Review of _Library Service Design: A Lita Guide To Holistic Assessment, Insight, and Improvement_

Steve Brantley
Library Service Design is a deceptively simple title for this book since the contents go far beyond the basic “nuts and bolts” how-to guide that one might expect at first glance. As library professionals, we know what kinds of services we offer, how they work and how to provide them effectively. But Library Service Design is the application of industrial design and systems design methodology to the user-centered interactions between spaces, objects, interfaces and people in the library. As such it emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the points of contact a user encounters in order to accomplish their task(s). Marquez’ and Downey’s book helps us understand the holistic nature of library services from an outsider’s perspective, not simply because the user (outsider) does not understand the finer points of difference between public, technical and access services, but because the effectiveness of any of these services truly is reliant upon the success or failure of the others.

The book is six chapters, a guide to illustrations, notes, bibliography, and a topic and terminology index. For the skimmer, chapter four provides the central content of the book, the tools and techniques which have been explicated in the form of answering the questions: what, why, how, when who, and materials. This is an efficient format allowing easy comparison of a wide variety of methods, many of which will not be familiar to the majority of librarians. The other chapters contextualize the tools and techniques.

Chapters one and two make a case for utilizing service design in libraries and cogently lay out the library and its services as systems within which users act and are influenced, and then explains the methodology of Service Design. Chapter three provides examples and advice about how a service design project is organized and executed. This chapter goes much further than the average “this is how we did it” narrative and provides insightful reasons behind the decisions taken by the Marquez and Downey team at Reed College. Chapters five and six discuss how best to make decisions about adapting service design for your own institution, and a case is made for the implementation of ongoing assessment of library services.

The greatest value of this book is its ability to address a methodology for high quality service design and improvement that can be applied in any area of the library. Like most large organizations, libraries are (by necessity we assume) broken into a variety of functional departments, each of which performing operations and services that serve a larger whole but nevertheless become distinct and focus on different aspects of the organizational mission. Library Service Design can be read by the leadership of any of the library functional areas with successful application in each. The authors are forward thinking and deserve a wide readership. The implementation of library service design as a methodology could be one of the grand ideas that improve the basic functioning of our institutions.

Steve Brantley, Associate Professor and Head, Reference and Instruction Services
Booth Library, Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston IL, 61920