Remote work in technical services: What have we learned?

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HELLO!

Anna Craft
she/her
Coordinator of Metadata Services
UNCG University Libraries
arcraft@uncg.edu
How was remote work implemented in library technical services before the pandemic?

And what has changed about remote work in technical services since the pandemic started?
In early 2020, what did you find if you searched for articles on remote work in library technical services?
In short, Not a lot
I write a regular column for *Serials Review*, called “Electronic Resources Forum”

I’m not an e-resources librarian, so I usually take a broad interpretation of e-resources, sometimes opening up the focus to include technical services

In March of 2020, my university shifted to remote learning and remote work

Since I was thinking so much about the pandemic and remote work, I decided to look into connecting those topics in my column
Remote Work in Library Technical Services: Connecting Historical Perspectives to Realities of the Developing COVID-19 Pandemic

Anna R. Craft  (Contributor)  id
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https://go.uncg.edu/sr2020
Google Scholar search: remote work technical services library

Remote Work in Library Technical Services: Connecting Historical Perspectives to Realities of the Developing COVID-19 Pandemic
AR Craft - Serials Review, 2020 - Taylor & Francis
The concept and practice of remote work in library technical services is not new, but the scale and speed of the transition to remote work for many libraries due to the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented. This column provides an overview of pre-pandemic literature ...

Remote library users—needs and expectations
R Cooper, PR Dempsey, V Menon, C Millson-Martula - 1998 - ideals.illinois.edu
... Likewise, their technology backgrounds may be more limited, and they may have less access to technical computer support (Rosenquist-Buhler,1996) with the bulk of their experience gained in the work setting ... Page 4. COOPER ET AL./REMOTE LIBRARY USERS 45 ...

Remote locations for technical services: An exploratory survey
MJ McGurr - Technical Services Quarterly, 2011 - Taylor & Francis
... Falling in and out of Love: The Impact of Moving to a Remote Location on ... Isacco, "Work Spaces, Satisfaction, and Productivity in Libraries": 27–30 ... Harvard College Library Technical Services Resource Web Site http://hcl.harvard.edu/technicalservices/ (accessed March 22, 2010 ...


Subjects: Library technical services; Academic libraries; COVID-19 pandemic
Many of the top results were about:

- Remote work in non-library settings
- Library services for remote users / distance learners
- Remote access to electronic library collections
- Remote locations for technical services
- Remote reference services
- Libraries in remote locations
- Library services for remote communities
At that time, very few articles addressed both remote work and library technical services.

But luckily there were at least a few publications on this topic.
So, what did I find?
What types of literature informed this column?

**Case studies**
Documenting TS remote work involving one person or one dept

**Reports**
From conference discussions about TS remote work

**“Other”**
Generalist (not solely TS) literature about remote work(ers) in libraries
The literature only reflects what is *published*, which doesn’t include all experiences.

Not all library personnel write, present, and/or publish about their work experiences; so the literature only tells part of the story.
Full-text online access wasn’t available for some articles that sounded promising, and print collections weren’t available due to closures.

The literature I did find was focused on academic libraries.

Also, I may have missed some things!
According to the literature, remote work in library technical services was being discussed, tested, and implemented in the 1990s (on a limited basis).

Articles published in:

- 1995
- 1996
- 1998
The literature reflects one particular area within technical services as testing out (and publishing about) these early implementations of remote work.
Terminology changes over time

What terms and strings appeared in the titles of relevant literature?

▸ “Telecataloging”
▸ “Telecommuting”
▸ “Cataloging coast to coast”
▸ “Flexibility in the management of cataloging”
▸ “Flexible staffing”
▸ “Working from afar”
What else can we learn from the literature?
Planning for remote work

- Institutional / departmental policies
  - Liability considerations
- Technology
  - What is needed, what will be provided, and by whom?
- Agreement on tasks, schedule, time frame, performance evaluation, etc
  - Some institutions require an MOU or MOA
Remote work challenges

- Technology
- Isolation
- Socialization
- Work-life balance
- Equity
Remote work can be an equity issue

- In institutional settings, organizations usually provide physical facilities, technology, internet access, and other job-related needs.

- Not all organizations provide hardware, software, and/or internet access (or financial support for such) to personnel working remotely.

- In such situations, remote work may essentially be reserved for personnel who can provide these resources themselves.
Potential remote work benefits

- Offer flexibility for employees
- Improve employee morale
- Increase efficiency
- Reduce sick leave used
- Improve employee retention
- Opportunity for employers to rethink physical spaces (and attain savings on such)
What about the future?

- We’re not where we were this time last year, but we’re not out of the pandemic and we don’t know its full and lasting effects on libraries and our work, spaces, services, and users.

- I don’t have answers; I do have questions.
Some questions

▸ How did library technical services units handle the transition to remote work?

▸ What challenges did they face?

▸ What innovations were made, resources were created, or lessons were learned in supporting and managing the transition to remote work?
More questions

How have libraries handled provision of technology, isolation of personnel, and other issues discussed in the literature?

► How will the pandemic affect library TS operations in the long-term?

► Will remote work become more common in TS units, even after remote work and social distancing measures are no longer required or recommended?
It is hard to imagine remote work in a pre-internet time

But it is *not* hard to imagine tech services personnel testing out new and different ways to get their work done.
Personnel in library technical services handle change all the time!
THANKS!

Any questions?

- Anna Craft: arcraft@uncg.edu
- Slides link: https://go.uncg.edu/cc2021
Article links:


The full article is also available via open access in UNCG’s institutional repository: [https://go.uncg.edu/sr2020](https://go.uncg.edu/sr2020)
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