January 27, 2020

Welcome to Your New Job: Streamlining Inherited Workflows

Jennifer Eustis, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Welcome to Your New Job

Streamlining Inherited Workflows & Processes

I would like to thank the co-chairs of the Technical Services Workflow Efficiency IG and you for giving me the chance to tell you about my experience at UMass interweaved with others such as taking on new tasks or jobs. I'd like to start in the middle of the story with an introduction to UMass' Information Resource Management department (aka technical services) using the example of batch loading at UMass. Then, I'll pass to how I gather this information. This is where I explain my process which is based on my experience with project management and narrative theory. Lastly, I'll talk about managing change because in short starting a new job or taking on a new task is essentially accepting and managing change.

Introduction

UMass & Information Resource Management

Story of Batch Loading at UMass Amherst Libraries

Batch Loading
Secret Ways of The ILS
1 principle loader in systems, 1 serials expert, 1 systems librarian, 1 ILS coordinator

Staff Turnover
How to Respond to Change
Principle loader moved on

Staff Changes
Twists
1 serials expert changes to reduced time

Staff Changes
Turns
1 serials expert now part time and working on a different project, ILS Coordinator promoted out of the position, 1 systems librarian retired

UMass libraries currently uses Aleph as its ILS. Aleph is a solid system but is also "quirky". For batch loading, it is necessary to be aware of these quirks. At UMass, there were a number of knowledge experts: a metadata "systems" librarian who knew Aleph well. This person was the principle batch loader, wrote scripts for that purposes, and custom load profiles. The serials expert also knows Aleph well and did a number of batch loads and other batch jobs. Batch loading was also supported by our systems librarian in addition to our ILS coordinator or the person in change of Aleph for the Five College Consortium of which UMass is a member. Approximately 3-4 years ago, the metadata systems librarian or principle batch loader moved on to another position. And so after that, the serials expert opted for a reduced schedule. This shifted some of the batch loading responsibilities to the systems librarian. Then in the last 2 years, the serials expert went to part time and the systems librarian retired.

What Was Left Behind

Knowledge | Training | Documentation | Trust
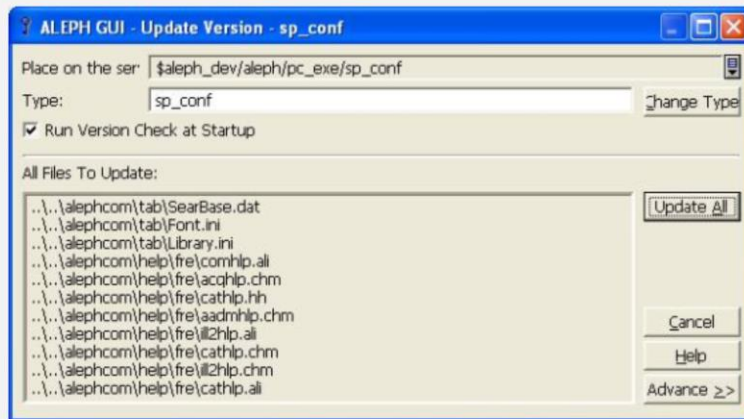
Over the years, this negatively affected a number of areas. With the primary loader gone, there was a gap in knowledge, documentation, and training. Also, there was a mishap when this person left. The documentation was kept in a Google Drive UMass account and was never downloaded before the person left. Unfortunately, this account wasn't kept and since the person had moved on documentation was lost. New documentation was created. This was a perfect storm of missing documentation, lack of knowledge expertise, lack of people of train which lead to trust issues with handing this work over to anyone new especially given that this work requires server access and one wrong move could possibly affect not just UMass but all 5 organizations in the consortium.

ALEPH GUI - Update Version - sp_conf

Place on the ser: $aleph_dev/aleph/pc_exe/sp_conf

Type: sp_conf   Change Type

☑ Run Version Check at Startup

All Files To Update:

..\..\alephcom\tab\SearBase.dat
..\..\alephcom\tab\Font.ini
..\..\alephcom\tab\Library.ini
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\comhlp.ali
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\acqhlp.chm
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\cathlp.hh
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\aadmhlp.chm
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\il2hlp.ali
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\cathlp.chm
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\il2hlp.chm
..\..\alephcom\help\fre\cathlp.ali

Update All

Cancel

Help

Advance >>

O2:

Batch Loading Needs

Why Batch Loading, where it was, where it's going

These issues are really highlighted by the needs of batch loading.
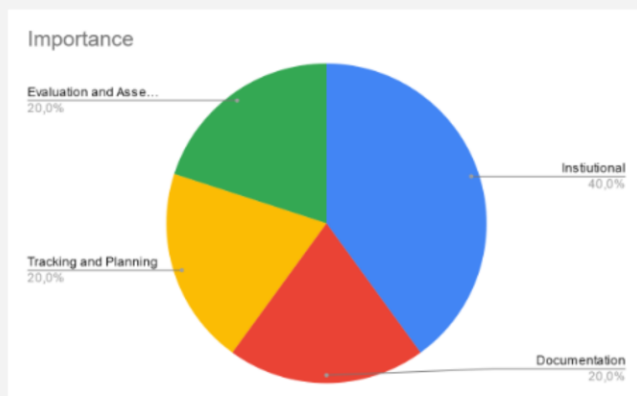
Batch loading is a complex process that involves not just the ILS or LSP but a number of tools and systems to "massage" data to make it palatable for discovery and access. This chart is not the end all, be all of batch loading. In my experience, to ensure that processes are understood and there is backup, it is important to have people who have institutional knowledge, who can train and plan, who document, and who evaluate the workflows and batch loads. Above, institutional knowledge is prioritized because of the the quirks of Aleph and the added layer of the system being for the consortium.

The Problem with Batch Loading is the extensive need for time, knowledge, resources

Workflow was simplified with the hope that less time, knowledge, resources were used

Ex Libris SFX

EDS

CORAL

HLM

A-Z Database List

Resulting in relying on 3rd Party Linking and EContent Management Software

Workflow Changes

Batch loading takes resources. With the changes over the years with staff, this meant that only 1 person was responsible for nearly 3 dozen batch loads. These loads were added to that person's job duties. Responding to that, workflows were simplified in an effort to balance workloads. The focus went from batch loading to 3rd party systems. The number of batch loads reduced to about 10. An staff in ERM took on the tasks of enabling and tracking these e-resources. This lead to the notion of "Data integration" where after an e-resource was acquired and went through any licensing steps, it was recorded in CORAL and then with data integration the question became if it was possible to enable this resource through SFX, EDS DB, EDS CL, HLM, or the DBList. The DBList is the A-Z database list provided by Springshare.

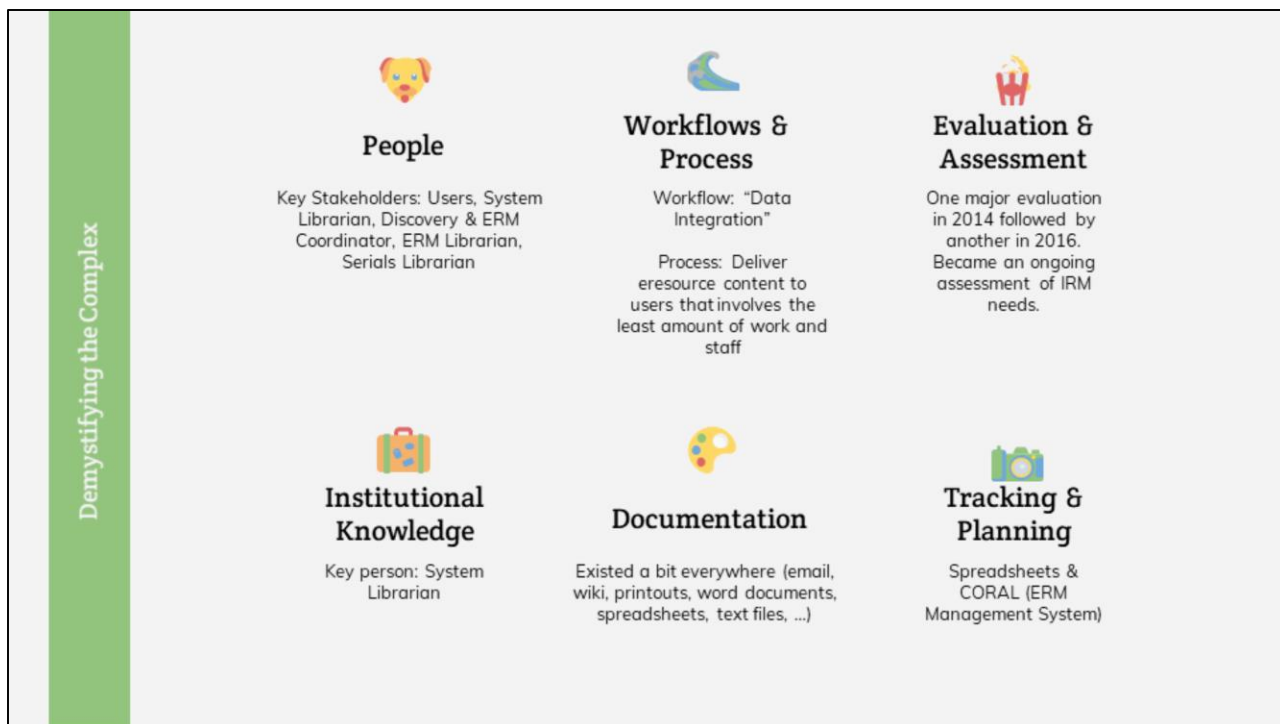"And this is where our ED workflow redesign team went insane."
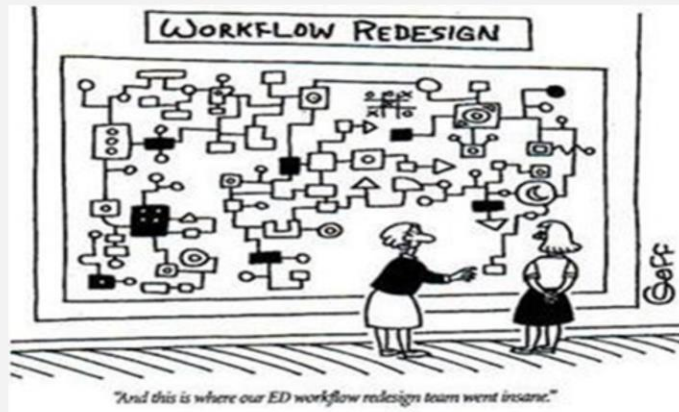
03:

Unearthing Mysteries

Simplifying Complexity & Streamlining

So far, I've cheated because I've already told you half the story. The information presented needed to be gathered and understood. This is normal for anyone starting a new job or taking on a new job duty. In this section, I'll go through my process of how to do that. I've applied techniques that I've learned from project management and narrative theory.

	People	Workflows & Processes	Needs & Wants
Institutional Knowledge	Find and meet with key stakeholders (Systems librarians, ILS Coordinator, Acquisitions & ERM staff, Liaisons, ...)	Find out the stories. Uncover the lingering questions. What worked. What didn't work.	Capture a list of needs for the Institution and key stakeholders. Start working on wants.
Tracking & Planning	Find and meet those who have been tracking and/or planning	Uncover any workflows or processes.	Which stories correspond to the workflows and processes? Does these correspond to the needs and possible wants?
Documentation	Find anyone who knows about documentation and ask them to share it.	Are there any workflows or processes that incorporate documenting? Learn how documentation was captured and shared (post-it notes, printouts, email, ...)?	Does documentation have a story and how does it relate to other stories? What needs were met with documentation?
Evaluation & Assessment	Find anyone who knows if any evaluation or assessment was done.	Find any possible evaluations.	How does this fit in with the stories being told and the needs of the institution?

Questioning the Complex

When you first start, everything is foreign and new. There's a lot to learn, take in. At first everything is complex. With the example of batch loading, thanks to my experience, I know that some of the key features to loading that I prioritize are institutional knowledge, tracking & planning, documentation, and evaluation & assessment. To understand the interweaving stories, I create a matrix of people, workflows & processes, and needs & wants for each of these features. The goal is really to uncover who the key players are, how these people interact with each other and others, what workflows have been created and/or inherited, and what these people want and need to do their jobs. This is a lot of information gathering and it takes time. Here at UMass all new employees go through an orientation period where they meet with the units in the library and key people. I took this opportunity to gather information about batch loading but also other aspects of my new job. I feel it's important to listen to what is and what isn't said.

Demystifying the Complex

People

Key Stakeholders: Users, System Librarian, Discovery & ERM Coordinator, ERM Librarian, Serials Librarian

Workflows & Process

Workflow: "Data Integration"

Process: Deliver eresource content to users that involves the least amount of work and staff

Evaluation & Assessment

One major evaluation in 2014 followed by another in 2016. Became an ongoing assessment of IRM needs.

Institutional Knowledge

Key person: System Librarian

Documentation

Existed a bit everywhere (email, wiki, printouts, word documents, spreadsheets, text files, ...)

Tracking & Planning

Spreadsheets & CORAL (ERM Management System)

For batch loading, the key people were all in the same unit and one additional player. That unit is the Discovery and Resource Management Systems or the equivalent of ERM and discovery systems (EDS). The additional person is the head of IT who was recently promoted from the position of ILS coordinator for the 5 College Consortium.

The workflow as decided by the associate dean is to use the data integration model or to check SFX, then EDS, then HLM, then DBList. Batch loading is a last resort and only for ebooks/streaming videos or audio that cannot be discovered any other way. The process is to ensure that resources are discoverable and accessible where staff aren't overburdened.

This came about through an evaluation of the department in 2014 which was followed up by another one in 2016.

The institutional knowledge was held by the systems librarian, now retired, and the head of IT.

Documentation was either missing or a bit everywhere. Only essential documentation was current meaning that the spreadsheets and CORAL were more up to date than that found on the wiki or other documentation sources such as Google Drive.

Simplifying the Complex

Story:

Due to normal staff turnover and changes in how e-resources are managed and delivered, UMass Information Resource Management department simplified workflows so that batch loading is a last resort and where staff rely on 3rd party software. Only a small number of loads were being done but that work was too much for one person.

Needs:

- Deliver quality eresource content to users
- Develop sustainable workflows
- Distribute and rebalance workloads
- Review of workflows/processes that were left in hiatus

Wants:

- Respect the values of UMass Amherst (ethics, Diversity/Inclusion)
- Aspire to transparent and clear workflows
- Evaluate batch loads
- Develop collaborative processes

Outcome:

- Create a list of tasks that fit needs & wants
- Prioritize that list
- Create a project plan for list

So what's the story, needs, and wants?

Evaluation of E-Resources

Creating Lists (aka Report):

- Outlined current and past workflows and staff responsible
- Highlighted issues and needs
- Came up with a set of recommendations

Continue to Simplify

Depending on the institution the formalization of the story might be a report as is the case for UMass. Even if it is not required, it is great to have some shared written documentation that documents what you've been doing and your plans going forward.
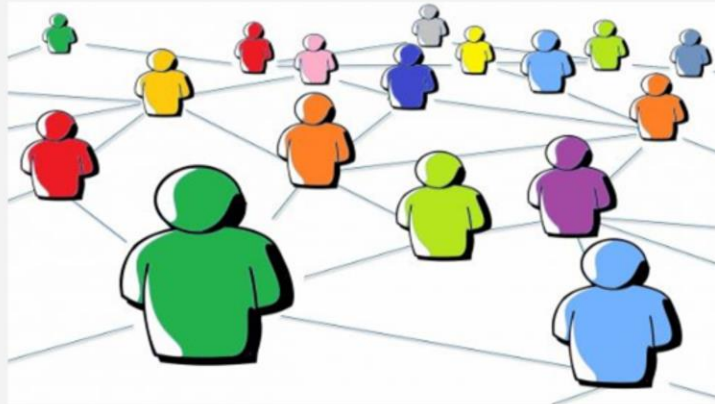
04:

Planning for Change

People over Process

Starting a new job or taking on a new job duty means change. The important thing to remember is that people come before any process and workflows.

Start with the Easiest Tasks

- Training
- Document training
- Launch informal working group (Batch Loading Team)
- Plan for 1st review project (CORAL update)

UMass Amherst CORAL 2.0

CORAL Project:

People: BLT, ERM Specialist, Coordinators

Goal: Add fields to "Cataloging" tab to track batch loads better

Task: Come up with list of fields; get that list approved; add fields to CORAL; populate fields

Time: 2-3 months

Evaluate: Led to 2 other CORAL projects (both year projects)

From the report or story, each recommendation becomes a project. Each project has key people, timeline, communication strategies, assumptions, obstacles, and perhaps risk. Of course not all of these projects need to be fleshed out with maximum details. They also don't have to have formal written project plans. What is important is that you make sure that any changes you make are shared and communicated out. These changes affect not just you but your colleagues. For batch loading, we had our list on the left which we prioritized and then create this small CORAL project. Here we are the key stakeholders (systems librarian, my supervisor, DRMS unit). You can stack the projects in a project timeline; this will allow you to add more time if needed, make changes, communicate upcoming changes, and keep track of activities.
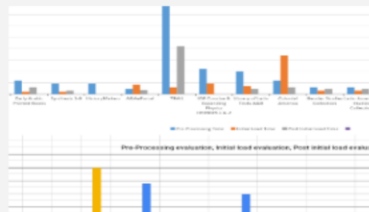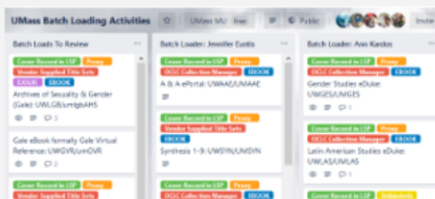
What was streamlined? A new informal working group was formed. This group helps balance the load and makes sure communication gets out about the group's activities. Information was tracked initially in multiple spreadsheets online in Google and then also on a shared server. We first added information to CORAL. After re-evaluating this, we ended up with a Trello Board that replaces all of the spreadsheets and CORAL. An evaluation process was started. This process aims at providing a transparent method to understand the level of difficult of each batch set of bibliographic metadata and why a batch set is or isn't a candidate to be loaded into our ILS. We collaborate much more with our colleagues throughout the library and in particular liaisons bringing them into discussions on how we evaluate batch loads and updates to loads.

People

Keep communicating. Re-evaluate the story you heard from different perspectives. What do people feel needs to be changed? Do your proposed changes fit the bill?

Workflows & Process

Workflow: "Data Integration".

Process: Delivery eresource content to users that involves the least amount of work and staff
Are your changes respecting this?

Evaluation & Assessment

What does evaluation mean?

Institutional Knowledge

What is the role of institutional knowledge? How important is it?

Documentation

Where is the best place to document workflows?

Tracking & Planning

How can this be simplified?

For any changes, also make sure to re-evaluate these with your stakeholders. What new stories are taking shape? Do these new stories match up with the directives from above?

Change

Work/Life
Balance

Project/Daily
Grind Balance

Learning/Adopting
/Adapting Balance

And let's not forget to balance not just projects but change with the time to work
through this change for you and your colleagues. One might argue that all of this work
is time consuming. Yes. Documentation to keep track and plan projects can take time.
However it also allows a quick visual to see how much time is being devoted to the
tasks. That way you can prioritize tasks.

Thanks!

Jennifer Eustis
jeustis@umass.edu
UMass Amherst Libraries

Thanks