Building Digital Proficiency in Staff with Analog Skills

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Abstract:

After staff finish their formal education and move into the workplace, their computing skills become outdated and/or not transferable to the library's new digital environment. Supervisors are challenged to provide training to their staff yet may not have curriculum development and instructional experience. Through two case studies, supervisors will gain methodologies to assess staff computing skills and provide individual development plans to meet the employee at his or her level and sequentially develop the competencies to meet the new digital requirements. In the first case staff in the Library of Congress Nairobi Office learn how to process serials through synchronous online learning sessions with the instructor in Washington, D.C. In the second case, the supervisor and employee join in the process of compiling an individual development plan to guide the acquisition of computing skills in systematic way with the goal of full participation in the library's digital initiatives.

Keywords: staff development, digital proficiency, performance, competencies, training

Introduction

This paper will provide supervisors with methodologies to develop implement and evaluate curriculum for library staff at all levels and abilities to move from basic computer technology skills to high performance in the digital environment. Often after staff finish their formal education and move to the workplace, their computing skills become outdated and/or not transferable to a new digital environment. They may avoid and/or fear, then resist new digital projects. Their supervisors in many cases are not curriculum development specialists nor do they have an instructional background but are facing new library computing systems and digitization projects. Ways to overcome these challenges will be explored from the employer/supervisor perspective.

Case Example #1: Processing Serials Library of Congress Overseas Office in Nairobi

Background

Library staff in the Nairobi office were sending bound serials to the African, Latin American and Western European (ALAWE) Cataloging Division at the Library of Congress on Capitol Hill after the bibliographic cataloging record was created. Staff in ALAWE then needed to open the boxes of bound serials, locate the bibliographic record then create holdings records with summary holdings statements and item records with barcode numbers that were linked to the barcode on book. This process required considerable extra time and staff resources then having a cataloger complete the entire process as was being done on Capitol Hill.

Management decided that the Nairobi Office staff should use the same workflow as the Capitol Hill staff and add the holdings and item records to the bound serials, but the Nairobi Office staff would need the same training that the Capitol Hill staff had. There was no money in the budget to send an instructor to the Nairobi Office for two weeks to do the training.

Challenges to the training

The managers in ALAWE met with the instructor who had taught the Capitol Hill staff the exact processing that the Nairobi staff needed to learn. The instructor had experience in synchronous online learning, but major challenges included:

- 9-hour time difference

- Nairobi staff had no online learning experience

- There was no computer classroom for hands-on instruction.

- The computers on Capitol Hill had a special training database to learn to create records without corrupting the production catalog

- On Capitol Hill the instructor could see where an employee was having difficulty.

- Tech support was readily available on Capitol Hill and the only person in the Nairobi Office who worked with tech support had no experience with online learning nor with the integrated library system test database and record creation in the cataloging module.

Planning the training

The instructor gave a demonstration of the synchronous online learning system to the ALAWE managers in the computer lab classroom. Included was a large screen at the front of the classroom with projection of the online learning system that had the cataloging record displayed from the instructor's computer. They watched their computers and were able to replicate what they were seeing. All agreed this method could work for the Nairobi Office if the challenges could be overcome.

Next came telephone meetings with the Nairobi Office Director who determined that he could obtain enough computers and secure internet connection at a large conference room table in the office.

The instructor and managers decided that the Nairobi Office staff would need an orientation to online learning where they would just watch a PowerPoint that introduced them to online learning and the classes they were about to take. Staff in the Nairobi office would need the full course on searching for serial records, then the course on creating and editing serial holding records and item records with barcodes. They would also need additional instruction on processing serials for the Africana collections.

Also, it was decided that the staff would only have an hour and half session each day in contrast to the 3-hour sessions the staff on Capitol Hill had. This would help them absorb the training in smaller chunks and let them work at a slower pace. In addition, it would help with the 9-hour time difference. Staff wanted the instruction from 2:00 – 3:30 p.m. Nairobi time so they could get ahead of the massive traffic problems later in the day. This meant the instructor needed to be set up at the Library of Congress by 5:00 a.m. Firewall issues and the need for a secure connection to the Library's test database prevented using the system to display the test database from the instructor's home.

After preparing each module of instruction, the instructor tested displaying each one in the online system using the Capitol Hill classroom then viewing them on a computer in an adjoining room to see how each appeared. Since the instruction included showing PowerPoints, using the training online cataloging database, and displaying the manual, each was adjusted for maximum appearance.

Next the instructor taught the technical staff member in Nairobi how to set up the e-learning synchronous instruction on the workstation by emailing a picture of the required equipment as well as step-by-step procedures for using the online synchronous learning system.
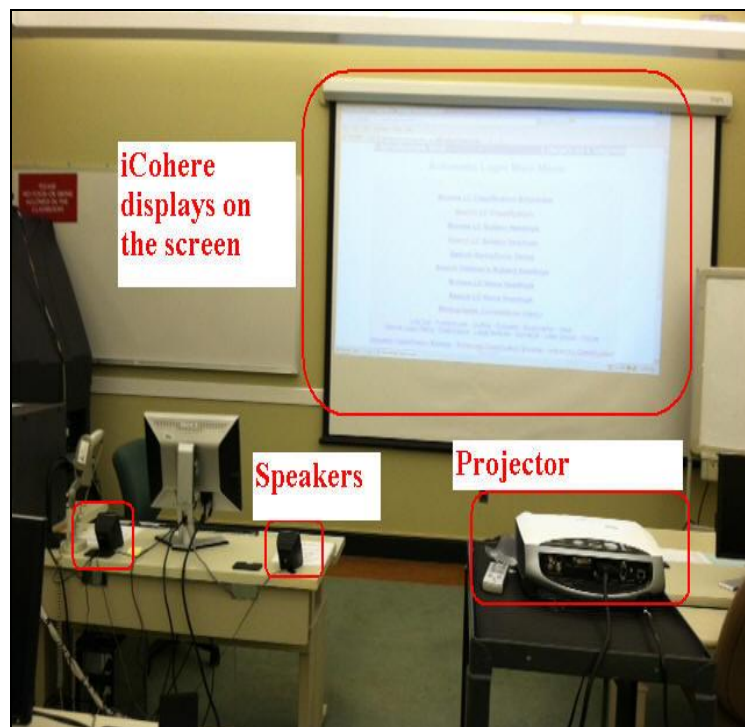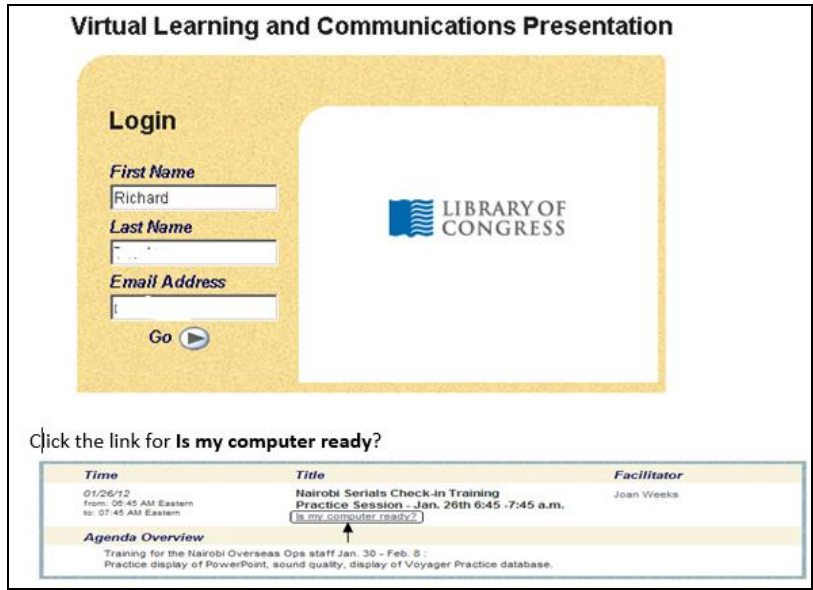
After confirming that everything was set up in Nairobi, the instructor conducted a test session with the technical staff member. It was discovered that there were latency problems using Voice over internet protocol, so a direct conference phone line was established.

Next the training online catalog database application was installed on the computers in Nairobi and the training manuals were sent via email then downloaded and printed out for the participants.

Teaching the new system

On the first day, the participants watched the PowerPoint that introduced them to what they would be learning and how to learn in the online environment. They took turns speaking into the conference phone to introduce themselves and ask a question. The next session involved looking at the manual and following the instruction on the screen. The class sent the instructor a photo of their classroom in Nairobi and the instructor sent back the photo with herself put in the front of the classroom near the screen. They all remarked how they felt much more connected to the instructor and comfortable with online learning.

Over the next week, the searching for serials and creating holdings and item records classes were taught while the participants followed the instruction on the screen then replicated the step-by-step procedures hands on using their computers. The director went around the room and communicated problems and where staff needed more explanation. At first, it went very slowly but gradually the pace picked up. After each participant created records in the training online cataloging database, the instructor was able to see the record and mention any correction needed or reteach the element. All staff in Nairobi are now independently creating holdings and item records for the Africana serials and reported that they enjoyed learning in the online environment.

Case Example #2: Individual Development Plan Process

In the leading up to the employee annual performance review, the supervisor should look ahead at the work the library is planning to undertake, new software that may be installed, new processing that the employees may need to undertake and list the major areas of responsibility that the employee will have in this work.

In a work breakdown analysis, the supervisor could determine the skills the employee will need to reach the goal of full performance. The supervisor would then meet with the employee to determine his or her level and then develop the curriculum sequentially with the competencies to meet the new digital requirements. These courses or learning modules would then be in inserted into the Individual Development Plan including expected completion dates with the agreement of the supervisor and employee.

Propose of the Individual Development Plan Process

The Library seeks to model a high-performance culture that encourages, supports, and invests in the development of its staff. Professional development is an ongoing process to ensure that employees are staying current, if not one step ahead in their fields and mission-critical competencies.

This plan is intended to:

- Encourage each employee to take ownership of his or her career development
- Provide an administrative mechanism for identifying and tracking development needs and plans
- Assist in planning employee training and development activities
- Align employee development with the mission, goals, and objectives of the Library and the service units (SU)
- Allow supervisors to develop a better understanding of their staff's professional goals, strengths and development needs
- Provide a basis for discussion periodically and tracking progress throughout the year

Additionally:

- Development goals will assist the employee in becoming stronger in his or her current role or expanding on strengths currently demonstrated -- these are goals for improving over the next year
- Development goals also will relate to preparing the employee for future roles or foreseeable changes in existing roles

- Specific training activities should be entered and tracked electronically through the "My Plan" portion of the Online Learning Center
- Goals expressed in the plan should be viewed as flexible and are subject to resource constraints

Resources that can be used by both the employee and supervisor to create this IDP include position description, performance plan, performance appraisal, performance targets, annual objectives, strategic plans, and unit priorities.

Sample Form

Employee Name/Employee ID:	Current Position Description Number / Title / Series / Grade:	Organizational Unit:	Appraisal Period Date: 03/01/2019-2/29/2020)

	Goal (Describe the observable competency, knowledge, skill, or ability you would like to enhance or develop)	Target Completion Date	Developmental Activities (examples: shadowing, detail, just-in-time learning, conference, on-line or classroom training, reading, coaching, mentoring)	Progress Made Next Steps
	MARC for non-cataloguers	Sept. 13, 2019	Classroom training	Employee demonstrates knowledge of MARC fields
	Searching for Serial Records	Sept. 30, 2019	Classroom training	Employee demonstrates searching techniques
	Editing Serial Holdings and Item Records	Oct. 15, 2019	Classroom training and mentoring	Employee edits records with supervision.
	Creating New Serials Holdings and Item Records	Oct. 30, 2019	Classroom training and mentoring	Employee creates records independently

Employee Signature and Date: _____

Supervisor Signature and Date: _____

(Library of Congress Workforce Performance Management staff)

Conclusion

One of the most difficult challenges supervisors face is overcoming staff resistance to change. Some staff believe that the status quo has worked for years and there is no need to change. They feel threatened at the mention of new computer technology. Added to this challenge staff may need to also take classes in the new online environment. With e-learning some staff need more fundamental skills before they engage in e-learning. Tech support is a challenge in many situations when learners get lost or can't navigate the course. In some instances, bandwidth, language and time differences can become obstacles. Technology change initiatives can be difficult to implement without staff buy in

Using the case studies, the supervisor can gain methodologies to overcome these challenges and implement technology initiatives with their staff. When the supervisor engages the staff in the instructional process at their individual level, they feel empowered rather than threatened and valued for their contributions to the change. They will learn new ways to take control of their own development and participate fully in library's digital initiatives.   Staff become active participants in the digital landscape with patrons using social media and feel empowered to collaborate on digitization projects.

Acknowledgments