

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

4-1-2020

Turbulent Times in Content Development: Remaining Efficacious Among Reorganizations, Fires, and the Serials Crisis

Casey D. Hoeve

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, achoeve@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience>



Part of the [Collection Development and Management Commons](#)

Hoeve, Casey D., "Turbulent Times in Content Development: Remaining Efficacious Among Reorganizations, Fires, and the Serials Crisis" (2020). *Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries*. 399. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/399>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Turbulent Times in Content Development: Remaining Efficacious Among Reorganizations, Fires, and the Serials Crisis

Casey D. Hoeve

Associate Professor, Head of Content & Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and formerly Content Development Librarian for Arts, Architecture, & the Humanities, Kansas State University

All too often, the internal organization of collection development departments are ignored. Perhaps inadvertently, more pressing issues of budgets, resource renewals, and vendor negotiations divert our attention; yet at the same time, the completion of these initiatives require capable and efficient faculty and staff.

Burnout, now classified by the World Health Organization as a “syndrome conceptualized resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed,” (WHO, 2019) is appropriate to juxtapose against the organization of collection development departments. As self-care is vital to our health, the same question of vitality should be applied in collection development departments – an investigation of the value and lifecycle of organizational structures presently in place.

At Kansas State University (K-State) Libraries, external and internal department stressors bear considerable importance and examination. Since 2010, these libraries have experienced over a million dollars in budget reductions due to defunding of higher education by

Published in *Against the Grain*, April 1, 2020

From the column “Optimizing Library Services,” Column Editors: Ms. Brittany Haynes (Editorial Assistant, IGI Global) and Ms. Lindsay Wertman (Managing Director, IGI Global).

the state. In addition, the Libraries have also witnessed a decrease of over 35 faculty and staff positions combined as a result of attrition.

Withstanding these setbacks, K-State Libraries have managed to shift content (collection) development and acquisitions departments to adjust to these challenges, absorbing the departments into existing organizational structures to collaborate in innovative ways to manage essential functions. By employing practices of flexibility, collaboration, and patient execution, content development librarians were able to come full circle through multiple reorganizations and emerge as a new department with administration support. This has minimized burnout and empowered the content development group to find help from unexpected places within the Libraries.

K-State Libraries' narrative affirms Aladebumoye's (2016) experience with collection development organization, in which retirements and position changes can cause chaotic conditions within a library but also the opportunity for transitions and rethinking strategy. In spring 2017, the Associate Dean for Content Development Management and Scholarly Communications retired. After a failed search, another setback occurred, when the department head for Content Development & Acquisitions resigned to accept another job opportunity.

With a reduced budget and fewer faculty and staff available (Sowell, 2014), it was decided by K-State Libraries administration that an interim head of Content Development & Acquisitions would not be named. In lieu of that position, an acting head of Content Development & Acquisitions was briefly installed until a reorganized department structure could be established.

Astutely pointed out by Fisher (2001), libraries are still attempting to effectively position collection development within libraries. Under K-State's past organizational model (Hoeve et. al, 2014), content development, acquisitions, and interlibrary loan were included as one department, similar to structures outlined by Sohn (1987) and Bryant (1987). Meeting with K-State Libraries administration, it was decided that Content Development would be absorbed in the Academic Services (subject specialists) Department, and acquisitions would be transferred to Metadata, Preservation, and Digital Initiatives. Interlibrary Loan agreed to join User Services. The process was to be implemented for six months and then revisited for assessment and potential continuation. It was implicitly understood that an Associate

Dean would be hired before any major collection development organizational changes would occur.

Under the newly restructured departments, Content Development & Acquisitions remained in the same working area. It was deemed critical that these units remain in close proximity to continue interacting on projects, particularly major database and journal cancellation reviews. Reflecting upon this arrangement, content development librarians learned how to serve as a bridge between public (Academic Services) and technical services (Acquisitions) sides of the Libraries.

The Academic Services Department supports three teams. (1) Arts, Humanities & Design, (2) Social Sciences, and (3) Sciences, with each having a team supervisor. Content Development was designated as a fourth team, but decided to take a more egalitarian approach, reporting to the department head, rather than having a team lead.

After six months of working in the Academic Services Department, Libraries administration and the College Committee on Planning (CCOP) met to approve the creation of a Content Development Department, consisting of three content development librarians and a department head. This was also approved by the University Provost, but no official date of implementation was defined.

Two major events then proceeded that vastly reshaped the Libraries. The head of Academic Services resigned to accept a new position at another library, and on May 22, 2018, in a catastrophic accident, Hale Library caught fire, being deemed a total loss.

In the wake of having an interim of Academic Services and an uninhabitable library, the Libraries physically (but not organizationally) separated content development from subject specialists, housing teams where space could be found. During this period, major journal package and database cancellation projects occurred at this juncture. Content development librarians were partnered with subject specialists, maximizing both outreach and collection development activities, sharing in responsibilities to support the project (Bryant, 1987). The group used a combination of in-person meetings, teleconferencing through Zoom, and GoogleDocs to collaborate in a dispersed environment, “developing bridges to other teams in the organization” (Zhu, 2011). As meeting space and parking became an issue when school started, remote technologies became the primary method of completing tasks and meetings.

Even with the tentative, yet generally stable organizational structure in place, there were still essential positions missing to assist in content development tasks, particularly journal cancellations to balance the budget. A lack of collection development support is historically framed by Kroll (1985), observing that “not only must the staff-versus-collection-budget question be settled, all too often in terms of where to cut rather than where to add, but also the distribution of the change must be determined.” Screening the Libraries’ landscape, the dilemma was temporarily subverted by using students from the reference desk to help with populating spreadsheets. Special collections also lent their staff with a lessened workload due to the fire to help with gathering usage statistics.

Another attempt at attaining a team lead for content development failed in July 2018, with content development librarians choosing to advocate for a Content Development Department. The former head of Academic Services reversed their decision and returned to K-State, providing enough faculty for content development to emerge as a separate department. The interim head of Academic Services was then designated as acting head of Content Development, officially becoming the Head of Content Development in the fall of 2018.

In March 2019, K-State Libraries hired an Associate Dean of Collections, Discovery, & Information Technology Services. As content development is returning to a more stabilized unit with increasing numbers of staff and administrative support, the department is still making use of student help and underutilized staff from metadata, special collections, and the Libraries annex to assist with tasks.

Throughout the process, the Libraries experienced several organizational shifts, and managed to complete core functions, including substantial cancellation projects. Internally evaluating the process illustrated the benefits and disadvantages of rapid change and reorganization.

One such advantage was creating open communication channels between multiple departments. Traditional siloes were broken down, as the Academic Services Department met at least once a week, with equal time devoted to collections and public service. Specialized topic meetings were interspersed as needed, providing regular updates to inform both groups of progress and upcoming initiatives.

In addition, team leads met once a week to discuss strategic directions for the department. Content development elected a rotating

representative to serve as a quasi-team lead for meetings. Since the content development librarians had worked with one another for more than seven years, this provided an opportunity to make group decisions and create more flexibility in leadership during rapid change.

The reorganization model also allowed content development librarians to increase their presence in the subject team meetings in the Academic Services Department. This option empowered subject teams to closely collaborate on relevant resource reviews and optimally support these areas. The transparent communication resulting from this model synchronized information sharing to successfully complete large journal package reviews and cancellations.

Most importantly, reorganization yielded opportunities to evaluate the Libraries for ancillary support. Reaching out to multiple department heads, individuals were identified who were willing to support content development. Content development's fluidity to shift between various management styles and engage with a broader range of departments produced conclusions regarding effective and ineffective practices to successfully complete projects and core functions.

Conversely, continual reorganization resulted in several negative effects. Supervisors in the Academic Services Department had minimal to no collection development experience. Content development librarians had to provide instruction on practical aspects and management of collections projects. In many instances, content development librarians did not have enough administration support, as supervisors relied upon them to make the decisions. The Academic Services Department also increased in size, reducing the amount of support department heads could allocate to each team.

Regardless of the reorganization changes, content development remained understaffed with less oversight. While able to secure roaming faculty and students orphaned by the fire, training was still required, temporarily reducing the amount of time that could be spent on projects. Meetings to surmount staffing shortages opened up new lines of communication; however, meeting overload became increasingly apparent and problematic. For the sake of time, not all topics could be covered in enough detail. This issue was alleviated as Content Development became a department and could divest themselves from attending most Academic Services Department meetings. The lack of a team lead for Content Development did result in some complications. Although it was preferred that department decisions

remain egalitarian, with less supervisory oversight, it was more difficult to allocate projects, fully communicate project completion status, and uphold accountability.

Organizationally, the expectation of an established Content Development Department was prolonged. The search for an associate dean failed once, and a search for a Content Development team lead failed twice. While the new Content Development Department was approved by CCOP, the Dean, and the Provost, Libraries administration was insistent that the department would not be created until an associate dean was hired. However, the return of the former head of Academic Services finally paved the way for hiring a head of Content Development and approving a separate Content Development Department. This fortuitous circumstance provided supervisory support, organization, and authority to make decisions on specialized collections projects.

Through the process of multiple reorganizations, supervisors, a library fire, and major serials cancellation projects, the Content Development unit was able to remain functional during capricious conditions. Rather than dwelling on calamity, internal analyses of multiple, experimental organizational structures empowered the Libraries to identify opportunities, both beneficial and adverse. By embracing practices of flexibility, collaboration, and communication, patient execution was employed until content development librarians were able to come full circle into a new department with supervisory support. By breaking out of the traditional mold, libraries can survive the turbulent times and avoid burnout with efficacious services and outcomes.

Works Cited

- Aladebumoye, A., Ellero, N.P., and Annette Day. Rebuilding: Organizing and operating under new management. *The Serials Librarian*, 70, (1-4), 224 - 228.
- Bryant, B. (1987). The organizational structure of collection development. *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 31 (2), 111 - 122.
- Fisher, W. (2001). Impact of organizational structure on acquisitions and collection development. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services*, 25 (4), 409 - 414.
- Hoeve, C.D., Urton, E., and Bell, T.M. (2014). Management of content development and subject engagement through an arts matrix model: A case study. In A. Woodsworth & W.D. Penniman (Eds.), *Advances in Librarianship* 38 (177-210). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.

- Kroll, R. (1985). The place of reference collection development in the organizational structure of the library. *RQ*, 25 (1), 96 – 100.
- Sohn, J. (1987). Collection development organizational patterns in ARL libraries. *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 31 (2), 123 – 134.
- Sowell, S. (2014). “Building a new paradigm: Analysis of a case study in organizational change in collection management using Bolman’s and Deal’s Four-Frame Model. *Collection Management*, 39 (2-3), 211-226.
- World Health Organization (28 May 2019). *Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon:”* Retrieved from https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/ .
- Zhu, Lihong. (2011). Use of teams in technical services in academic libraries. *Library Collections, Acquisitions & Technical Services*, 35, 69 – 82.

Recommended Readings

- Chandler, D. R. (2016). Prepared for Anything and Everything: Libraries, Archives, and Unexpected Small Scale Disasters. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 240-256). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch011.
- Dixon, J., and Abashian, N. (2016). Beyond the Collection: Emergency Planning for Public and Staff Safety. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 120-140). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch006.
- Goldman, B. (2016). Two Fires and a Flood: Lasting Impact on a Public Library, Its Staff, and Community. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 560-581). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch024.
- Hamilton, R., and Brown, D. (2016). Disaster Management and Continuity Planning in Libraries: Changes since the Year 2000. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 1-24). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch001.
- Levenson, H. N. (2018). Collaborative Weeding Among Public University Libraries Can Lead to Cost Savings for All. In I. Management Association (Ed.), *Library Science and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1409-1435). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-3914-8.ch067.
- Lock, M. B., Fansler, C., and Webb, M. (2016). Emergency Planning (R)Evolution: Making a Comprehensive Emergency Plan for the Present and the Future. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 70-95). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch004.

- Ruan, L., and Sykes, J. (2018). Strategic Planning in Special Libraries and Information Centers. In I. Management Association (Ed.), *Library Science and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 447-472). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-3914-8.ch021.
- Verplaetse, A., Mascareñas, P., and O'Neill, K. (2016). Zen and the Art of Disaster Planning: Collaboration Challenges in Library Disaster Plan Design and Execution. In E. Decker, & J. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (pp. 96-119). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-8624-3.ch005.