Subject matrices: an innovative approach to serving the agricultural and biological science disciplines

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by Livia Olsen, Jason Coleman, Jenny Oleen

**A library reorganization story . . .**

**Before:**
- Departments broken into the traditional areas of Public & Technical Services
- Public Services in TRADITIONAL SUBJECT SILOS: Social Sciences, Humanities, and the Sciences
- Interdepartmental collaboration took place through committees

**After:**
- Departments belonging traditionally in public services are DIVIDED BY USER TYPE: Undergraduate & Community Services (UCS) and Faculty & Graduate Services (FGS)
- Emphasis on internal & external collaboration
- SUBJECT MATRICES offer a comprehensive approach to collaboration and addressing user needs

**Theoretical Inspirations**

**Complexity Theory**
- Creativity in organizations can be achieved by resisting the temptation to plan and control.
- Innovation is promoted by states of tension and uncertainty.
- Systems self-organize to meet challenges. Attempts to shape the self-organization may compromise adaptation.
- Managers can loosely guide organizations toward desired outcomes by introducing disturbances similar to those outcomes

**Loosely Coupled Systems Theory**
- Environments can be shaped by strategic choices of organizations.
- Complex systems are composed of multiple subsystems of less complexity. Organizational structures that react slowly to changes in interactions among subsystems enable novel intermediate adaptations to arise.
- Loose coupling can be achieved by altering the timing between receipt of feedback about a system’s functioning and implementation of changes based on that feedback.

**Successes**

- Increased communication across library departments about reference, instruction, and the Libraries’ collection
- Learning opportunities for matrix members to share their skills and experiences with fellow librarians
- Idea generation that will potentially serve the whole university
- Created unique outreach opportunities leading to the addition of K-State’s Research & Extension Librarian joining the group

**K-State Libraries Agriculture & Biological Sciences Matrix**
- The matrix is people!
- Librarians from UCS, FGS, Content Development, and Scholarly Communications & Publishing departments are involved.

**Challenges**
- Do faculty and students understand how this new system works? Does it matter?
- How to assess success or failure?
- How does the matrix communicate outside the Libraries?
- Do the matrix members have time for matrix activities?