Beyond Orientation: A Look at Scheduled Time and Unscheduled Time in a New Librarian's First Sixty Days

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Abstract

Some new librarians feel alone and are not excited about the orientation process, but library science literature is focused on this first phase of employment and its importance. This article is a self-reflection of one librarian's allocation of scheduled time and unscheduled time in the first sixty days of employment and its possible role beyond the orientation process. The analysis of the librarian's time within the first sixty days showed a balance between scheduled time and unscheduled time. The analysis also showed that only 5% of the first sixty days was spent in a formal orientation program. The new librarian experienced a stronger sense of employee engagement than previous positions that did not have a balanced time allocation.

Introduction

Onboarding new librarians can be a challenge for direct supervisors. New librarians often feel alone, isolated, and sometimes disrespected, yet only one-third feel that orientation programs are important.[1] The new librarian must be acquainted with new daily requirements, weekly duties, department obligations, organizational structure, department cultures, colleagues and other various items. The first sixty days can provide a range of emotions from overwhelmed to lonely. Many questions can be left unanswered. *How does the staff copier work? Who is the person to turn to for printing help? When will there be time to read through this entire handbook? Who were those three people in that last meeting? Where is the password for that? Why have I not seen anyone in the last three days?*

New librarians in the first sixty days of employment may have little to do since they are not yet directly involved in projects or appointed to committees. At other times, new librarians are so busy in other service areas that they are unable to learn and review key aspects of the new position. Social psychology looks at overload and underload in employment and focuses on the need for a "varied flow of stimuli" and a "need for social interaction".[2] A look at scheduled time and unscheduled time can show a sense of overload or underload for a new librarian.

While the orientation process's purpose is to acquaint new librarians to a new organization and role, there are other parts of the first sixty days of the job. This article looks at finding a balance between time to absorb new information and time to connect with a new place of employment and how it may be linked to creating an experience that increases employee engagement within the first sixty days.

Literature Review

Professional literature is persuaded of the importance of employee onboarding or the orientation process. The first phase of employment is a crucial part for the employee and the organization.[3] A study surveying 406 new employees from a variety of occupations found unmet expectations in organizational structure and job duties can lead to a lower mood overall.[4] This discrepancy in expectations is called "reality shock" and is the main issue in the orientation process.[5]

The importance of the beginning phase of employment is also addressed in professional literature within library science. One study of entry-level librarians from institutions with a membership in the Association of Research Libraries notes librarians benefit from an understanding of "institution and professional culture".[6] This study surveyed 122 librarians and identified that new librarians often feel isolated and challenged by many parts of the onboarding process. Another study notes the first few days of the job for librarians can be stressful.[7] Results suggest a formal training plan should be in place before the first day of employment and continue to last at least a year.[8] A study of 97 new librarians reports the ability to retain an employee starts with the onboarding process.[9] These librarians also felt "reality shock" and it contributed negatively to the overall morale of the first phase of employment.[10]

A few general studies focused on actual time spent during the workday. These studies categorize time in different ways. One study explains that contracted time is time an employee carries out specific activities while free-time is the time that remains.[11] Other studies refer to this time as quantitative underload and quantitative overload.[12] Quantitative overload is defined as a high amount of work being done per unit.[13] Studies also note how employees use time within the workday. New employees may have to make choices on how to fill the day.[14] Employees want autonomy in the time of day they chose to work, the speed of the work, and the content of the work, but supervisors often do not have a choice in how many hours an employee can work.[15]

Other literature that studies boredom within employment includes overload or underload in the workday. One-third of all employees do not have enough to do and bored employees spend more than two hours on personal matters during the workday.[16] Bored people engage in counterproductive behaviors.[17] Boredom is not limited to blue collar and office workers.[18] People become particularly bored right after periods of sustained high activity and coworkers can have an impact on boredom.[19] A study on clerical worker's boredom and busy work found that work culture taught staff that it was okay not to work at certain times, including "Friday afternoons, immediately before lunch, and right before quitting time."[20] The clerical workers in this study hid their boredom to block increased workloads and to prevent job loss.

Studies in library literature also include research on time during the workday. One study reports librarians want autonomy and are often shocked at the quantity of required meetings.[21] The study shows librarians had ample flexibility and felt they were completely "on their own" which led to a lack of engagement. Another study finds new librarians are interested in more one-on-one meetings to learn something specific or larger meetings for socialization.[22] Farrell's time management reflection states that "if a leader has an overview or time audit of how time is being used, then adjustments can be made" and that "seeking a balance between needs and wants can be tricky, but asking can help the leader see how time should be used to help the person and the organization."[23] Farrell also recognizes that time is a commodity and supervisors and librarians both want their time respected. Another study gathered data on two technical services departments. The study suggested using a simple data collection instrument and selecting the right period to collect the data.[24]

Library science literature describes solutions for time management and engagement within the orientation and onboarding process. Supervisors can protect new librarians from trying to take on too much in the first year.[25] Supervisors can also present opportunities for the employees to connect with coworkers and to develop a professional network.[26] New librarians struggle the most with completing tasks and need help with time and workload management.[27] However, each librarian has a different need for time management.[28] This may require that each new librarian have a specialized solution.[29]

Librarian Reflection

Reflection upon my first sixty days in my current position revealed a sense of balance between scheduled and unscheduled time. I felt a strong sense of engagement with my new position and within my overall role at my current institution. Although I did not have my former schedules from my first sixty days of employment from my previous positions, I wanted to analyze the ratio of time spent in this position to validate my assumption of balanced time categories.

In my current position as a tenure-track librarian at a state university, the balance between scheduled and unscheduled time in my first sixty days felt different than my previous roles. Although I did not have a record of my time to compare to my current situation, my impression was that I had different time allocations in previous positions. In my first position as a librarian at a small private university, there was one additional librarian and a library director who had similar duties. My schedule in the first sixty days was mostly in the unscheduled time category and I did not have a strong sense of employee engagement. I did not have a formal orientation program. In my second position as a librarian at a public library branch of a large public university, I was the only librarian from my organization, but there were five other librarians in my department within the joint-use library. My schedule in the first sixty days at that institution was mostly in the scheduled time category with a significant reference desk schedule and I did not have a strong sense of employee engagement. I did have an informal orientation program. In my third position as a librarian at a state college, I was one of two librarians contributing to a full-time staff of five at our specific campus. My schedule in the first sixty days at that institution was mostly in the unscheduled time category and I did not have a strong sense of employee engagement. I did not have a formal orientation program. Although each position was different in terms of staffing, institutional size, and academic type, these positions consisted of an imbalanced amount of scheduled and unscheduled time.

Every professional librarian position that I have been in provided me with a work e-mail and online calendar. As a librarian with interests in time management and productivity, I aim to keep an accurate calendar with precise meeting and event times. I organize my tasks and goals daily, weekly, and monthly. I value having a detailed calendar and accurately portraying my time so that I will be able to reflect monthly on my schedule and work tasks in order to improve my productivity. In the first sixty days of employment, having a feeling of engagement with my

position and the organization helped create a positive experience during the beginning phase when work or roles have not yet been defined and it may be difficult to define productivity.

Methodology

All calendar events from the first sixty days were used to determine scheduled time. The events were readily available and accessible to view from the work calendar. A spreadsheet was used to record the date, the specific day within the sequence of employment, the event title or description, event details, and the duration of the event in minutes. As each day was recorded, new categories were created to reflect the event description. The following categories were determined to cover all the event types:

- Campus - an event open to the entire campus community
- Campus Training - a training event open to the entire campus community
- Conference - a multi-day out-of-state library conference
- Department - a meeting requiring the attendance of all or a select number of library staff from my department
- Faculty Outreach - in-person outreach to liaison departments
- IL (Information Literacy) Consultation - a meeting with a librarian to discuss information literacy activities and lesson plans for a class
- Instruction – a library session taught or time spent observing another librarian teaching
- Librarian Development - professional development events including webinars, a librarian retreat, and in-house workshops
- Library - meeting that required the attendance of all or a select number library staff
- Library Interviews - a meeting in support of a search committee including candidate presentations, introductory department meetings, and library faculty meetings
- Onboarding Checklist – time spent activity working through a checklist consisting of multiple departments and staff of the library to gain an understanding of the operations of the library
- Outreach - outreach to other campus departments and programs

- Out of Office - time out of the office including holidays, sick time, and vacation time
- Reference - a reference desk shift or observation of another librarian
- Research - time working with colleagues on research for publication
- Research Consultations - a meeting with a student working on a research assignment

Then, a spreadsheet consisting of how many minutes spent in each category was created. This table was then converted into the number of hours spent in each category. The total number of hours in each category was rounded to the nearest quarter of an hour. The final category of unscheduled time was determined by subtracting the total amount of possible working hours for the first sixty days from the total amount of hours of scheduled time.

Results

The first sixty days of employment consisted of 480 hours. This represents a 40 hour work week. Of those 480 hours, 56% (n=266.75) of the hours were unscheduled time. Unscheduled time is time free of any scheduled events. The remaining 44% (n=213.25) of hours represented scheduled time. Scheduled time is time that has been scheduled with an event. The first sixty days are represented in Figure 1.

The 56% of unscheduled time consisted of work-related tasks, lunch, projects, background reading, and impromptu discussions with colleagues. Work goals were created on Day 41. Much of the first sixty days before the selection of work goals consisted of learning about the organizational culture, work dynamics between colleagues, and library procedures and policies.

The 44% of scheduled time was broken up into 17 categories. Department meetings consisted of the largest segment of time with 7% (n=31.25) of the total hours. Instruction, including peer-observations and teaching library sessions was 6% (n= 30). Reference duties, including a one hour weekly shift and covering for other librarians was also 6% (n=27.5) of scheduled time. The Onboarding Checklist (n=26), time spent at an out-of-state conference (n=24), and out-of-office time due to sickness or travel time (n=24) all represented 5% each of the first sixty days. Librarian development was 3% (n=16) of the time. Librarian interviews were 2% (n=11). The remaining eight categories represented 1% or less of scheduled time for the first sixty days. These categories are represented in Figure 1 as "Other".

The review of time in the first sixty days showed a balance between unscheduled time (56%) and scheduled time (44%). This aligned with my view that time within the first sixty days was allocated in a balanced amount. It was suspected that more time was spent on the Onboarding Checklist, and while it was in the top four categories of scheduled time, overall, it represented only 5% (n=26) of the time.
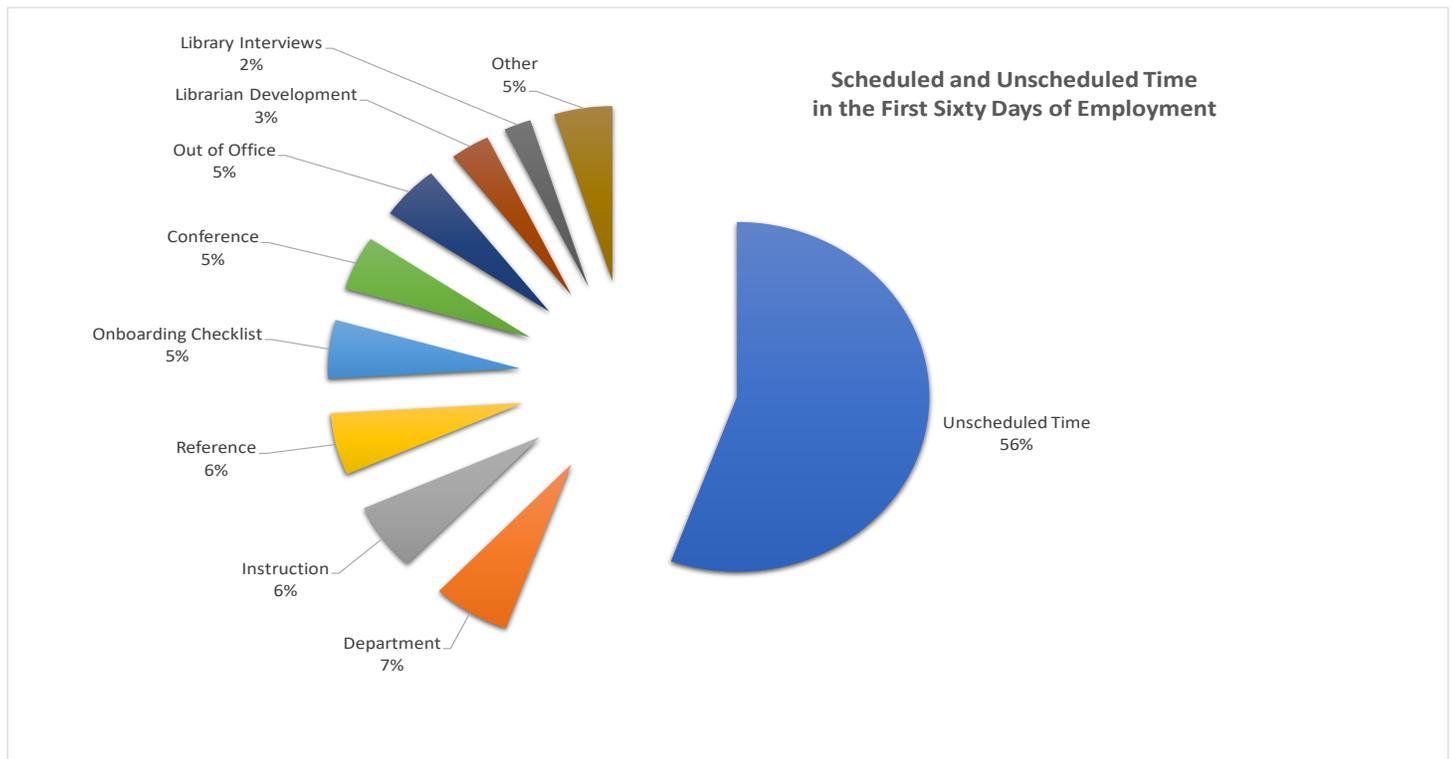

Figure 1. Time allocation in first sixty days of employment

Discussion

The results and analysis of unscheduled time and scheduled time showed a balanced amount. I felt a sense of employee engagement at my new position within the first sixty days. This sense of engagement was not focused solely on the onboarding process as the time analysis showed this was only 5% of my overall time. Categories such as librarian development, campus training, and library interviews were not in my first sixty days at any of my previous positions. The sense of engagement may be linked to the number of library, department, and librarian development events that allowed me to spend time with my department and other library colleagues. For example, I attended a gathering of all library staff to have coffee with the Dean of Libraries and was able to get to know other staff from outside of my department. There was also a day retreat for faculty librarians where I was able to learn about the communication and leadership styles of other librarians. The 56% of unscheduled time allowed me to get to

know my department in a more informal setting. I was able to have lunch with other tenure-track librarians in my department, learn more about the department's history and culture through hallway discussions, and explore tasks and readings that enabled me to develop a sense of background for my position.

This reflection on time in the first sixty days of employment shows the allocation of unscheduled time and scheduled time. While each of my previous positions were categorized as heavily unscheduled time or heavily scheduled time, this position had a mixture of both categories. I did not have a strong sense of engagement at any previous position in the first sixty days. There was also a mixture of informal orientation and no orientation at those positions. While this accounts for only one librarian's first sixty days, there are some questions that a supervisor could consider before determining the appropriate amount of scheduled or unscheduled time for new librarians.

- *Is the librarian experienced or new to the field?* As this is my fourth professional position, my sense of engagement may be tied to how confident I am in my role as a librarian and not tied to the organization itself. A librarian in a first professional position may have different requirements for unscheduled and scheduled time. A new librarian may need more time on learning university jargon, understanding department functions, or fulfilling management duties if in a supervisory role. An experienced librarian may have an idea of what projects to work on, have national committee commitments, or have ongoing research.

- *How does the librarian prefer to develop new skills?* Experience has allowed me to hone in on how I like to learn. A new librarian may need more guidance in this area. The librarian may prefer to learn by watching webinars or reading textbooks. This librarian would want more unscheduled time to get up to speed in the new role. The librarian may prefer hands-on workshops or learning by observation. This librarian would need more scheduled times with other employees.

- *Are there other new employees in the library or in other departments?* In my previous positions, I was the only new librarian. In my current position, there were many other new librarians. New employees may want the chance to connect during the orientation process. Scheduling time for discussion or

allowing enough unscheduled time can help new employees to reach out to each other.

- *Has the department or supervisor made the new employee feel welcome?* Directors have different strengths and may focus on different parts of the onboarding phase. Although this may be a question that is hard to answer on one's own, the library supervisor could consider asking the new employee how to make them feel more welcome. The library supervisor could schedule time for the entire department to meet and get to know the new employee. It may be helpful for the new employee to understand if there is an open-door policy or if new questions are preferred in e-mail.

- *Does the librarian have a plan for unscheduled time?* As I was transitioning into a similar role from my previous job, I had ideas for what I wanted to work on beyond my daily duties. There may be ample opportunity given to the librarian for unscheduled time, but if the librarian is unsure of what to do or to accomplish during that time there may be a communication error. The librarian also may not be ready to dive into assignments or goals during the first sixty days.

- *What is missing from the picture?* Some new librarians may not feel comfortable asking for more responsibility or less work in the first sixty days. The new librarian may not know what questions to ask. The librarian might feel lost or overwhelmed. It may be helpful to check-in and speak with the new librarian to make sure the balance is providing a welcome environment.

Conclusion

Further study is needed to determine an appropriate balance of scheduled time and unscheduled time for new librarians. This study was limited to one individual's self-reflection. The calendars of multiple librarians during their first sixty days and determining their levels of engagement at their new institution will help library managers see if there is a correlation between time allocation and engagement. Librarians in their first professional position versus new librarians in a second or third position may experience a different sense of engagement. Further study between different years of experience before a new position could be beneficial to distinguish between levels of employee engagement. An established employee engagement survey can help identify new librarian engagement levels. As this is an area overlooked by

library orientation programs, further studies of library managers' roles in new librarians' schedules could reveal a link with new employment engagement. Much of the library science literature discusses the importance of orientation programs, but the use of time allocation is missing from the conversation.

Library supervisors should want their new librarians to feel engaged and have a positive experience in their first sixty days of employment. Managers can work on providing that "varied flow of stimuli" and create the social interaction that is needed by so many in the workplace.[30] So much effort and time is put into interviewing and hiring new employees, but often librarians are left on their own in their new positions or overworked due to low staffing. Paying attention to the ratio of unscheduled time and scheduled time may increase a new librarian's employee engagement in the first sixty days. Finding the right balance in a new schedule is important and may need to be tailored to each new individual employee. There is a need for analyzing new librarian schedules and determining their overall feelings of employee engagement. Studying the overall schedule of new librarians in their first sixty days may lead to the right balance of time. In this one instance, starting with a schedule that was close to 50% unscheduled time and 50% scheduled time helped make one new librarian feel engaged from the start. This reflection serves as an example that can encourage library managers to think beyond the orientation process and about a new librarian's time allocation within the first sixty days of employment.

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