Development of an Embedded Knowledge Management Librarian Role

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An embedded knowledge management librarian can help make an organization's overwhelming institutional knowledge accessible and understandable for its members. At the University of North Carolina's Health Sciences Library (HSL), an initial project to organize the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NC AHEC) practice support program's emails developed into an embedded librarian providing knowledge management services.

The Problem

HSL librarians learned that an external campus partner, the NC AHEC practice support program, was overwhelmed by the volume of their internal documents and communication.

Partner: NC AHEC Practice Support Program

A team of quality improvement consultants working with primary care practices.

Challenge: Geographically Dispersed Team

Team members work at 9 locations throughout North Carolina and must access materials from both the office and the field.

Challenge: Shared Document Collection

Team members need to find reference material from a collection of shared documents.

Challenge: Email Communication

The team primarily communicates with email, leaving no shared record of prior work.

The Solution

HSL created a new librarian role, combining knowledge management expertise with an embedded position.

Demonstrating Value: Initial Project

With access to the program's listserv and documents, the librarian created:

- Cloud-based content management system
- Original tagging vocabulary
- Standardized format to archive emails



Ongoing Role: Increasingly Embedded

After the initial project, the program included the librarian in new grant funding with new roles:

- Attending discipline meetings
- Participating in conference calls
- Collaborating with other team members

Lessons Learned

The HSL was able to develop this new librarian role because of a strong partnership with NC AHEC and a successful initial project.

Lesson: Be Proactive

Potential partners may not recognize how a librarian can help their teams. Seek out groups who might benefit and don't be shy about offering services.

Lesson: Demonstrate Value

Find an opportunity to show potential partners what a librarian can add to their team.

Lesson: Be flexible

Be willing to stretch the role of a librarian to meet the team's needs.

I'll never do a project without a librarian again.