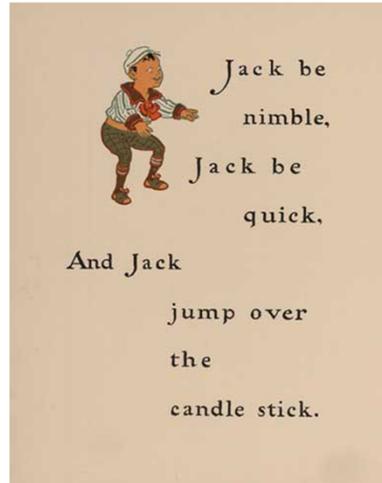


I'll be talking today about Flexible Staffing Assignments as a model to address [constantly changing] workflows in acquisitions and particular how experimenting and assessing different staffing models helps balance needs of both traditional and new print acquisition and electronic resource acquisition workflows (the brick and the click). Because access to information online is instantly gratifying, meeting library patron's needs for both print and online materials have become more immediate. Acquisitions workflows have had to change to meet faced paced and individualized demands. For large academic institutions with legacy print collections, this has not been a seamless transition away from print to electronic. Unique and increasingly patron-driven acquisitions have required more complex and flexible staffing arrangements for both print and electronic materials. The processes must be Nimble (no two orders are the same), Quick (everything is a RUSH order), and involve Fire? (or other hoops to jump through).

Flexibility takes many forms



Illustrations by W.W. Denslow (courtesy of [Project Gutenberg](#))



Many models exist to meet the ideals of flexibility and adaptability to workflow changes. In fact across the KU Libraries there have been a variety of new structures and staffing models used to address flexibility across the organization including:

- *an experiment in matrix reporting structure for Collection Development, Reference, and Instruction
- *the use of temporary staff positions, cross-training, and backup assignments in Cataloging and Acquisitions/Serials
- *increased use of student employees
- *ad hoc flexible work assignments
- *explicit shared work assignments.

The purpose of this session is not even to suggest one of these models over another. Instead, the take-away from our experience and this presentation is to show 1) how acquisitions workflows are changing and adapting in general, 2) to show practical and valuable ways of assessing the impact of staffing models, and 3) how this can improve planning.

Outline

- Background
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Results
- **Communication** as Workflow Assessment

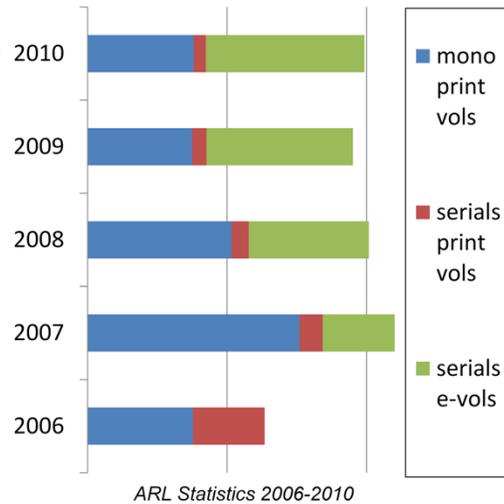


Following the traditional format of my paper, I'll show from both the literature and our assessment of our experience with explicit shared work assignments, how **communication** plays an essential role in the e-resources workflow and begs critical attention as a focus for assessment.

I'll start with background for how explicit shared work assignments developed in the Acquisitions/Serials department. A review of the existing literature will show trends in workflows and staffing and various models for their assessment. I'll outline our model for assessing the staff and supervisors involved and the results. Finally, I'll point to some directions moving forward for our workflow, staffing, and assessment.

Acquisitions at KU

- \$9.5 million acquisitions budget
- 7 branch libraries
- Medical Campus



The University of Kansas is a large academic library with a total library materials budget of \$9.5 million. Since 2006, electronic resources acquisitions have grown by 61% while both monographic and serial print titles have declined. In addition to e-collecting practices, there has also been an upward trend in ILL, patron driven acquisitions, and e-preferred approval book profiling. The acquisitions department acquires all materials for each of the libraries' 7 branches -- Art, Music, Engineering, the two main libraries (Watson & Anschutz) for Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Spencer Research Library, and the Edwards Campus Regents Center Library. KU also joint licenses a number of e-resources with our Medical Campus.

Literature

- Flexible staffing, aka:
 - Cross-training, Shared assignments
 - Retooling
 - Reassignment, reorganization
 - Temporary employees
 - “Everybody does a bit of everything”



The acquisitions literature from 2003-2007 included a variety of perspectives on organizational changes and staffing models for libraries. Reorganization and workflow changes continue to be major topics, given the rapid rise of new collecting practices against flattening budgets. More recently, the 2011 ER&L conference has added a new track devoted to workflow and management and listservs continue lively discussions like the two-day ALCTS e-forum on Serials Staffing and Workflow this past June. These studies, meetings, and conversations address the importance of flexible staffing arrangements – describing them as cross-training, shared assignments retooling, reassigning, use of temporary employees, and models where “everyone does a bit of everything”.

It is important to observe this shift away from the traditional expertise-based workflow to a distributed model, because the shift brings with it new and core areas that necessitate assessment beyond just the libraries’ functional changes in workflow. **Communication** is one area of significant impact. Across all the library literature on the topic of staffing and workflow, the need to refocus on effective and streamlined communication and increased collaboration was strongly emphasized. This was a key component in developing and structuring assessment of the shared assignment at KU.

Assessing Impact

- Business/Matrix Models

Functional Matrix

- Employees remain full members of functional unit
- Processes, procedures to ensure cross-functional collaboration

Balanced Matrix

- Most commonly known
- Employees officially members of two organizing dimensions
- Strives for equal power and authority

Project Matrix

- Employees move b/w functional depts. as official members
- Permanent project mgmt overlay and authority.
- Functional managers support and advise

(Sy & D'Annunzio)



The business and management literature was most useful in providing concrete models for assessment of flexible staffing structures like shared assignments. Case studies on the matrix structure were most common. Matrix structures are like shared assignments in that both the work and the reporting line in each cross two or more divisions. Of the three most common types of matrix structures (functional, balanced, and project), the shared assignments matched matrix elements of the balanced and the functional types. A key difference between them is that the functional matrix employees remain full members of a single functional unit, rather than as official members of two. The goals of the shared assignments reflected a desire to have a more balanced understanding of membership across the department, however since they do retain a primary supervisor and unit, our shared assignments resemble more closely in practice the functional model.

Assessing Impact

- Business/Matrix Models

CHALLENGES

- Misaligned goals
- Unclear roles and responsibilities
- Ambiguous authority
- Lack of a matrix guardian
- Silo-focused employees

(Sy & D'Annunzio)



The matrix study by Sy & D'Annunzio also identified five “challenges” from managers’ perspectives. These challenges and the library literature’s attention to communication were considered and integrated into the assessment of our shared assignments.

Staff Survey Instrument

15. How likely are you to recommend shared staffing assignments based on your experience?

	not at all likely (0)	1	2	3	4	extremely likely (5)
Recommendation	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	66.7% (2)	33.3% (1)	0.0% (0)
NPS	Detractors (0-2)		N/A (3)		Promoter (4-5)	
	-0		0		1	

- Ultimate Question



The survey instrument consisted of 15 questions divided across three sections. The first section gathered demographic information by the respondent's assigned units, physical location, and whether there had been any previous experience of shared assignments. It also included a question about initial perceptions of shared assignments in general.

The middle section assessed four categories of the shared assignment experience: communication, time management, physical location, and learning connections. Questions in this section were designed using a variant of the Net Promoter Score evaluation tool, a customer loyalty/satisfaction rating based out of Reichheld's book *The Ultimate Question*. The third section sought to determine any change from initial perceptions, as well solicit suggestions for improvements, and by asking the Ultimate Question: whether the respondent would *recommend* shared staffing assignments based on this experience. Using specific questions for each category being assessed, effectiveness is rated on a scale of 0 (not at all effective) to 5 (extremely effective). When calculated, all middle values (3) are considered passive and are not counted toward the score. Detractor values from 0-2 are subtracted from any promoter values of 4-5 to arrive at the Net Promoter Score (NPS).

The value of using NPS was primarily for the simplicity of the questions and actionable nature of the resulting scores. This metric used straightforward language to tie together the day-to-day effects of working in this model with the goals of the assignment. The scoring mechanism more clearly identifies the actionable areas. These are revealed by promoter scores (what do we keep doing) and detractor scores (what do we stop doing, or what we do to turn this to a promoter?).

NPS Results & Comments

communication	NPS	(100 scale)	comments
b/w employee and supervisor	2	67	
b/w supervisors	1	33	
training documentation	0	0	"quite a bit of helpful training documentation..."; "...not much training documentation... frequently took notes and made my own..."
clarifying roles and responsibilities	(-1)	(-33)	
time management			
distribution across units	2 (67)	67	
understanding / setting priorities	0	0	"...priorities are clear in serials check-in area, but not very clear in eledres/claims/usage"
physical location			
proximity to supervisor	1 (33)	33	
proximity to others doing similar work	1 (33)	33	
ability to concentrate	0	0	"...I frequently have trouble concentrating when working in my cubicle because of [noise in the area]."
equal access to needed resources	2 (67)	67	"...I have plenty of access to all needed resources."
learning connections			
primary unit	2	67	"...very useful for making connection and learning how the units work (independently and with each other. I would say this is the most noticeable benefit of this type of work sharing."
secondary unit	2	67	
other units in the department	1	33	"I do not think the shared assignment is any better or worse than any other method for learning connections with other units, departments, and the library/University."
across library departments	1	33	
across university	1	33	



The majority of the questions using NPS score resulted in promotional scores of 1. On the whole this left more questions than answers since these scores resulted from such a high occurrence of passive ratings and comments were limited to a single perspective. Ratings and comments about learning connections did reveal that some aspects of the goals for shared assignment were met effectively.

Supervisor Structured Interview

- Perception
- Effectiveness
 - Communication
 - Physical Location
 - Assessment
- Ultimate Question
 - Time Mgmt
 - Learning Connections



Supervisors were interviewed individually using similar questions as the staff survey instrument where applicable. Supervisors' historical perspective and involvement in the planning of these shared assignments made the interview a more effective method for gathering their spontaneous and complete feedback.

Similar to staff survey responses, supervisors expressed lukewarm perceptions of shared assignments overall. The topics addressed in the interviews focused primarily on communication and physical location. All agreed on the importance of staff proximity to supervisor, noting that the need to travel to another location, even to remain in proximity to another supervisor, seemed less productive overall. Each cited the prominent role of communication in the process of developing, training, working, and assessing the shared assignment experience. Most also generally noted positive communication experiences between staff and other supervisors in the course of their work. Some inequities in both physical location and initial communication experiences with staff were noted. Regarding the latter, however, the process of assessment helped to clarify role and purpose more clearly in the end.

Their recommendations for continuing shared assignment came with the caveat to clarifying distinctions between cross-training and the shared assignment, saying "shadowing" for cross-training may be enough for making learning connections in some areas. In other areas, where you may more regularly need people to fill in, a fixed shared assignment is more effective for learning and time management. Otherwise, the time spent training is wasted since practice in those skills is not ongoing.

Now What?

- Assess concept of shared assignment
- Continue shared assignment?
- If so, how to make them more effective, per feedback.
 - Improve training, provide clearer priorities
 - Scheduling, time management, physical location present challenges
- Further workflow analysis?



While shared assignments served the established goals of familiarity with the department overall and performing effectively in a variety of roles, it was noted they may not be the only way to address these goals. Ultimately all involved felt the experience provided a beginning understanding of what makes a good shared assignment, what specific areas could be improved (training, clearer priorities – related to schedules/time mgmt) and what to monitor as pitfalls, and where to account for practical constraints over which there may be little control (e.g. space, noise).

The most useful part of the experience however, was the process of assessment itself. The experience opened up communication between staff and supervisors, among supervisors, and between supervisors and the department head, and helped in planning workflow and larger departmental priorities. Specifically, it revealed the importance of understanding and communicating the peaks and valleys of each unit's workflow. It also helped each unit begin to determine a minimum percentage of staff time needed to maintain comprehension for the most effective use cross-training.

Another unforeseen outcome was accomplishing a first step of a more comprehensive workflow analysis for the department. Going forward it would be useful to build on Feather's 2007 study of communication networks to identify specific communication gaps in the shared assignment and other areas of the acquisitions workflow. To get a more accurate, objective picture of shared assignment impact, the survey instrument would need to be reexamined and developed further to account for reliability over time and generalizability across other uses of shared assignments in the organization and for any kind of external organizational application.

Questions?

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