Toward Greater Satisfaction

An Electronic Resources Communication Audit

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- Community of over 60,000 users
- 18 library locations on main campus
- Two consortial memberships (OhioLINK and CIC)
- 18,000 manifestations of ejournals
- 440 databases
- 1 librarian and 2 staff members devoted to e-resource acquisition and access management

Communications and Workflow

- Non-linear workflow
- Heavy reliance on email communications
- No established best practices
- Major emphasis on timeliness due to user expectations
- High volume of work transactions
- Complex communications network

Insights From Other Disciplines

- Communication Audits
  - Methods of discovery and analysis
  - Changes in workplace and workers due to changing communications technology

- Information Management
  - Inadequate software solutions
  - Impact on productivity and worker satisfaction

Communication Audits

- Examine how task processes impact communication

- Determine adequacy of information exchange

- Check directionality of information flow

- Plot networks

- Relate communication to organizational outcomes

Technology's Impact on Communications

- Email has streamlined hierarchy
- Email is dangerous if it displaces too much face to face interaction
- Increases pressure on responsiveness
- Techno-stress
- Attention Deficit Trait (ADT)

Information Management

- Society has increased the volume of information that needs to be managed without creating adequate ways of managing it

- Poor information management on the part of workers may be due to inadequate tools, not just that workers are disorganized

Approach and Analysis

- Inbound, outbound, and internal communications monitored for two months

- Categorized in order to determine predominant types of information flow

- Interviews held with unit staff and others who work closely with unit

- Email as major method most closely analyzed

Communication Types in Electronic Resources Acquisition and Management

Darts
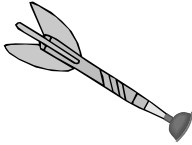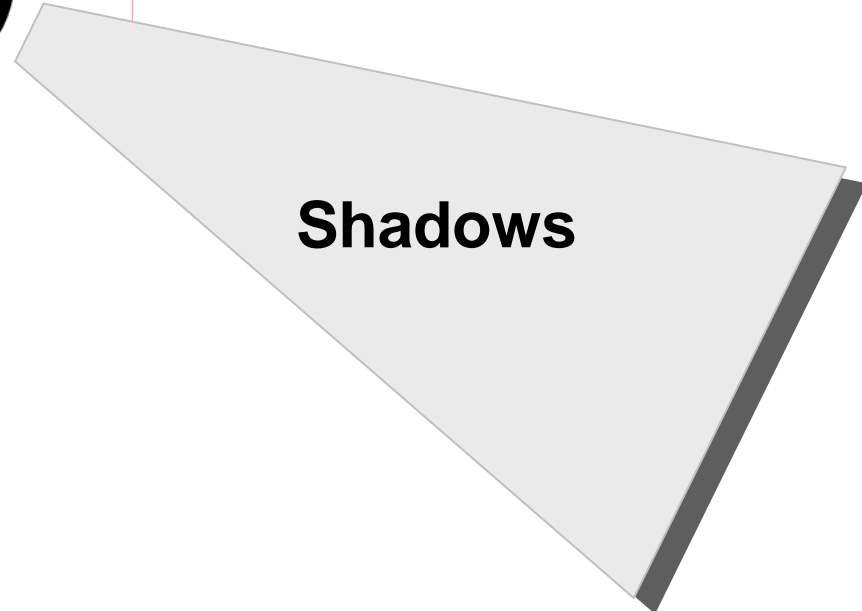
Electronic Resources Unit
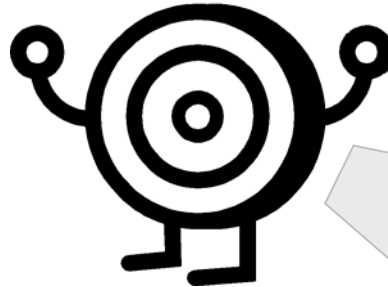
Lobs

Spotlights

Shadows

Darts

- ERMS alerts
- Web forms
  - Fee-based resources to acquire
  - Free resources to add
  - Access problem notification
- Electronic resources unit group email

Lobs

- Consortial list messages
- Individually targeted email
- Paper mail
- Faxes
- In person communications
- Telephone/voice mail

Spotlights

- Electronic Resources Management System

- Library catalog

Shadows

- Print files

- Unit's shared digital files

- Personal email files

- Informal chat in office area

Ways to Improve

- Tighten control over group email traffic
- Reduce needless cc-ing
- Improve and enhance web forms for targeted communication
- Create standards/expectations for information storage and retrieval
- Open ERMS viewing to other staff
- Examine communication channels that don't fit neatly within the four major groups

Strategies for Greater Satisfaction

- Receive and send as many Darts as possible.

- Reduce the number of Lobs as much as possible.

- Fill Spotlights with as much information as possible.

- Make certain that Shadows really need to be Shadows and would not be significant contributions to Spotlights.

Looking Forward

- "De-specialize" electronic resources management
- Watch for email management overload among electronic resources staff
- Stay tuned to information management software developments
- Consider and evaluate new roles for agents
- Strike balances

(With apologies to Edward Hallowell in "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform," *Harvard Business Review,* January 2005…)

…when you are confronted with the news of yet another publisher being acquired by a conglomerate after the fifth interruption in the midst of a search for an invoice that was never sent on the day that the third license negotiation has collapsed and the 12th angry message about loss of access to an ejournal has blipped unbidden across your computer screen, your brain begins to panic…

Step back and realize…

that we are in a time of great change,

the intensity surrounding the management of electronic resources exists because they are so critical to the relevancy of libraries,

and that maintaining control over the communication network is a key component for success.