

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP:

Examining Cross Perceptions of Public and Technical Services Academic Librarians

Cathy Weng

Erin Ackerman

The College of New Jersey

Ewing, NJ USA

June 2, 2016

Academic Librarian 4 Conference, Hong Kong

Presenters

Cathy Weng

Head of Cataloging

The College of New Jersey

USA

Erin Ackerman

Social Sciences Librarian

The College of New Jersey

USA

Outline

- Public Services (PS) vs. Technical Services (TS)
- The Great Divide?
- Cross Perceptions Study
 - ▣ Study purpose
 - ▣ Methodologies
 - ▣ Results and findings
 - ▣ Discussion
- Towards sustainable partnership

Public Services vs. Technical Services



- Assist users in finding information; facilitate research process
- “Dwell in the light” “Glory shall be great”



- Identify, select, acquire, organize, maintain library resources for easy discovery and delivery
- “Dwell in the darkness” “Shall not know the public”

*Carrier Library Learning Commons, Google image, captured April 22, 2016

** Fort Smith Public Library, Google image, captured, April 22, 2016

PS vs. TS - The Great Divide?

- Physical distance
- Lack of social interaction
- Differences in organizational culture (service-focused vs. product-focused)

Possible effects:

- *Barriers to communication and understanding*
- *Potential formation of harmful stereotypes*
- *Hindering mutual understanding and effective collaborations*

PS and TS Librarians Relationships

6

- Speak two different languages
- Look at the world from very different perspectives
- Did not relate well
- Rivalries, antagonism, narrowness and misunderstanding



*Business Rivalry image, taken from Dreamstime, April 22, 2016

dreamstime.com

TS work and TS Librarians

7

- Referred to by reference librarians as “support staff”
- Value of TS work was often discounted
- “Second-class” professional positions
- TS career has “little appeal” to library school students



8

Cross Perceptions Study

Cross Perceptions Study

- Purpose:
 - ▣ To learn perceptions of PS and TS librarians have of each other
 - ▣ To promote better understanding among librarians
- Research questions:
 - ▣ How do librarians in the two fields perceive the role and value of their colleagues?
 - ▣ What can be done to promote collegiality and foster long-term partnership?

Study Methodologies

- Survey distributed through professional PS & TS email lists in Spring 2014
- Using Likert-scale and open-text-response question formats
- 850+ responses
- 586 academic librarians
 - ▣ 360 identified as technical services librarians
 - ▣ 226 identified as public services librarians

Key Survey Questions

- Core qualities of PS and TS librarians
- Shared PS librarians' perceptions of TS librarians
- Impact of TS work on library service
- TS only: what changes would you like to see that would help TS play a role integral to PS initiatives?

Survey Demographics

12

Types of Institution	Percentage (all respondents)	Years of service	Percentage (PS)	Percentage (TS)
4 year Research	55.1%	> 10 years	58%	74%
4 year Undergrad	39.3%	5-10 years	22%	16%
Community College	5.6%	1-5 years	18%	9%
		< 1 year	2%	1%

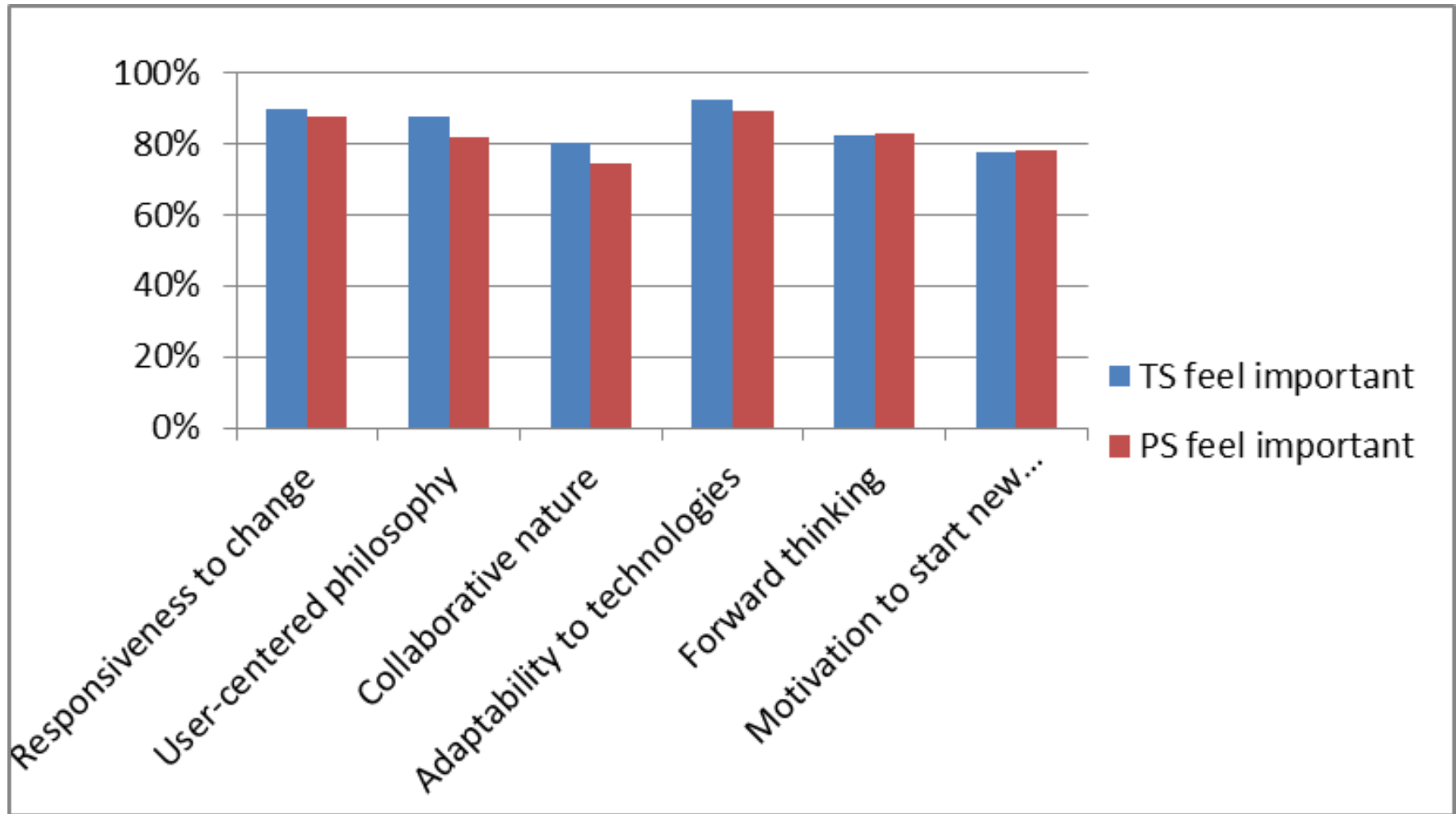
Core Qualities of PS/TS Librarians

- Q: What are the core qualities TS (PS) librarians need in order to support the library and its users?

Core Qualities
Responsiveness to change
User-centered philosophy
Collaborative nature
Adaptability to technologies
Forward thinking
Motivation to start new initiatives

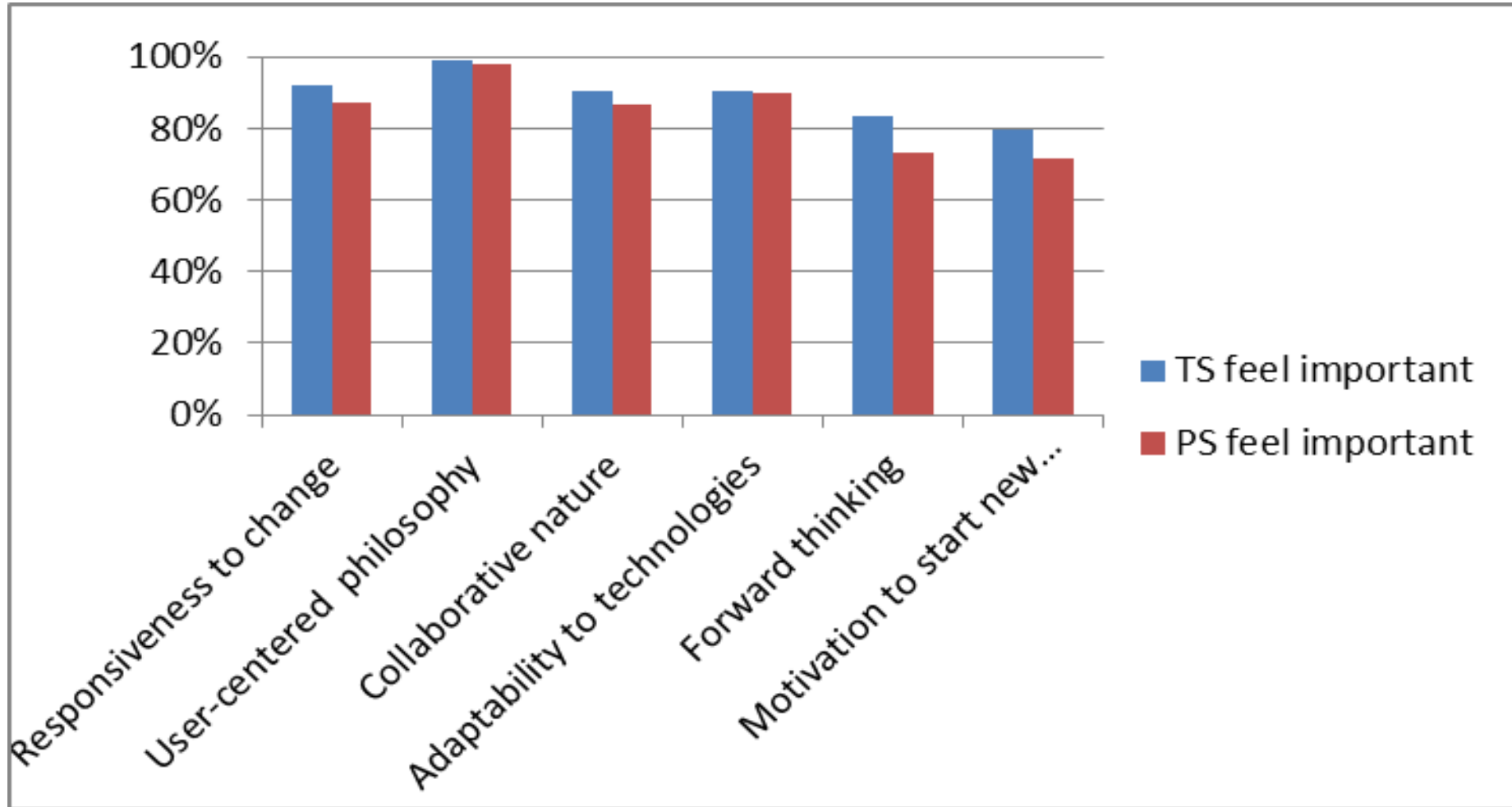
Core Qualities - TS librarians

14



Core Qualities - PS Librarians

15



Other Core Qualities (Open text)

TS Core Qualities

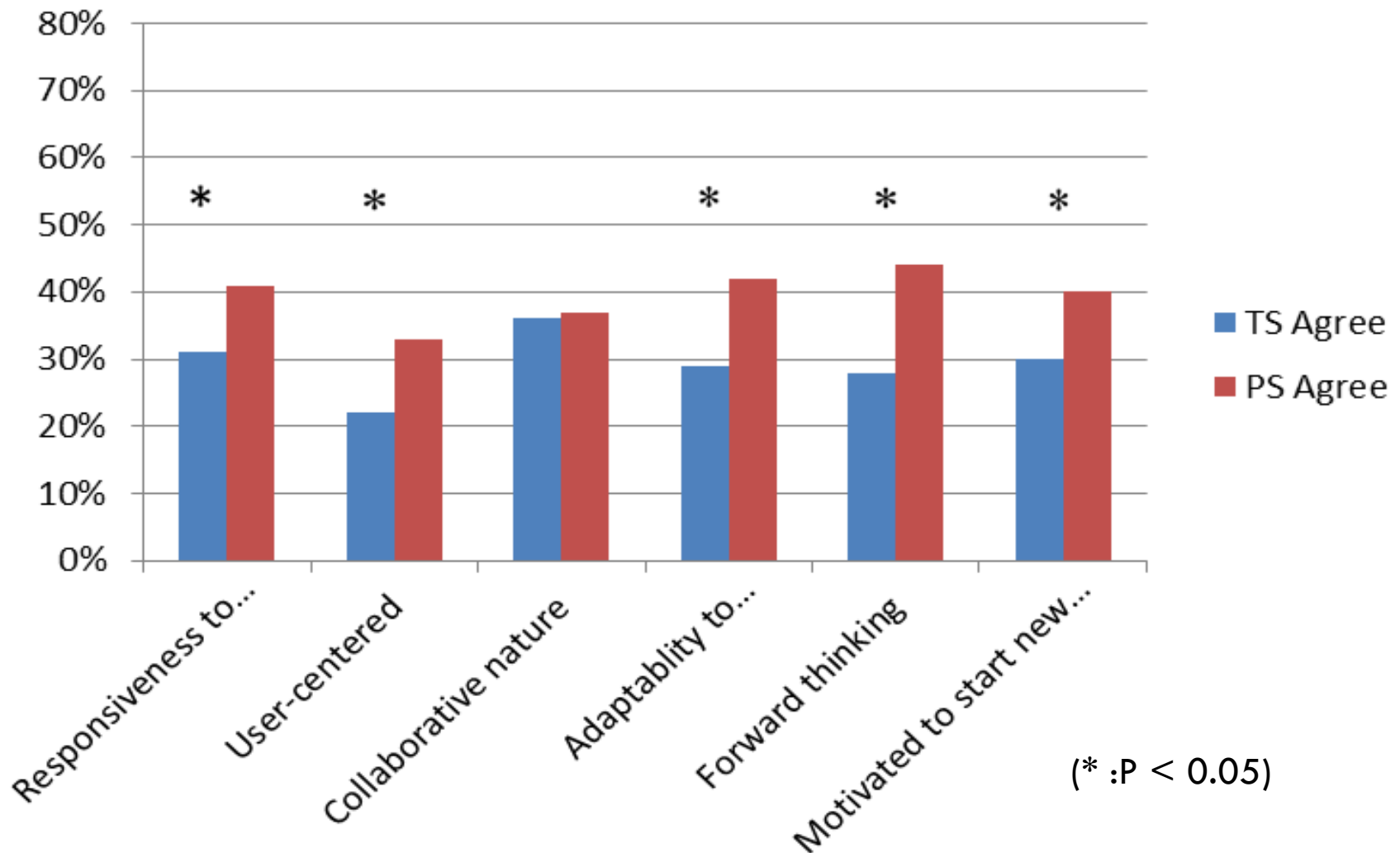
TS Respondents	PS Respondents
1. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving	1. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving
2. Detail oriented	2. Ability to communicate with co-workers
3. Ability to communicate with co-workers	3. Technology

PS Core Qualities

TS Respondents	PS Respondents
1. Ability to communicate with patrons and co-workers	1. Ability to communicate with patrons and co-workers
2. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving	2. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving
3. Appreciation of Technical Services	3. Outreach/advocacy

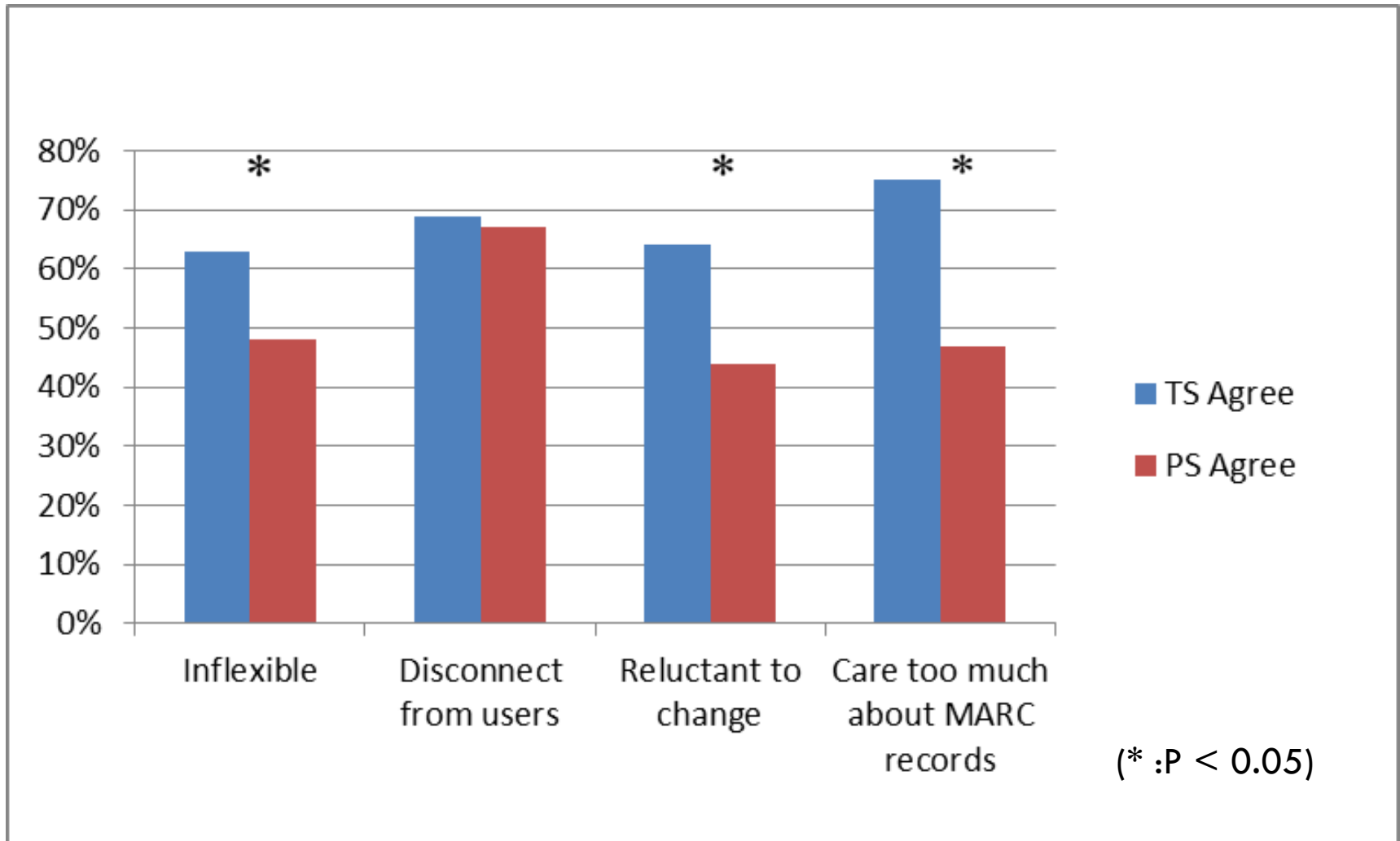
PS Perceptions of TS Librarians – Positive Perceptions

17



PS Perceptions of TS Librarians – Negative Perceptions

18



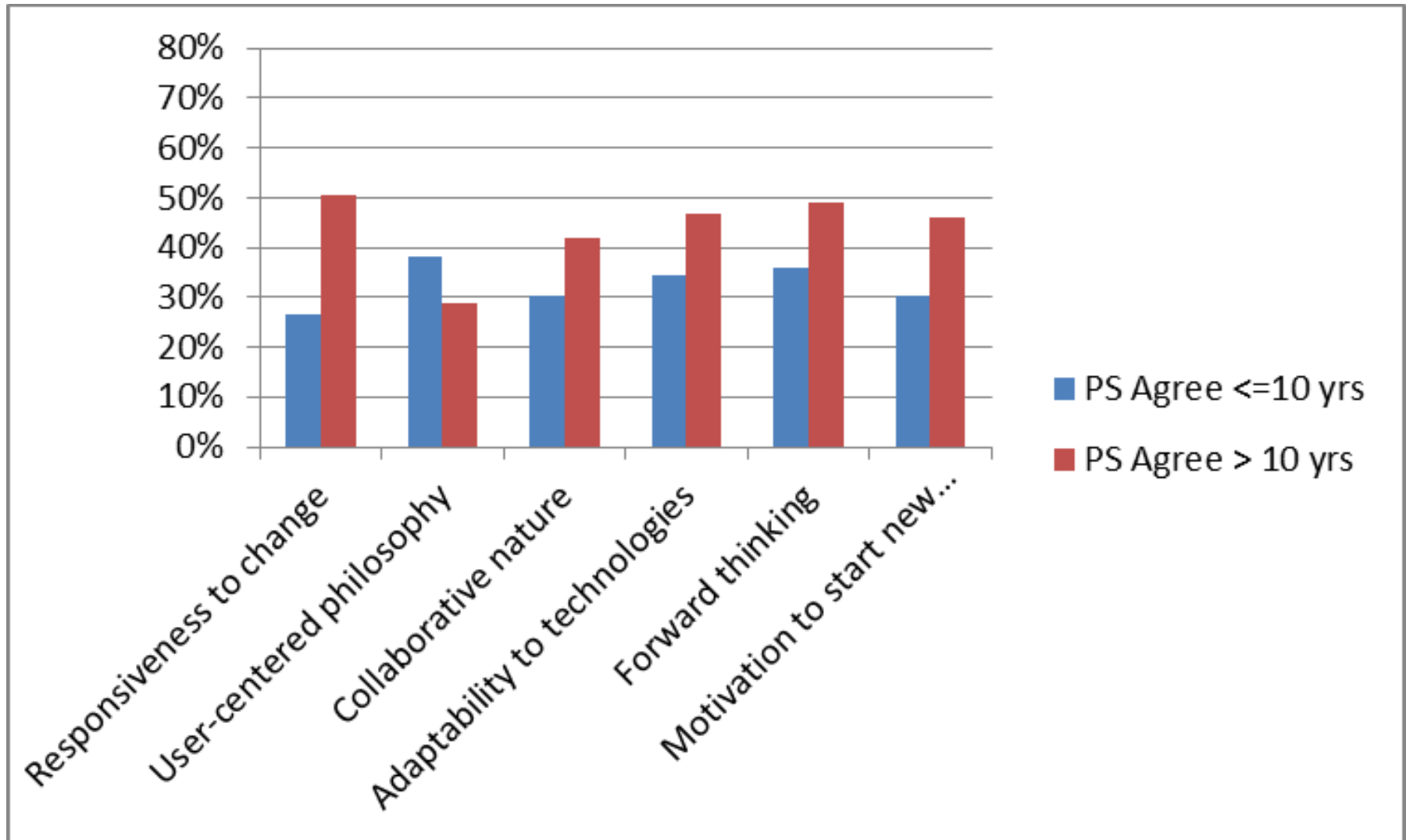
Aggregate view of Shared PS Perceptions of TS Librarians

19

Aggregate view		
	Positive perceptions	Negative perceptions
TS agree (average)	29.3%	67.8%
PS agree (average)	39.5%	51.5%

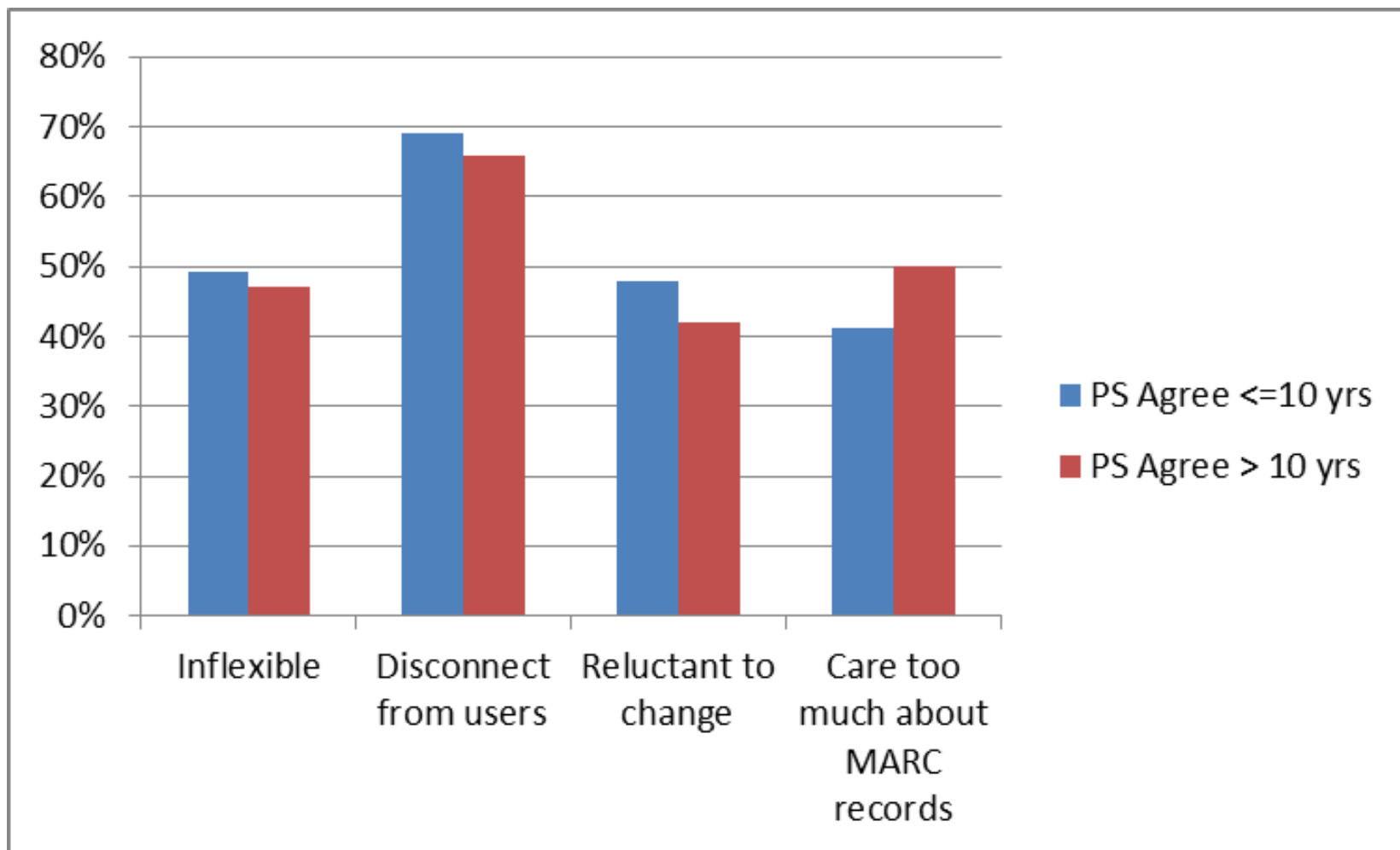
PS perceptions of TS librarians - PS respondents by years of service - positive perceptions

20



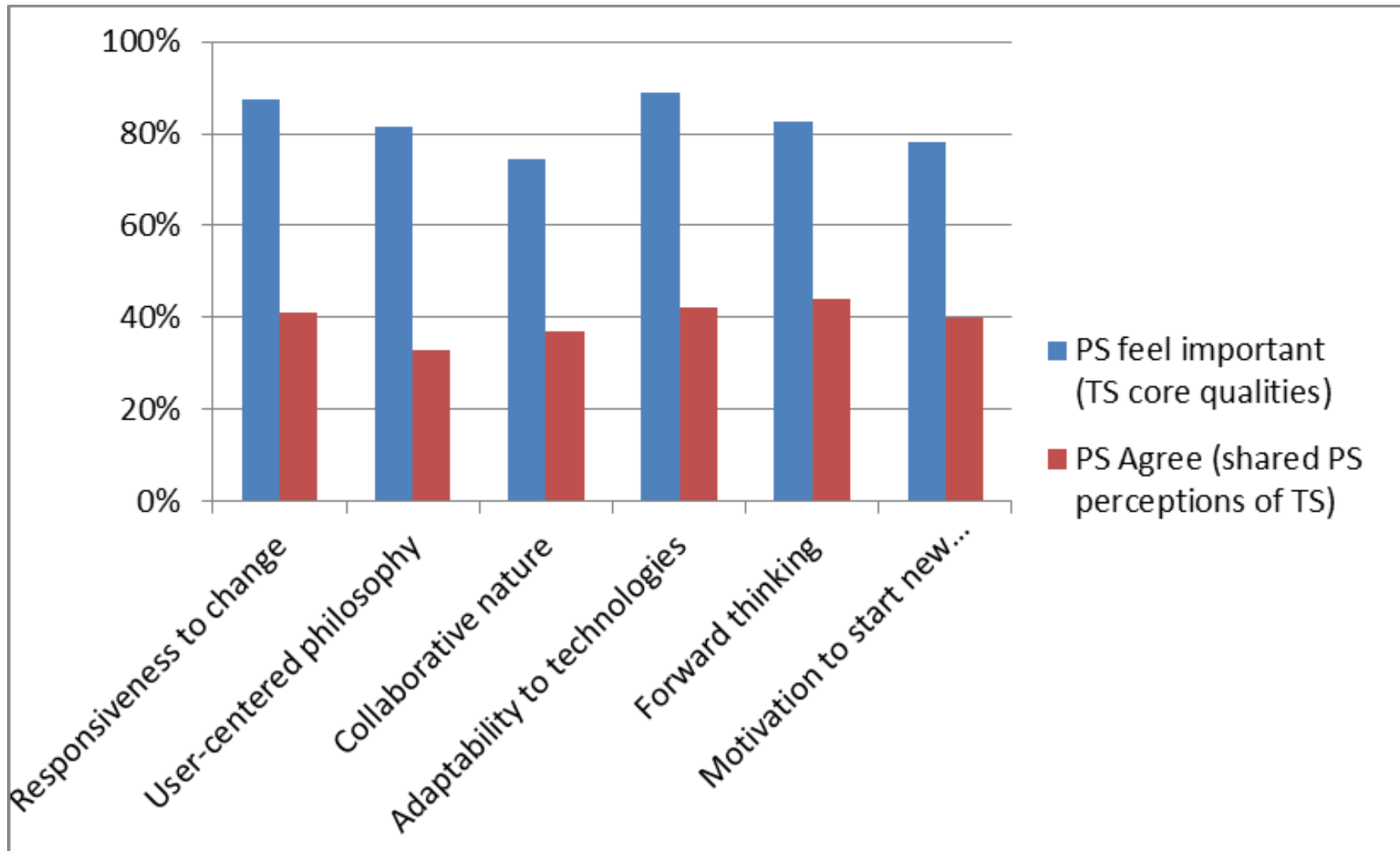
Shared PS perceptions of TS librarians - PS respondents by years of service - negative perceptions

21



TS Core Qualities and Perceptions of TS – Measuring Service Quality (PS respondents)

22



Measuring Service Quality

23

- A gap (82% vs. 40%) between the desired/expected performance and the actual performance of TS librarians as perceived by PS respondents.
- Suggesting that TS librarians were perceived as underperforming by PS respondents.
- Associating the perceived underperformance of TS librarians with the low status they were accorded

TS Work Direct Impact on Library Users

- 97% of both TS and PS survey respondents saw Technical Services as having a direct impact on library users
 - ▣ Major emphasis on TS role in providing access/discovery/delivery of library resources
- Respondents comments:
 - ▣ “[PS Librarians] are the frontline soldiers – [TS Librarians] provide the ammunition and equipment.
 - ▣ “Without [TS] work, we would lose track of everything. The collection is useless if it isn't searchable!”

Changes TS Like to See (TS only question)

- More communication and collaboration
- Changes in management and leadership for better communication, joint goal-setting, and staffing decision-making.
- More respect and better appreciation from PS

What We Learned From the Study

26

- Confirmed negative PS perceptions of TS librarians
 - ▣ TS respondents expected a higher level of negativity than did PS respondents
- TS librarians were perceived as underperforming by PS respondents
- The longer a PS librarian had worked, the more he/she felt that TS librarians were perceived positively

What We Should Focus



- Work to narrow the gap and ensure more consistent experiences and expectations
- PS and TS librarians to adjust their expectations and also improve service behavior
- Education, communication and a participative approach can help increase the consistency of expectations and perceptions

What Can Be Done

28

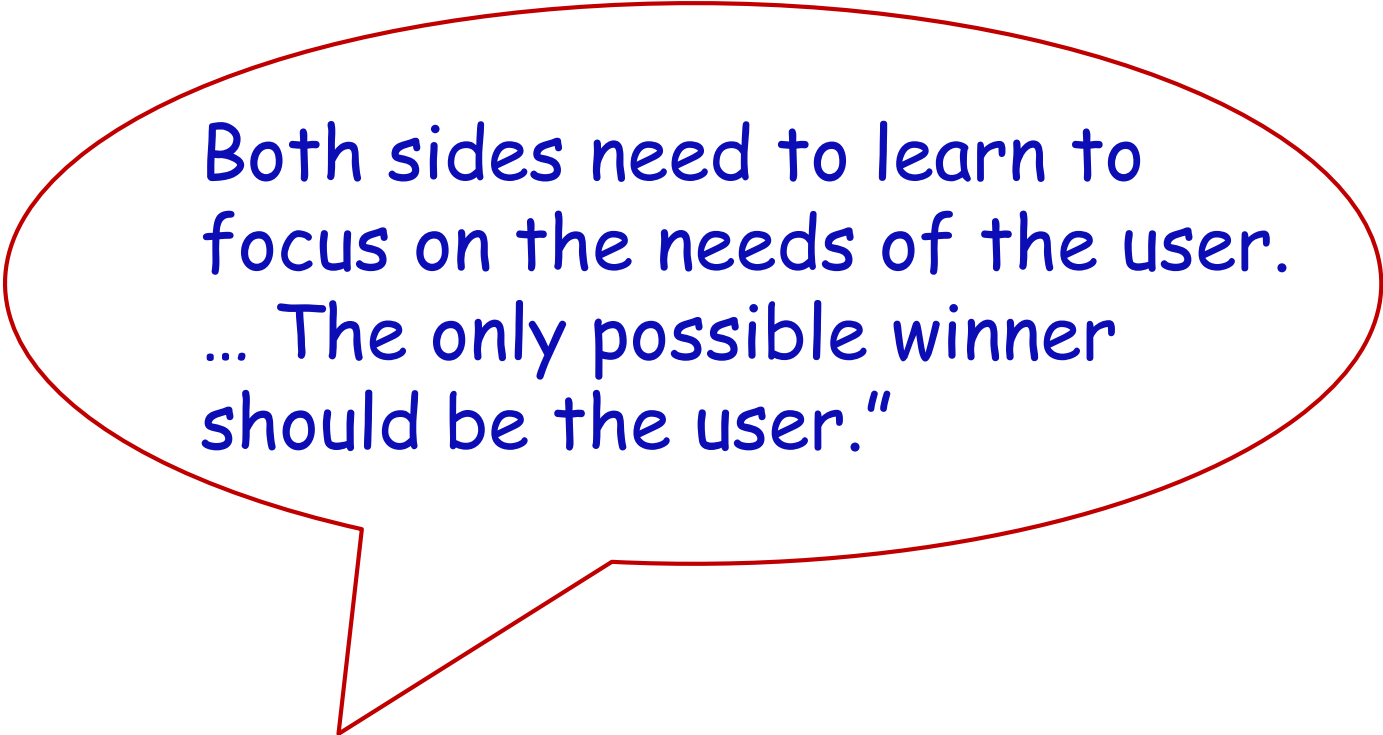
- To enhance institutional communication and understanding between PS and TS librarians to alleviate negative perceptions
- To create a culture of collaboration
- To build trust and sustainable partnership

To Conclude

"... when we work together we each have important expertise to bring, and I think along the way we learn about each other that we each have important skills and qualities that together allows us to keep our institutions thriving."

To Conclude

30



Both sides need to learn to focus on the needs of the user. ... The only possible winner should be the user."



Thank You!

weng@tcnj.edu
ackermac@tcnj.edu