Beyond Implementation: Positioning Maintenance as a Core Commitment in Libraries

Ruth Kitchin Tillman
Sally W. Kalin Librarian for Technological Innovations, Penn State
Why Maintenance?
Why Maintenance?

- Under-researched compared to time spent
Why Maintenance?

- Under-researched
- Key to ROI for expensive products
Why Maintenance?

- Under-researched
- Key to ROI for expensive products
- Prepares us to pivot in crises
Why Maintenance?

- Under-researched
- Key to ROI for expensive products
- Prepares us to pivot in crises
- Improves patron and worker morale
Defining Maintenance
"Acts that sustain or repair... the interfaces we design to function between and among information systems"
Example Systems Maintenance Tasks

- Performing upgrades
- Updating settings
- Handling bugs
- Managing integrations
- Enabling new vendor-supplied features
- Minor improvements to UX
Maintain or Sunset?
Researching Maintenance
Research Design

- Qualitative/phenomenological inquiry
- 16 participants supporting the 5 main academic ILSes
- Interviews coded for emerging themes
Themes

Unpredictability of Workload
Invisibility of Time Worked
Collaboration
Communication
Affective Impact of Visibility and Capacity
Themes

Unpredictability of Workload
Invisibility of Time Worked
Collaboration
Communication
Affective Impact of Visibility and Capacity
Unpredictability of Workload

- Vendor timelines
Unpredictability of Workload

- Vendor timelines
- New services/integrations as new points of failure
Unpredictability of Workload

- Vendor timelines
- New services/integrations as new points of failure
- Priority on fixing end-user problems
Invisibility of Time Worked

- Presumption of availability
"I wish [others knew] that you have to work hard to be unnoticed"
Invisibility of Time Worked

- Presumption of availability
- Impacts capacity and morale
Affective Impact of Visibility/Capacity

- Most visible when things break down
- Overstretched by presumption of availability
- Unable to control vendor timelines
"[delays in vendor response] really impacts our unit's reputation within the library but also our library's reputation within the university."
Recommendations
1. Identify what you're maintaining.
2. Identify what you're *not* maintaining.
3. Do less; maintain it better.
"It seemed to surprise people that went that there was so much more being done. I think most people were under the impression that [a single] systems person can just handle all the behind the scenes stuff and keep things humming along smoothly."
4. Acknowledge and reward maintenance.
"It's so easy, I think, for an administrator to be focused on what makes us look good and less about [making] sure our users continue can continue to access the systems that we provide.

"What ends up happening is: we're constantly putting out fires because we don't have a plan for maintenance. We don't have adequate staff to keep everything going."
Further Reading

https://ronallo.com/presentations/sunsetting-cni/


https://asgalvan.com/2018/02/22/the-revolution-will-not-be-standardized/

Kendrick, Kaetrena Davis. Multiple articles on low morale in libraries. 
https://kaetrenadaviskendrick.wordpress.com/published-articles/


Penn State IRB #: STUDY00015392
Questions?

Contact me at: rkt6@psu.edu
https://ruthtillman.com
Credits

● Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
● Sunset (Slide 11)
  https://flickr.com/photos/thales/7560050614
● Duct Tape FTW (Slide 11)
  https://flickr.com/photos/c4s9/6875659417