Objectives

1. To compare efficiencies gained from task timing for a variety of task types.
2. To outline staff feedback practices used to lower task times.
3. To demonstrate that task timing can be an effective means of controlling time spent on editorial tasks.

Background

KWF Editorial is hired by client journals and societies to provide editorial support for defined tasks in the peer review workflow. For several projects, average time required to complete each editorial task is tracked and reported to our clients, internal managers, and associates. These reports are used to assess the effects of workflow changes and to set goals for staff.

Journals experiencing growth may benefit from task timing data analysis by being able to pinpoint specific tasks that take the most editorial staff time. KWF Editorial conducted an analysis of task time data across a range of different tasks performed for journals of varying sizes to determine whether task timing is an effective means of controlling average time per task in a variety of conditions.

Methods

Task Timing Methodology

- Task timing was implemented using simple spreadsheet data entry of start and stop times, manuscript information, task type, and staff initials.
- A scripted application was developed over time with “Start” and “Stop” buttons, a drop-down menu to select task type, a running clock display, and a field where associates can denote special circumstances to explain out-of-target task times.
- Task timing data feeds directly into dashboards customized for associates, team managers, and client journals.

Staff Feedback Methodology

- Individual productivity dashboards compare an associate’s monthly averages to the team’s average time per task (Cathy vs. Team).
- Productivity goals are established by the client or task manager. Stoplight color-coding shows when an associate is within 5% of the target goal.
- Managers review data on a weekly or monthly basis. Off-target months or tasks are easily identified. Support is provided and results are monitored to see if performance realigns with the established productivity goals.
- Goals are incorporated into annual reviews to inform promotion and salary considerations.
- Individual performance improves over time as associates are made aware of target goals and can track their ongoing progress.
- Team performance is optimized as individual productivity increases.

Data Selection

- Tasks were selected from a variety of journals and multi-journal societies varying from mid-size to very large.
- Identifying information about each journal was kept anonymous to retain KWF Editorial client confidentiality.

Results & Analysis

Data show decreases in average time per task across:

- A variety of different tasks
- A range of time frames, from 3 months to 2 years
- A variety of submission volumes for journals and societies

Spikes and drops in average task times can be correlated with:

- Training of new staff (e.g., August 2016 and March 2017 for Submission Checks for Society A, May 2016 for Sending Chase Letters for Journal C, and February 2017 for the Proof QC task for Journal C)
- Workflow changes (e.g., May 2016 and September 2016 for Inviting Editors for Journal C)

Conclusion

Timing of editorial tasks, combined with goal setting and data sharing with editorial staff, is shown to reduce “time per task” averages. Task timing also allows for immediate assessment of the impact of workflow changes on staff time per task. Journals and societies seeking to reduce costs or free staff time for new initiatives should consider implementing task timing coupled with staff feedback.