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Implementing Floating Collections: To Float or to Sink? A case study

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Abstract: This case study describes the implementation process of Floating Collection as a way to work with collections at Linkoping University Library, from the first discussion, further to the implementation of a large-scale test, and to the Boards decision to permanently work with Floating Collection. The study shows mainly advantages but also some concerns, experiences that other libraries also report.

Keywords: Collection management, Floating Collections, User driven, Case study

1. Introduction

Linkoping University Library (LiUB) has five libraries located at four campuses: Humanities and Social Sciences Library (HumSam) and Technology and Life Sciences Library (TekNat) at Campus Valla[1], The Health Sciences Library (HUB) at Campus HU, all located in Linkoping, Campus Norrkoping Library (CNB) in Norrkoping and Byggmastare John Mattssons Library located in Stockholm. The latter have not been a part of the test, due to geographical circumstances and different rules for the use of the material.

Linkoping University (LiU) pursue partially equivalent educations at the two campuses in Linkoping and Norrkoping, mainly HUB and CNB, which caused extensively book transports between the libraries. Sought after books were sent to the requested library, and when it was returned it was sent back to the owning library.

In December 2010 LiUB started to test and implement Floating Collections. We define a Floating Collection as a group of books that are not housed permanently at a specific library. Instead the books are shelved in the library where they were most recently discharged. The test continued until December

[1] At the end of 2014 the HumSam Library and the TekNat Library were merged into one library – Campus Valla Library.

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2013, when it was evaluated. The evaluation resulted in a transformation from a large-scale test to an established way of working with the collections.
This case study approach is based on Yin's model from 2009. As the model describes, the study includes a case, an aim and a description of the approach. The case, the implementation of Floating Collections at LiUB, includes the complete implementation process; from the first discussion, the pilot test, the evaluation phase of the implementation, which includes statistical data and a staff questionnaire, and finally the Boards decision that Floating Collection will be a permanent way to work with the collections at LiUB. Beyond the evaluation data, the study is made through conversations with persons who contributed with background information, and a theoretical framework including other libraries experiences of Floating Collections, Library 2.0 and changing processes.

2. Literature review

Bartlett (2014) describes Floating Collections as a collection with no owning libraries, and the book routing is controlled by users. Users can request a book to a certain library, and the book will be shelved there if a) it is returned there b) the requesting user never picks it up and there is no more reservations.
There are some similar reasons to start working with Floating Collection according to Hilyard (2012), such as:

- to reduce material handling and transports,
- to increase availability of items,
- more variety and refreshed collections,
- save time for the users and staff,
- to reduce costs.

The financial reason concerns for example reduced transport since reservations only need to be transported once rather than twice and purchasing such as the reduced need to duplicate titles (Hilyard, 2012). The benefits of using Floating Collections is further described as a shift from library-owned collections to system-owned, and to extend the use of resources while eliminating staff overload (Cropper, 2012). Bartlett (2014) describes several reasons to let collections float: economic, user friendly, time saving and that the collection will continuous be refreshed.
When implementing Floating Collections it appears that worries and concerns such as knowledge about the collection will be lost (Johal & Quigley, 2012; Bartlett, 2012), that the weeding will be based on finding space (Johal & Quigley, 2012), and the uncertainty of loosen an item from a certain collection (Cropper, 2012).
According to Hilyard (2012), the staff response to implementing Floating Collection is mostly positive. One positive effect was the economical perspective; such as the Cuyahoga County Public Library where they were able to save 10-15 % on reduced transports (Bartlett, 2012). Kressler (2012) noted that the number of purchased books decreased since there were no need for a

copy at each library which also was a saving. Other experienced benefits is that the collections are framed by the users (Bartlett, 2012), that the floating refreshes the collection "by itself" (Bartlett, 2012; Johal & Quigley, 2012). Cropper (2012) noted that circulation increased when using floating collections and Johal and Quigley (2012) mentioned that the public were more satisfied with the higher availability and user friendly influence. Regarding staff satisfaction Johal and Quigley (2012) surveyed Vancouver Public Library staff and reported that 48% were satisfied with Floating Collections while 5% were not satisfied and the rest expressed either neutrality or declined to comment.

Weeding issues seems to be rather complicated. There appears to be a need for clearer instructions and training sessions according to Hilyard (2012). Ginsky (2012) mentioned a weeding specialist group at the Carasota County Library System who regularly visits the involved libraries for "weeding marathons", an all-day operation. This weeding project turned out successful. Other future needs is rebalancing needs and routines, when books are pooled at some libraries (Bartlett, 2012; Cropper, 2012).

Nutefall and Chadwell (2012) points out four important factors to provide a successful realignment in academic libraries. At first, the library needs certain goals and articulated outcomes for the realignment. The second one is clear communication across the organisation and not only within the working groups. This is important during periods of change and could be seen as a channel for broad input, which in itself is a factor that has effect on how successful the change process turns out. The third factor is assessment – which is a way to find out whether the change was successful or not. The last factor was to make sure that the realignment was connected to the University's realignment.

Further, there is important with a strong team to lead the change process. The team needs to consist of persons with authority, expertise, such as established leaders who are able to guide the staff through the change process. It is important for the team to be able to meet resistance in order to make sure that the right decisions are made and to ensure that communication concerning the change is taken seriously (Kotter, 1996).

To recap: For libraries that have chosen to float, saving time, reducing costs, and improving accessibility seems to be the most frequently cited reasons for making the switch from traditional collections.

3. The Implementation Phases

The implementation of Floating Collections can be seen as a respond to Library 2.0. Library 2.0 is described as a model for user-driven change (Casey & Savastinuk, 2007) and the goal is that the users will create library services that answer to their demands. That responds to the meaning of Floating Collections; the user needs decides where the books will be shelved, and accordingly a book will be available where it is most needed. Casey and Savastinuk (2007) focus a lot on an ongoing change process that will continue to form the library services responding to changing user needs, and that match the nature of Floating Collections.

The discussion at LiUB started in 2008. The systems librarian was inspired by the content of an international mailing list regarding library systems, where a Floating Collection-discussion appeared. An idea to test it at LiUB started to grow. In the beginning of 2009 the former systems librarian, who at this time was appointed as a co-ordinater of loan services, together with one of the new systems librarians were assigned to determine the possibilities to test Floating Collections at LiUB.

In the next step, an implementing group was appointed, that consisted of eleven persons, including the systems librarian, the loan services coordinator among others, and the test implementation was decided by the Board.

During the following 18 month there was an ongoing discussion with staff and management. Small pilot tests were done in the library system, since one major question was how the library system was able to manage Floating Collections. The test results were positive, and therefore the Head of the library appointed a new group to figure out how to start the implementation of a large-scale test with Floating Collections at LiUB. This group was smaller than the former, with only four persons. It consisted for example of the loan services coordinator and the catalogue coordinator. In the beginning of the autumn of 2010 the decision was made that Floating Collections should be implemented as an ongoing test, and that the implementation should be coordinated with the implementation of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)[2]. In December 2010, the first floating book was catalogued and shelved, and after this the Floating Collection grew every time a new bought book appeared, and every time a book was transformed from the old system into the DDC-collection. The cataloguers have continuously thereafter worked with reclassification of older books into DDC – and into the floating collection. The test comprised non-fiction literature, consisting of 265 367 items. Consequently, there were collections excluded from the test, such as fiction, periodicals and different special collections.

The aims of implementing Floating Collections at LiUB were several; the books should be shelved where it was needed; the placement of books would be user-driven; the sharing of books should lead to a more economic acquisition method since there were no need for each library to buy their own copy as the book stayed at the returning library and also the fact that the book transports could be reduced.

In *Strategic Plan for Information Management at Linkoping University 2011-2015* (2010) the major statement concerning Floating Collection is that it would result in higher availability of the books, since the shelving will be more user-driven, and therefore will be more time-saving for the users and work-saving for the library staff. Beside this, the four libraries will be stronger connected and able to act as *one* library.

Summing up the aims, there is three main points, which cover the above mentioned aspects:

- Users perspective

[2]Until December 2010 LiUB used the Swedish SAB classification system.

- Economic perspective
- Staff perspective

Not surprisingly, as always before and in the beginning of all change processes staff were concerned and doubtful. Concerns regarding whether the books should be shelved at the "wrong" library or that some libraries should be overcrowded with books while some should turn up with empty shelves. There was a fear that the subject librarians should lose control of "their" shelves and books, and that it would seem like the staff had no knowledge regarding the collection. There was also worries that it would be confusing for the users when books were "floating around".

Three years after starting the implementation the Board decided to evaluate the large-scaled test. A group was appointed, consisting of persons representing the four libraries involved. One of the persons in the group had also been part of the group who worked with the implementation.

4. Evaluating the final test

In December 2013 a group of four librarians was pointed out to evaluate the test with Floating Collections. The mission was to investigate if the test had answered the intended goals, which is described in *Strategic Plan for Information Management at Linkoping University 2011-2015* (2010) (see above) and the Board pointed out that the evaluation should focus both on user and library perspectives.

In order to answer to the mission of the evaluation, the group decided to analyse statistical data from the library system and through a questionnaire investigate the staff's opinions concerning Floating Collection.

5. Methods

According to Yin (2004) a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and compared to other methods the strengths is its ability to examine in-depth. The method is pertinent when addressing either a descriptive or an explanatory question. When collecting data it's important to establish converging lines of evidence to make the findings as robust as possible through triangulation. Statistical data together with a questionnaire was used to develop a complete understanding of the results. Open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire in order for the respondents to answer each question in their own words. Although open questions might be more demanding for respondents the answers can provide useful insight into a topic.

6. Results

The statistical data analysed were the number of books transported between the libraries, number of loans, the floating quantity, number of books in transport because of a reservation, and number of non-picked-up reservations. There was

also data collected concerning which classifications that floated most and how the collection sizes were affected.

- In 2011 115 246 books was in transport, 2012 84 947 books was in transport, which represents a 26% reduce. 2013 70 423 books was in transport, which represents a further reduce of 17%. The total reduce of books in transport from 2011 to 2013 was 39%, which shows that the transported books strongly reduced. Benefits of this is booth economic and work-connected as there are lesser books to handle each day.
- The number of books in transport from the floating collection, and with a reservation, was rather equal between the libraries, for example: Number of books in transport CNB – HUB 5305, HUB – CNB 5085. This shows that the transports is concentrated between the libraries with equal topics – the books are requested and transported when and to where it is needed.
- During 2013 23% (27600 items) of the reservations (119908) were non-picked-up reservations, and therefore that not automatically sent back to an owning library.
- The classifications that was most frequently floating due to reservations was 300-339 (Social Sciences), 360-399 (Social problems & services) and 610-619 (Medicin & Health) from CNB, HUB and HB and from TB 000-099 (General Works), 500-609 (Natural Sciences) and 650-659 (Management & auxiliary services).

The staff's opinions was investigated through a questionnaire and was left to all staff members who worked in information desks and/or worked as a subject librarian. The survey was set up by six open questions, in order to let the respondents answer as freely as possible and one last question with a yes- or no-alternative. The survey was distributed to 64 individuals. Despite a reminder the answer frequency were 44.
The result from the survey will be shown question by question.

1. **What is positive with Floating Collections?**
   The answers shows opinions of positive effects on availability – the books are where they are needed, there is fewer books in transport, it is time saving when the books are shelved at the requested library when reservations expires and the users appears and still wants the book and do not have to reserve it again. There is also positive opinions concerning acquisitions – there is no longer necessary to buy one item per library, and there is a possibility to develop coordinated routines concerning both acquisition, weeding and conservation/preservation issues.
2. **What is lesser positive with Floating Collections?**
   The most significant problem with Floating Collection, according to the respondents, is weeding – it is more difficult to make decisions when the subject librarian no longer "owns" the acquired books, and

when books acquired by someone else appears on the shelves. There is an anxiety regarding decision when weeding someone else's book. Another conspicuously opinion was that books are being shelved at the wrong library. A book might be returned at a certain library because the user lives nearby, not because he/she is a student at that campus, and in that case a book, for example, about knitting can be shelved at Health Sciences Library. There can also be problematic to estimate needed space on the shelves, and the different libraries acts variously when a "new" classification appears[i]. Finally, there are some worries that Floating Collections makes it harder for the users to browse the shelves.

3. **What could be better?**
   There are strong opinions of a need for coordinated routines expressed, concerning acquisitions, weeding and how we act when a divergent book appears – should it be shelved or sent back to the original library?
4. **How do you think Floating Collections effects the users?**
   The major part of the respondents did not think the users had noticed the test with Floating Collections. But the respondents had thoughts concerning ideas of positive effects; that the books are where they are needed and that the user might find an unexpected book, and ideas of negative effects was that it is harder to browse the shelves, the user needs to use the catalogue more, books are not available at expected library and the risk for a book being shelved at a wrong library because the user lives nearby it, and it is not needed there.
5. **What reactions have you received from users?**
   The majority said they didn't receive any comments from the users. But there were a few received comments: "Browsing possibilities were poorer", "positive with caution", "very good that the collection is being used optimally", "want the books immediate" and "I want to browse the shelves, it is really too bad my books are shattered".
6. **Other opinions?**
   The majority of the respondents expressed positive comments: the advantages are greater than the disadvantages, and that it makes internal work processes easier. Some examples:
   "I think it should be hard to abolish Floating Collections. After all, the advantages is greater than the disadvantages", "It should be a step backwards to stop Floating Collections".
7. **Do you think we should continue with Floating Collections?**
   31 of 44 respondents (70%) answered yes, six answered no, and the rest answered that they were unsure, or did not answer the question.

7. Reflection

The test was implemented in a way that resembles Nutefall's and Chadwell's (2012) factors for successful realignment (see above), and it may have contributed to mainly positive result. The group that implemented the pilot test did set up clear goals which was communicated to the staff, and there was an

ongoing discussion and communication in connection with the implementation before the final big test. This project is also connected to the university's standpoints, according to the strategic plan (Linkoping University, 2010), and meets the factor concerning connection to the University's realignment. Nutefall's and Chadwell's (2012) third factor, assessment, is fulfilled through this evaluation.

The experiences is that books are where they are needed – the student needs and use controls this. LiUB is not alone with such experiences: experiences mentioned at other libraries (Hilyard, 2012) was that they were surprised in which proportions the students controlled the collections (Kressler, 2012) and that the users appreciates the fast delivery of requested material (Ginsky, 2012). In concordant with Casey and Savastinuk (2007) the students influence on the collections strengthens the connections to Library 2.0 as it is a user-driven and constant changing collection management method, in order to create a library equivalent to user needs. This outcome states that Floating Collections leads to a more effective use of the collection.

Concerns are mostly about weeding issues, in which area it is a need and wish for coordination and clear instructions. There is a lack of instructions concerning what the librarian should and are allowed to do. LiUB is not alone - at Vancouver Public Library one of the outcomes is a need for support and instructions for weeding, and one of the expressed challenges was the staff's unwillingness to weed (Johal & Qigley, 2012). Bartlett (2014) suggests a centralised weeding, where weeding no longer is based on branches. Instead weeding should be seen in the "whole perspective" – where the collection is seen as one. This is in line with LiUB's ambition to work as one library, and might be a way to manage weeding.

Some of the survey results points out negative effects, which is probably not due to Floating Collections. There are opinions that it is not possible to browse and that the students need to use the catalogue more. Those problems are more likely depending on the transformation to DDC, since DDC categorize topics in a very different way than SAB – it is no longer possible to browse the way it was before, and the way the students and the librarians were used to. This might be the reason why both students and librarians needs to use the catalogue more than before. Even if other libraries also had worries concerning that knowledge about the collections would be lost (Johal & Quigley, 2012; Bartlett, 2012), there is nothing said that turned out that way.

The evaluation shows that Floating Collection has predominant advantages, concerning students, staffs and economic aspects. The user perspective is mentioned before, as the collection has become more user-driven. Floating Collection lead to reduced number of books in transport, which lead to reduced book handling for the staff. There is also opinions expressed that there is fewer items purchased. Both reduced transports and purchased items has led to

economic achievements. This also responds to the aims and results from the literature overview.

In spring 2014 the evaluation group recommended The Board to establish Floating Collection as a way of working, and no longer be a test. In May 2014 it was decided that LiUB permanently will use Floating Collection as a way to work with collections.

Although it is probably harder to get the users opinion it would have been useful to know if they feel that the library's Floating Collection meets their needs. Something to investigate in the near future.

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[i] When starting with DDC it was decided that there should be no mixed signums, all existing signums would be separated. But, in reality, some libraries did not act so. Instead, they shelved a new signa in an overlying shelf.