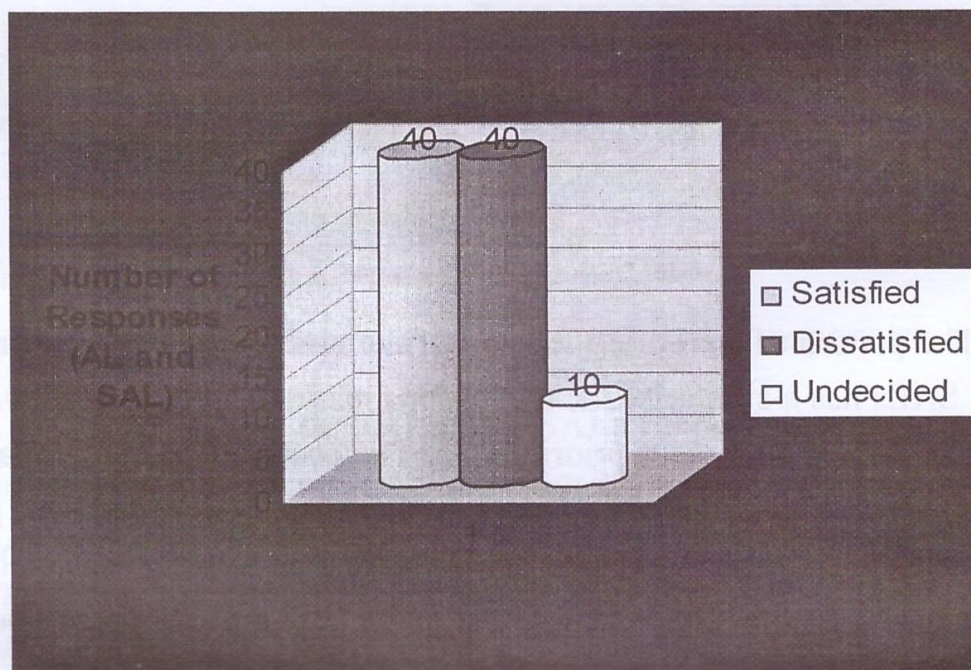
The pattern of answering to each of the above areas by librarians and ALs and SALs has a similarity i.e. two groups marked, ‘*solving a problematic situation*’ as a very important priority area. The second important area which needs teamwork is *cataloguing and classification*. It is understood that, priority must be given to solve *a problematic situation* by each team. It is also observed that in both in-house functions and information services are to be carried out using team approach.

Through experience in working in two university libraries in Sri Lanka, the researcher is certain that problematic situations are settled within the library through un-official means of teamwork, easing the stress and the burden of the university librarian.

The existing position of teamwork in university libraries

ALs and SALs were asked to what extent they are satisfied of the existing position of teamwork in university libraries (Chart 04). 40% of ALs and SALs were satisfied, 40% were dissatisfied, and 10% were undecided. The remarkable feature is that 40% of them were dissatisfied with the existing position of teamwork in university libraries. Therefore, it seems that teamwork activity is to be improved in ULSL. Since 100% librarians, and 93% ALs and SALs agree to work as teams, steps have to be taken on how teamwork has to be applied in a university library.

Chart 04. The existing position of teamwork in University Libraries-ALs and SALs responses



Verification of hypothesis

The new organizational structure and teamwork

Hypothesis: - *“Professionals prefer to work as teams in a more self-guided and committed work environment in university libraries.”* This hypothesis has been confirmed by 60% of librarians and 68% of ALs and SALs based on the statement *“A new cohesive and collaborative model based more on the principles of teamwork with high commitment.”*

Table 01 indicates the verification of this hypothesis. Out of four statements (Table 01) 3rd statement scored the highest which endorsed the applicability of team approach for the ULSL.

Table 01. The new organizational structure and teamwork- Librarans and ALs and SALs responses

Salient features and the new organizational structure for ULSL	% of Librarians responses	% of ALS and SALs responses
1. More traditional/ more hierarchical model, based on more control and more supervision from top management to lower management	-	4
2. Moderately hierarchical model, based on moderately control/supervision from top management to lower management	40	24
3. A new cohesive and collaborative model, based more on the principles of teamwork with high commitment	60	68
4. The existing traditional model which is practised in ULSL	-	4
Total	100	100

It is revealed that a new organizational structure is super imposed on the existing traditional hierarchical structure. A flatter organizational structure based on teamwork, quality and more commitment approach is preferred.

Conclusion

All university librarians selected for the survey and 93% of ALs and SLAs hold the view that teamwork is a management strategy that university libraries in Sri Lanka could adopt to better their services. Even at present some of the problems faced by the university libraries are solved by teamwork easing the stress on the librarians. The most preferred areas for teamwork in university libraries are cataloguing and classification, information technology and reader services, IT work, book selection and acquisition. Each team has to be assigned a core area. Through projects like the new teamwork initiatives (NTI) steps have to be taken to consider how teamwork is conducted. The proposed HRM model is preferred by most senior library staff. As in the case of library policy each university library has to follow a distinct teamwork strategy.

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and hence a typical study on team approach is yet to be undertaken particularly in academic libraries. Team management is another strategic area in change management. Badu (1990) concludes that 'the historical roots and the amicable atmosphere' which prevailed in university libraries in Ghana, were best suited for teamwork.

According to Walton's (1992) study, team approach was successfully applied in cataloguing and periodical work at Florida University Library in USA and the study showed that it has increased the levels of professionalism and cooperation among all levels of cataloguing and periodicals staff.

Poon-Richards (1995) discusses the radical shift from the traditional management models like bureaucratic and hierarchical which prevailed in libraries to a new model like team-based structure and explores the concept of Self Managed Team (SMT) in the management literature. SMT indicates 'a group of functionally flexible employees that have responsibility for directing and controlling their own work' (Heery and Noon, 2001). The study clarifies how Yale University's Sterling Library put into practice such a team in its Technical Services and recognizes the enhancement of the responsibility and leadership among self managed teams.

Odini (1996) identifies the improvement of staff morale and job satisfaction through teamwork, among public library employees in Kenya in his study in 1995. Team-based staffing structure was best suited for Kenyan Public Library System (KPLS).

Black and Granskog (1997) studied a model based on inter-team cooperation, introduced by the Michigan State University Libraries Technical Services Division to activate the workflow. Theses processing was selected as the first application of this model and the rapidity of the theses processing through teamwork was a notable feature .

Hall (1999) indicates the findings of research which focused to develop a better understanding of the skills required in teamwork in UK university libraries and the best ways of developing these skills. The teams surveyed in the study were found to be leader focused and the most repeatedly quoted examples of good teamwork have a tendency to depend on attitudes rather than skills. Communication was identified as a key skill, but task centered skills such as decision making were