

Reshaping Perspectives on Flexible Work: The Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Library Management

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abstract: During COVID-19, academic library employees pivoted to predominantly remote work. Associate deans, associate university librarians, and equivalent managers at the top 50 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions were interviewed about benefits, challenges, pre-pandemic norms, necessary conditions, and the future of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). The findings suggest that successful FWAs require adequate technology and effective managerial communication and depend on the types of positions and individuals involved. Most managers believe FWAs will increase in academic libraries in the future. FWAs provide benefits for both organizations and employees and will likely have a positive impact on library space, recruitment, and retention. At the same time, careful communication and compassionate leadership are needed for successful FWAs.

Introduction

COVID-19 has changed the way academic libraries operate. Because of the sudden and unexpected closure of library facilities in March 2020 due to the pandemic, many library employees had to adapt quickly to remote working. To support faculty and students off campus, libraries had to make many resources and services accessible electronically and remotely. Librarians could easily provide some services, such as research consultation and instruction, while working at a distance, assuming they had the necessary technology. Print-based and location-bound services were more visibly impacted, however.

While the forced transition from face-to-face to remote work entailed challenges, it also provided opportunities to reflect on the future of academic library endeavors. As the pandemic

persisted, libraries started to recruit and hire new employees over Zoom or other teleconferencing platforms. Meetings became more inclusive, with few or no restrictions on the number of participants, and most took place online. Business travel was discouraged and rare. Conferences and training sessions happened mostly online, giving participants the option to watch recordings at a convenient time. While working flexibly during the pandemic, employees had more control over the scheduling and location of their work. Financial challenges and hiring freezes provided a chance for library managers to rethink what duties were necessary, to cross-train staff, and to take advantage of existing resources as much as possible. Academic libraries had an opportunity to retain the best parts of in-person work, increase productivity, and save costs while freeing themselves from inefficient processes. The crisis likely accelerated some workforce trends already underway, such as automation and artificial intelligence, digitization of employee interaction and collaboration, increased demand for contingent workers, and more remote work.¹

Literature Review

While COVID-19 forced many libraries to test the limits and possibilities of flexible work arrangements (FWAs), the topic is not new. Libraries have dabbled in FWAs for decades, although those undertakings were primarily limited to pilots or case studies. In one of the few research studies on FWAs in academic libraries, Diane Zabel, Linda Friend, and Salvatore Meringolo found that the majority of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions surveyed allowed FWAs. However, most arrangements were made on a case-by-case basis, and participation rates were low. The most common form of FWA was flextime, followed by formal and informal leaves, compressed workweeks, voluntary part-time work, job sharing, job

exchange, and phased retirement. Telecommuting was much less common than other types of FWAs.²

Telecommuting became the form of flexible work most often discussed in library and information science (LIS) literature beginning in the mid-1990s, when technological advancements made it possible. Studies found certain types of library work better suited to FWAs than others. For example, original cataloging was relatively compatible with telecommuting, benefiting from a quiet and distraction-free environment, according to Leah Black and Colleen Hyslop's study at Michigan State University in East Lansing.³ Virtual reference, particularly in the evenings or weekends while library facilities were closed, became more prevalent starting in the early 2000s. Providing reference services over the Internet benefited the organization, end users, and library employees, as demonstrated by Jo Ann Calzonetti and Aimee deChambeau at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio.⁴ The team of Mary-Carol Lindbloom, Anna Yackle, Skip Burhans, Tom Peters, and Lori Bell described similar advantages to such service.⁵ Both studies found that virtual reference service provides library employees with scheduling and geographical flexibility as well as opportunities for professional growth, although success depended upon technological capabilities. In addition, telecommuting may address employees' personal or family issues. Jennifer Duncan described her experience telecommuting while relocating for six months as a successful "experiment."⁶ The continual characterization of FWAs as "pilots" or "experiments" in LIS literature reinforces that they have been mostly a temporary solution rather than a long-term, widespread strategy for increasing performance.

While the benefits of FWAs have been discussed, particularly their advantages for maintaining a good work-life balance, libraries have not yet embraced these options as a

recruiting and retention tool. Lauren Reiter and Diane Zabel reviewed library job ads, finding that FWAs were seldom mentioned, even though many institutions had flexible work policies.⁷ Tamara Townsend and Kimberley Bugg determined that many librarians need FWAs, including flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and research leaves, and recommended updating library policies to address those necessities.⁸

Technology has evolved rapidly since telecommuting emerged as a viable option for library work. Librarians use a plethora of technological tools and manage and collaborate effectively while working remotely, as Monica Rysavy and Russell Michalak described.⁹

A vast management literature discusses the impact of flexible work arrangements on job satisfaction and achievement. Some studies consider employee productivity, while others describe organizational performance. Output generally increases with FWAs. Clare Kelliher and Deirdre Anderson found flexible workers more satisfied and organizationally committed than their nonflexible counterparts in a study involving the United Kingdom's private sector. Kelliher and Anderson contend that employees perform better and even work harder when they have some control over their schedule or location of work.¹⁰ Nicholas Bloom, James Liang, John Roberts, and Zhichun Jenny Ying observed that working from home led to a 13 percent performance increase, of which 9 percent resulted from fewer breaks and sick days and 4 percent from a quieter or better working environment.¹¹ Tammy Allen, Ryan Johnson, Kaitlin Kiburz, and Kirsten Shockley cautioned that FWAs might not reduce work-family conflict but might increase productivity.¹²

Research also shows that informal FWAs negotiated between employees and their managers are more effective than formal arrangements in increasing productivity. Lilian De Menezes and Clare Kelliher found that informal FWAs better accommodate work-life

preferences and appear to enhance performance.¹³ Argyro Avgoustaki and Ioulia Bessa determined, however, that employees might perceive flexible work imposed by employers as unfair and so might exert less effort, though personnel seem to use employee-centered flexible work to balance life and job demands as the policies intend.¹⁴

FWAs also help enhance employee retention and promote gender equality, as Heejung Chung and Mariska van der Horst demonstrated in a study using a large household panel survey in the United Kingdom.¹⁵ Fostering commitment and retention requires fair and understanding supervisors as well as human resources practices that value employees' contribution and care about their well-being, as Marjorie Armstrong-Stassen and Francine Schlosser observed.¹⁶ In contrast, Carolyn Timms and her team found that FWAs contribute to reduced work engagement over time and discuss the importance of a supportive organizational culture to reduce personnel turnover.¹⁷

P. Matthijs Bal and Luc Dorenbosch found that employers who offer FWAs experience stronger organizational performance, lower absence due to sickness, and less turnover. Organizations with a high percentage of older workers particularly benefit from FWAs.¹⁸ Additionally, Jaime Ortega observed that employers give more discretion for FWAs to improve performance than to ease work-family balance.¹⁹ Furthermore, managers interpret employees' use of FWAs differently depending on the justification, according to Lisa Leslie, Colleen Flaherty Manchester, Tae-Youn Park, and Si Ahn Mehng. If an employee uses an FWA to increase productivity, managers interpret it as a signal of high organizational commitment. If, on the other hand, a worker requests an FWA for personal reasons (such as childcare), managers tend to consider it a sign of low organizational commitment, which may lead to career penalties for the employee.²⁰

In 2020, research by Alexander Bartik, Zoë Cullen, Edward Glaeser, Michael Luca, and Christopher Stanton found remote work more prevalent in industries with better-educated and better-paid staff. Remote work productivity was also higher for better-educated employees. About 40 percent of firms whose personnel switched to remote work during COVID-19 predicted that more than 40 percent of those workers would continue working off-site after the crisis ends.²¹ A study by Jonathan Dingel and Brent Neiman found that 37 percent of the jobs in the United States could be done from home, with significant variation across cities and industries. They contend that 83 percent of education services and 72 percent of information services could be handled remotely.²² Finally, Erik Brynjolfsson and his coauthors determined that states with a higher share of employment in information fields, including management and professional positions, more likely shifted toward remote work and had fewer people laid off or furloughed during the pandemic.²³ These findings indicate that many jobs in academic libraries could transition easily to remote work.

While the existing literature aids in understanding flexible work trends, research focused on academic library managers' perspectives is lacking. This study attempts to fill that gap.

Objectives

This study seeks to explore the views of senior managers in academic libraries regarding flexible work, based on their experience during COVID-19. Specifically, the objectives of this study are (1) to identify best practices for FWAs in large academic libraries by examining benefits and challenges of such arrangements during the pandemic and (2) to envision the future of flexible work for academic libraries. This study primarily focuses on FWAs designed to give employees more flexibility regarding work location and scheduling.

Methods

To investigate practices of flexible work in large academic libraries using rigorous mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, the authors conducted interviews with individuals employed in a variety of associate dean, associate university librarian, and equivalent positions at the top 50 ARL institutions. These positions were chosen because the responsibilities of these senior managers include overseeing library operations and making strategic decisions. Therefore, they have more frequent interactions with frontline managers than deans and university librarians, and yet are also members of senior management.

ARL membership includes major universities, large public institutions, and federal government agencies in the United States and Canada. The association periodically releases the ARL Investment Index, a ranking of ARL libraries often used to gauge the relative size of institutions. Using the 2018 ARL Investment Index, the authors identified the 50 largest academic libraries and reviewed the websites of these institutions to identify potential study participants, resulting in a population of 178 individuals.

The principal investigator recruited study participants via e-mail in August 2020 and scheduled interviews with 31 of them in August and September 2020. Other than a few exceptions, the geographical distribution of the sample generally reflects that of the ARL member population.

At 18 institutions (58 percent of the sample), librarians had faculty status, while 13 institutions (42 percent) did not have faculty librarians. Twenty participants (65 percent) used she/her/hers pronouns, and 11 (35 percent) preferred he/him/his pronouns. The generations represented consisted of 12 (39 percent) baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; 18 (58 percent) Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980; and 1 (3 percent) millennial, born between 1981 and 1996.

The interview protocol was determined to be exempt from review by The Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board. The structured interview consisted of seven questions on the state of flexible work during COVID-19 and prior to the pandemic, and reflections on success factors and the future of flexible work, as well as three demographic questions (see Appendix A for the interview questions). The authors conducted and recorded the conversations on Zoom. Present at each interview were the subject, the interviewer (typically the principal investigator), and one study team member serving as notetaker. Interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes.

Two study team members developed an initial list of codes, tested and refined them with a sample of six interviews, and finalized the coding instrument (see Appendix B for the coding sheet). Next, the two team members independently coded all interviews and compared results to confirm validity. When necessary, they reviewed the Zoom transcripts. The two coders transferred the coded data into an Excel file for quantitative analysis. Then the study team worked collaboratively to pull out quotations and identify themes. A team member analyzed the data in Excel and determined themes based on the extracted quotations. The other two members reviewed and confirmed the themes.

Findings

All interview participants (N = 31) indicated that their employees worked at least partially remotely at the time of the interview. Of the 31 interviewees, 21 (68 percent) reported that their staff fully or mostly worked off-site, while 10 (32 percent) declared that their employees worked remotely some of the time or that some did so all of the time. Most commented that they had pivoted to provide reference and instruction almost entirely online. Five participants (16 percent) indicated that their states have different mandates. Three pointed out that their state laws do not

allow state employees to work from home without permission. The other two commented that university employees must default to state mandates.

The interview participants identified various benefits to working flexibly during the pandemic, as shown in Table 1. Approximately half (16, or 52 percent) observed that work productivity increased. Additionally, more than one-third of the interviewees mentioned progress in remote projects and effective use of technology, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. A sizable number declared that meetings had become more inclusive or that management communication had improved (5, or 16 percent, and 4, or 13 percent, respectively). Participants' comments contextualize the findings:

[Employees] have been able to accomplish a lot of things while working from home. We have even been able to get some things done that we were not able to do on-site since we were busy maintaining the physical library. Many employees have been working harder and longer than before. Staff members have adapted to new technologies well.

Participant 6

Now we have meetings every two weeks with large numbers of people and lots of engagement. It's just a very positive experience where people feel connected and able to ask questions. Even though we are isolated, we are less isolated as an organization. It's a much more even playing field in the Zoom environment.

Participant 27

Table 1.
Positive aspects of working during COVID-19

What works during COVID-19*	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
Productivity	16	52%
Remote projects	11	35%
Technology use	11	35%
Inclusive meeting	5	16%
Administrative communication	4	13%
Collaboration	3	10%
Institutional leadership	3	10%
Caregiving	3	10%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants.

The participants also mentioned challenges related to working flexibly during the pandemic, as shown in Table 2. The most common negative comments related to technology difficulties (18, or 58 percent), such as lack of fast Internet and Zoom fatigue, followed by caregiving issues (13, or 42 percent). More than one-third of the interviewees (12, or 39 percent) observed that some employees' work could not be done remotely and that it was difficult to find meaningful tasks for them over a sustained period. Some also reported additional costs for libraries to support off-site work, such as Internet access, equipment, furniture, and supplies. It is interesting that technology and caregiving were mentioned as both positives and negatives. Some employees may have been more comfortable learning new technologies or had additional support for caregiving during remote working, while others struggled with technical or childcare issues. Some interviewees expressed concerns about increased workload, difficulty separating work life and personal life, and burnout:

We were surprised to find out a fair number of our staff actually do not have computers or Internet access at home, [or] don't have smartphones. So, you start to identify pretty quickly where there is a digital divide.

Participant 28

I've heard repeatedly about equity in terms of those who are required to work on-site and those from home, and it depends on the perspective of the person. Some people are working from home and absolutely thriving. And then there are people working from home who are going out of their skulls. Even for some of the parents and caregivers, it's great they can be home because of what is happening with schools, but some feel tired and frustrated because they don't have the space to focus on the work the way they would if they were physically on-site at work.

Participant 29

Those who weren't used to working flexibly, and those who had workflows and processes that were wedded to being in the building and working on campus [had more challenges]. Some did not have strong Internet connections or technology or skills to work the technology.

Participant 18

Table 2.
Negative aspects of working flexibly during COVID-19

What is challenging during COVID-19*	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
Technology	18	58%
Caregiving	13	42%
Nature of duties does not allow working remotely	12	39%
Ergonomics	9	29%
Isolation	8	26%
Equity	7	23%
Lack of casual contact	6	19%
Supervision	4	13%
Mental / Anxiety	2	6%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants.

As for surprises, approximately half the participants (14, or 45 percent) indicated they were amazed how quickly employees transitioned to remote working, while about one-third (9, or 29 percent) were surprised by increased productivity (see Table 3). Some described silver linings, such as increased interest in open educational resources (OER) and greater willingness to shift from print to electronic resources. Some discovered organizational weaknesses that they had not noticed prior to the pandemic, such as outdated Web content or an organizational structure that hindered collaboration. Their narratives reveal some unexpected discoveries:

The biggest surprise was just before everyone went off-site it was a bit chaotic, but now everything is flipped, and we can do so much work from home.

Participant 18

We were surprised to learn how much work lends itself to working remotely. Initially, some people worried about employee productivity. However, remote employees have been as productive or more productive.

Participant 9

Table 3.
Surprises or new findings while working during COVID-19

Surprises / new findings during COVID-19*	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
Quick adjustment to remote work	14	45%
Increased productivity	9	29%
Miss on-site work	2	6%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants.

Prior to COVID-19, FWAs were already available at most participants' institutions, and more than half had institutional policies on FWAs (see Figure 1). At the same time, most interviewees (23, or 74 percent) observed that working on-site was the norm, although employees could work remotely sometimes (see Table 4). Additionally, 22 participants (71

percent) reported that such arrangements were made at the supervisor's discretion on a case-by-case basis prior to COVID-19. These findings imply that the pandemic forced library administrators to accommodate more flexible work, whatever the official policies:

While the campus has in place a formal policy for flex scheduling, I would say they were pretty strict [pre-COVID]. You needed to work with your supervisor, and there was a tendency not to approve them, I think largely out of fear they would be exploited or liability concerns.

Participant 24

I was supportive of flex work before this [pandemic], especially for employees who are high performers and self-directed.

Participant 15

Figure 1. Flexible work arrangement policies at participant's institutions prior to COVID-19.

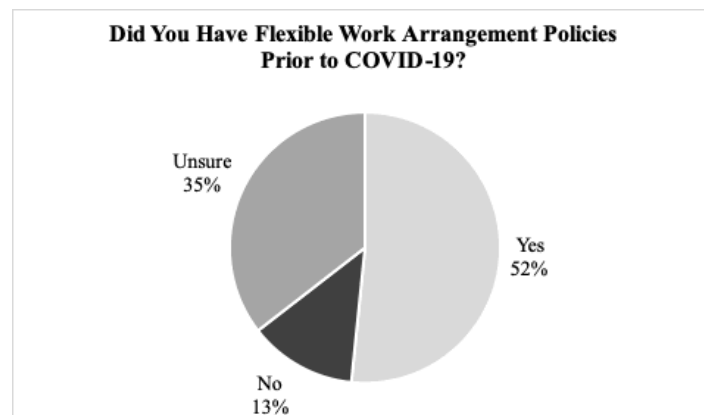


Table 4.
Work arrangement norms prior to COVID-19

What were the norms* prior to COVID-19?	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
On-site work	23	74%
Remote sometimes	16	52%
Flexible schedule	11	35%
Compressed schedule	2	6%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants

Among necessary conditions for successful FWAs, many participants mentioned technology (22, or 71 percent) as well as good communication (17, or 55 percent). Technology included not only stable and fast Internet but also other technical solutions to facilitate flexible work, such as cloud-based systems and video-conferencing software. About half the interviewees indicated that FWAs would depend on the type of position, meaning that some jobs, such as those that involve physical items and facilities, were not suited for FWAs. Additionally, 45 percent of the participants considered clear performance expectations necessary for successful FWAs. The behaviors they hoped for included maintaining updated calendars and keeping video cameras on at certain meetings. A relatively small number mentioned that position status, such as faculty and staff, mattered for successful FWAs. Furthermore, some commented on challenges related to onboarding newly hired personnel remotely (see Table 5 for details):

There needs to be clear expectations regarding deliverables. Communication needs to be thoughtful and regular. Good communication will be even more important as we develop hybrid teams. Most people have the basic technology they need for remote work. However, ergonomic issues need to be addressed.

Participant 26

It will largely have to do with what is needed of the position and the individuals we are hiring.

Participant 18

Table 5.

Necessary conditions for successful flexible work arrangements

What conditions* are needed for successful flex work?	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
Technology	22	71%
Communication	17	55%
Types of positions / duties	15	48%
Accountability / clear expectations	14	45%
Policies	8	26%
Experience	8	26%
Status, e.g., faculty, staff	4	13%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants

Finally, the interview participants were asked about the future of FWAs. The majority (24, or 77 percent) responded that FWAs would increase in academic libraries over time, while the rest (7, or 23 percent) were unsure (see Figure 2). The participants offered various considerations for the future of FWAs (see Table 6).

Figure 2. Participants' responses when asked about the future of flexible work arrangements.

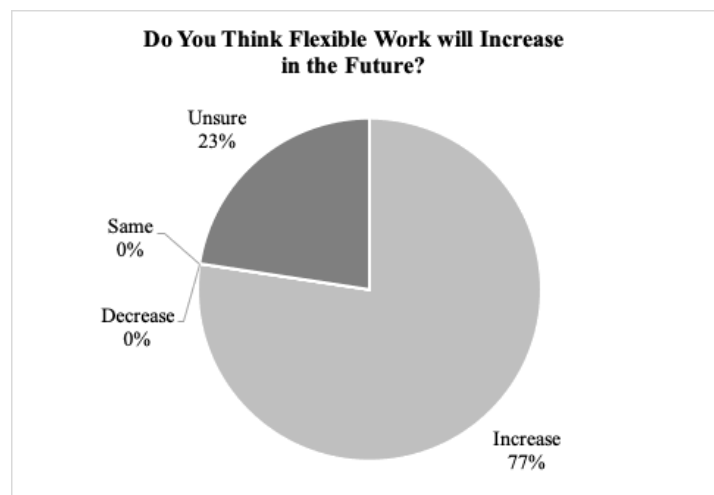


Table 6.
Future considerations for flexible work arrangements

What thoughts* do you have for the future of flex work for library employees?	Number of participants (N = 31)	Percentage of participants
Impact on library space	11	35%
Helps with recruitment	9	29%
Depends on job type	7	23%
Helps with retention	5	16%
Helps with location / commute issues	2	6%
Solves scheduling issues	2	6%

*The table lists topics mentioned by at least two participants.

More than one-third of the participants (11, or 35 percent) commented about the impact on library space and the possibility that some areas could be switched to other purposes, such as user engagement. Participant 21 predicted, “We may not need as many libraries or as many offices. Some of these offices could be transformed into collaborative spaces for users.” Additionally, more than a quarter of the interviewees (9, or 29 percent) thought that FWAs would help with recruitment of library employees. Participant 30 predicted, “I anticipate more use of flex work by managerial and professional staff, as we have seen the benefits to the organization and the individual. Not everyone can work remotely. However, this would be a great strategy for broadening the pool for some positions, especially IT positions.” Some reported they had already hired new employees without ever meeting the candidates in person. A sizable number (7, or 23 percent) mentioned that the future of FWAs depends on the nature of the work, meaning certain tasks must be done on-site while other work can be effectively performed elsewhere.

Discussion

Best Practices for FWAs in Academic Libraries

Among best practices for FWAs, participants stressed that managers should clarify performance expectations for all employees. Additionally, the hiring institution should provide the necessary equipment and technology if remote work is required and permanent. Supplying the needed software and hardware will enable more employees to participate and engage, regardless of their location.

This study revealed additional dimensions of successful FWAs. First, managers should recognize individual differences and provide flexibility. Employees might want or need to work at different times or in various locations, and adaptability would benefit both them and the organization's productivity. Additionally, managers might rely less on lengthy online meetings and more on collaboration tools, such as Google Docs, Microsoft Teams, and robust intranet. Doing so would allow communicating with employees when convenient for them and reduce technology fatigue. Second, managers need to understand that their team experiences different levels of stress while working from home. Compassionate leadership based on this understanding is essential for the success of FWAs, although this consideration also applies to on-site or conventional work arrangements. Third, FWAs require effective managerial communication. In addition to conveying clear expectations, managers should express their appreciation for employees' contributions and encourage them to take breaks. Recognizing that FWAs might make libraries less visible, managers and librarians need to publicize their accomplishments more effectively to make their users and stakeholders aware of what they do.

Future of Work for Academic Library Employees

The study participants expected increased FWAs in the future, although they recognized some challenges. Many acknowledged that most library work does not require physical presence,

based on their experience during COVID-19. Flexible working will likely become more usual, instead of being treated as an exception, which may reduce library office needs and free more space for other activities, such as user engagement. At the same time, the participants acknowledged that the future of FWAs depends on what students and faculty need. For example, if more courses are taught online, academic library work also must transform to serve the increased demands for online education.

FWAs will also impact future recruitment and retention efforts at academic libraries. Greater flexibility might encourage employees to stay in their roles longer or postpone retirement and might attract candidates from afar who would not consider a job if it required on-site work. Not only have some senior library managers already hired new employees without seeing them in person, but also some of them believe that certain jobs can be permanently handled remotely, particularly IT positions. Increased FWAs will likely result in space and cost savings, although onboarding and fully integrating off-site employees can be challenging. Managers will need to think about what flexibility each position can have and articulate it in the job description.

Job sharing might also increase, particularly if academic libraries remain under financial pressure. This sharing might happen across the organization or take place through consortia or other external collaborative endeavors. On campus, service points might become more consolidated, as remote services become the norm. Instruction sessions might be recorded to give librarians time for other work and to enable users to view the sessions at their convenience. Librarians' efforts might focus more on higher-level professional work, most of which can be handled remotely, while lower-level tasks might be automated through technology. FWAs provide significant benefits for the institution as well as for the employees, depending on their capabilities and willingness to learn new things.

Limitations

The analysis in this study is based on interviewees' responses in August and September 2020. As the pandemic persisted, their observations and predictions for the future might have changed. Additionally, it is possible the participants did not articulate answers to all the coded questions. Another limitation is that coding was done manually, and human errors might have occurred in the process. At the same time, all three researchers reviewed transcripts independently, verified results collaboratively, and believe the findings helped meet the study objectives.

Conclusion

COVID-19 experience has made academic library managers realize that FWAs increase productivity if the needed technology and tools are provided, if performance expectations are clearly communicated, and if managers offer flexibility while exercising empathetic leadership. Managers in this study believe FWAs will increase in the future, and the shift has positive implications for library space, recruitment and retention, and overall productivity. At the same time, the pandemic revealed a digital divide, a gap between employees who have ready access to computers and the Internet at home and those who do not, as well as differences among positions. Remote work is more challenging for employees who must have access to physical resources. For other positions, FWAs will allow librarians and staff to focus on high-level work while automating repetitive tasks and accelerating collaboration. This study also revealed that working off campus can be stressful. While workshops and meetings can take place online, and business travel will likely become less common, managers recognize the importance of in-person connection and networking. Establishing shared values while increasing FWAs to benefit employees and organizations will be a new challenge for library managers.

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Appendix A

Flexible Work Interview Questions

Current State of Flexible Work

1. What's the current state of work arrangements for librarians (or liaison/collection development)?
2. What's working? / Who's working effectively? (What conditions are helping?)
3. What's challenging?
4. Any surprises/new findings?

State of Flexible Work Prior to COVID-19

5. How was it prior to COVID-19?
 - a. Did you have policies? (yes/no)
 - b. What were the norms?

Reflections on Success Factors and the Future of Flexible Work

6. What conditions are needed for successful flexible work arrangements? For example:
 - a. Policies
 - b. Communication
 - c. Types of positions
 - d. Technology needs
 - e. New versus experienced employee
 - f. Status, e.g. tenure-track faculty, academic librarian, professional staff, other staff
 - g. Anything else?
7. What thoughts do you have for the future of flex work for librarians?

Demographic and Organizational Questions

- a. What's your pronoun?
- b. What is your age or generation, e.g., baby boomer, Generation X, millennial, etc.?
- c. Do your librarians have faculty status?

Appendix B

Flexible Work Coding Sheet

1. Current state:

- All or almost all remote
- Some remote
- All or almost all on-site

2. Currently, what's working?

- Productivity
- More webinars and training
- More inclusive meetings
- Increased collaboration
- Development of special projects to accommodate remote work
- Increased communication from library administration
- Strong institutional leadership
- Technology
- Flexibility for caregiving
- Others

3. Currently, what's challenging?

- Technology
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Social isolation
- Mental health (anxiety, depression)
- Equity issues (resources, location of work, such as on-site versus remote, etc.)

- Nature of job duties
- Lack of casual contact (“water cooler” chats)
- Supervision
- Office equipment/ergonomics
- Others

4. Currently, what’s been surprising?

- People adjusted to remote [work] quickly
- Increased productivity
- How much people miss on-site work
- Others

5. Previous state:

a. Policy

- Policy (yes)
- Policy (no)
- Not sure

b. Norms

- Working on-site
- Flexible schedules
- Working remotely on occasional basis
- Compressed schedules
- Other

c. Rationale

- Location (commute, cost of living, etc.)

- Scheduling
- Space
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Case by case (at discretion of supervisor)
- Others

6. What conditions are necessary for flex work?

- Policies
- Communication
- Types of positions, e.g. requiring on-site work
- Technology needs
- New versus experienced employee
- Status, e.g. tenure-track faculty, academic librarian, professional staff, other staff
- Accountability
- Anything else?

7. Future of flex work

a. Will flex work increase?

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay the same
- Not sure

b. Other considerations?

- Location (commute, cost of living, etc.)
- Scheduling
- Space
- Type of jobs
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Others

Interesting things to consider:

- State mandate regarding on-site work
- Others?

Quotations—Add number(s) of relevant question(s):

Notes

1. McKinsey & Company, "What 800 Executives Envision for the Postpandemic Workforce," September 23, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/what-800-executives-envision-for-the-postpandemic-workforce>.
2. Diane Zabel, Linda Friend, and Salvatore Meringolo, comp., *Flexible Work Arrangements in ARL Libraries: SPEC Kit 180* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1992).
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