

Current practice in academic workload allocation processes in Australia

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Collaborators

- Stijn Dekeyser (USQ) – survey design
- Rachel King (USQ) – statistical advice
- Liz Barre (UMelb and LHMI) – promotion of survey; analysis of textual questions
- Clive Baldock (UTas) – promotion of survey among Deans of Science



Motivation

- Academic workload is becoming increasingly regulated
- Workload Model: The rules that regulate allocation of academic work
- Our aim: to understand the effect that model design has on universities, academic staff, and academic managers
 - This can provide guidance in the design of future models
 - Plan to inventory a range of models to explore the design space
 - *First step: a small pilot study*



Context: AWM project – 4 facets

- Software development

- WAMS1 and WAMS2:
 - 2009 – 2013
 - Faculty of Sciences, USQ
- WAMS3:
 - 2014 – (ongoing)

- Deployment

- USQ (whole institution)
- Deakin (1 Faculty)
- UTas (1 Faculty)

- Trial

- 3 institutions

- Research

- 2013 Survey (TEMC'15)
- Blended Model (TEMC'14)
- LH Martin projects:
 - Courses (2014-2015)
 - Staff (2015-2016)

- USQ workload 2015

- Assisted S-DVC to create single workload model
- Tasked by S-DVC to support Sections in implementation



Pilot survey goals

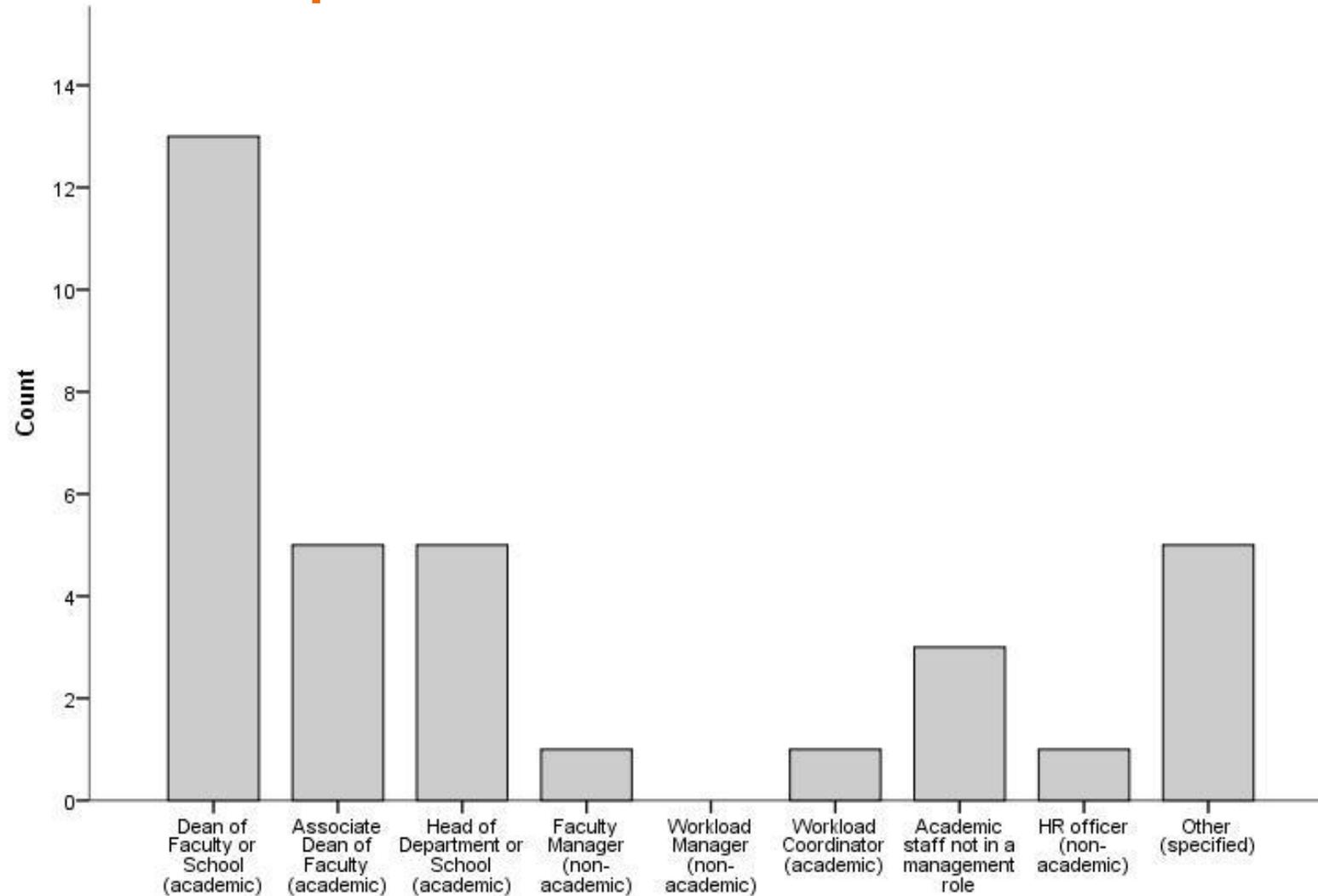
- To gain insight into current practice
- To guide formulation of wider and more refined survey
- Focus on
 - Kinds of models
 - Workload allocations policy and procedure
 - Tools that facilitate the process



The survey

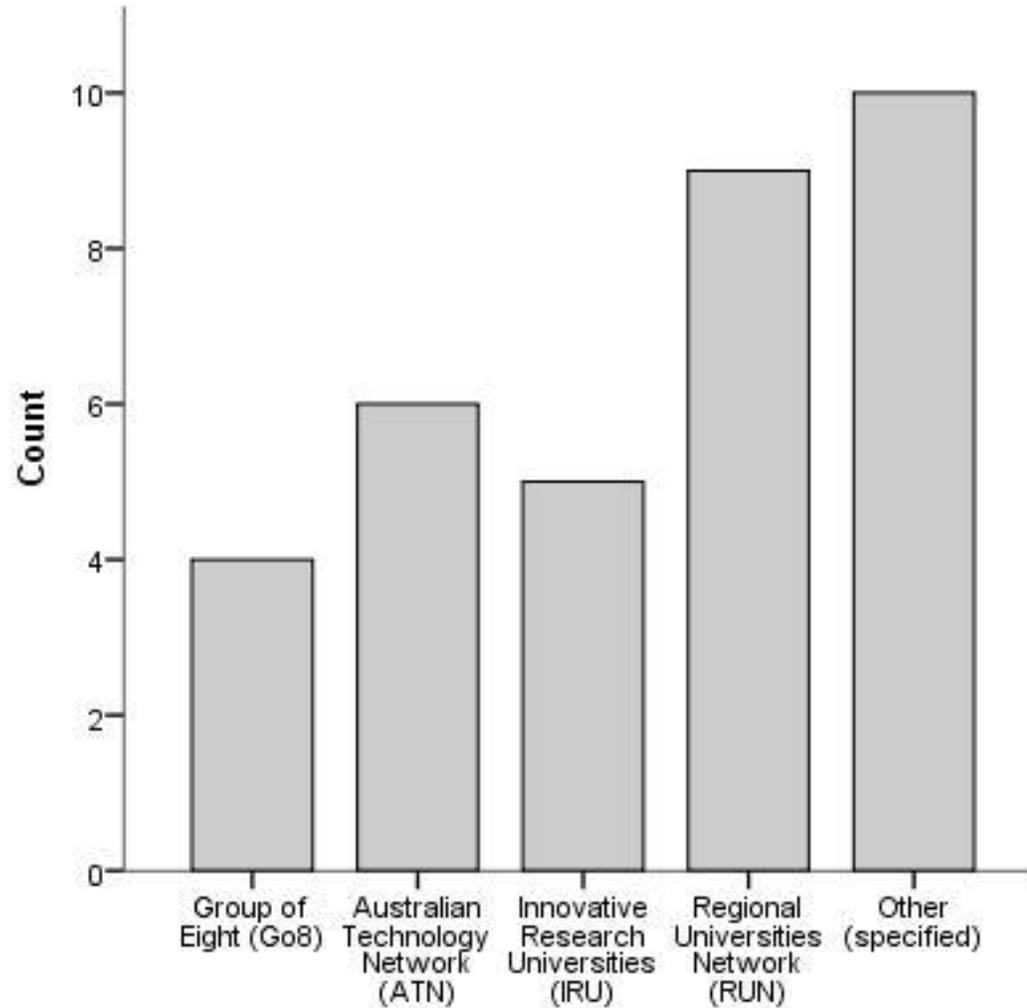
- March 2013
- Target group: Deans of Science, past LHM workshop participants
- Google docs
- 39 multi-choice questions, 4 free text response
- 34 respondents

Role of respondent





Type of institution





Results

- Major/interesting results will be reported
- Small sample size precludes drawing strong conclusions
- Results will be viewed and interpreted in context of subsequent work that we have done looking at individual models from a range of institutions.

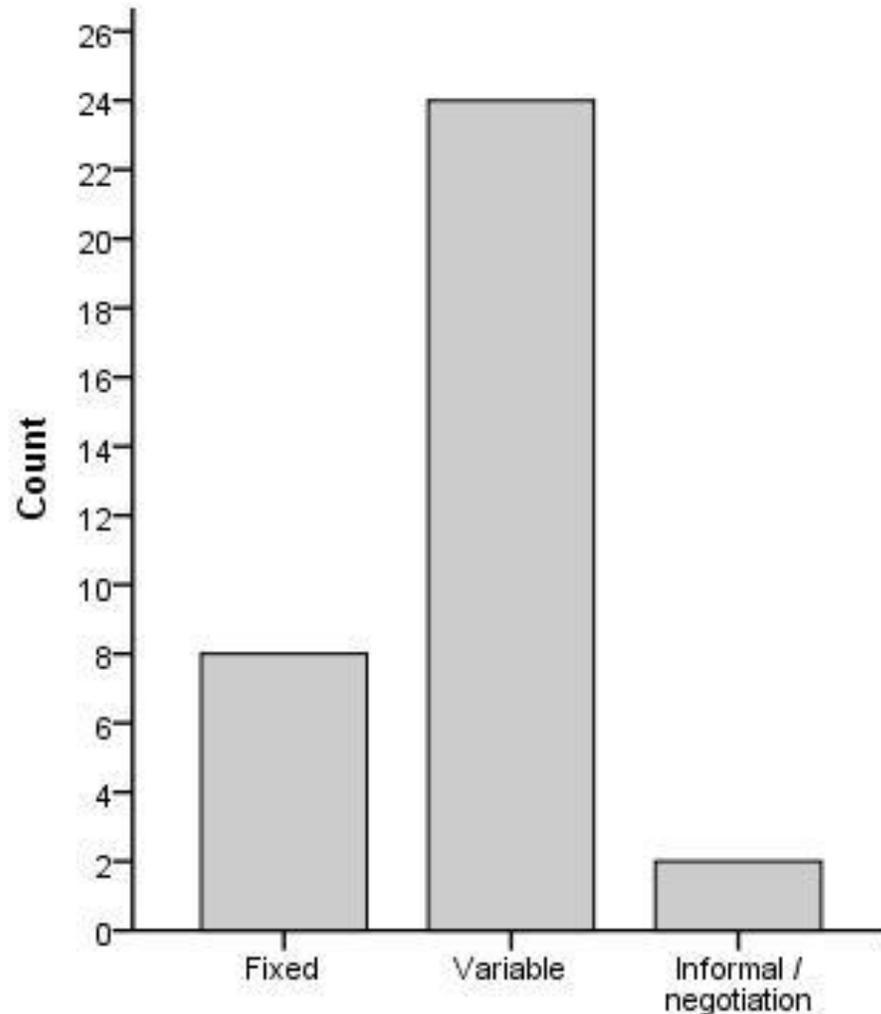


Models and rules

- 21 questions
- How are research, teaching, service allocations determined?
 - High level allocation to components
 - Low level: within each component
- Rules: style and complexity
- Efficacy & evaluation
- Financial implications



Teaching, Research, Service 'envelopes'



- *How is relative size determined?*
- Variable proportion is dominant in the sample
- Fixed 40/40/20 has been common in the past

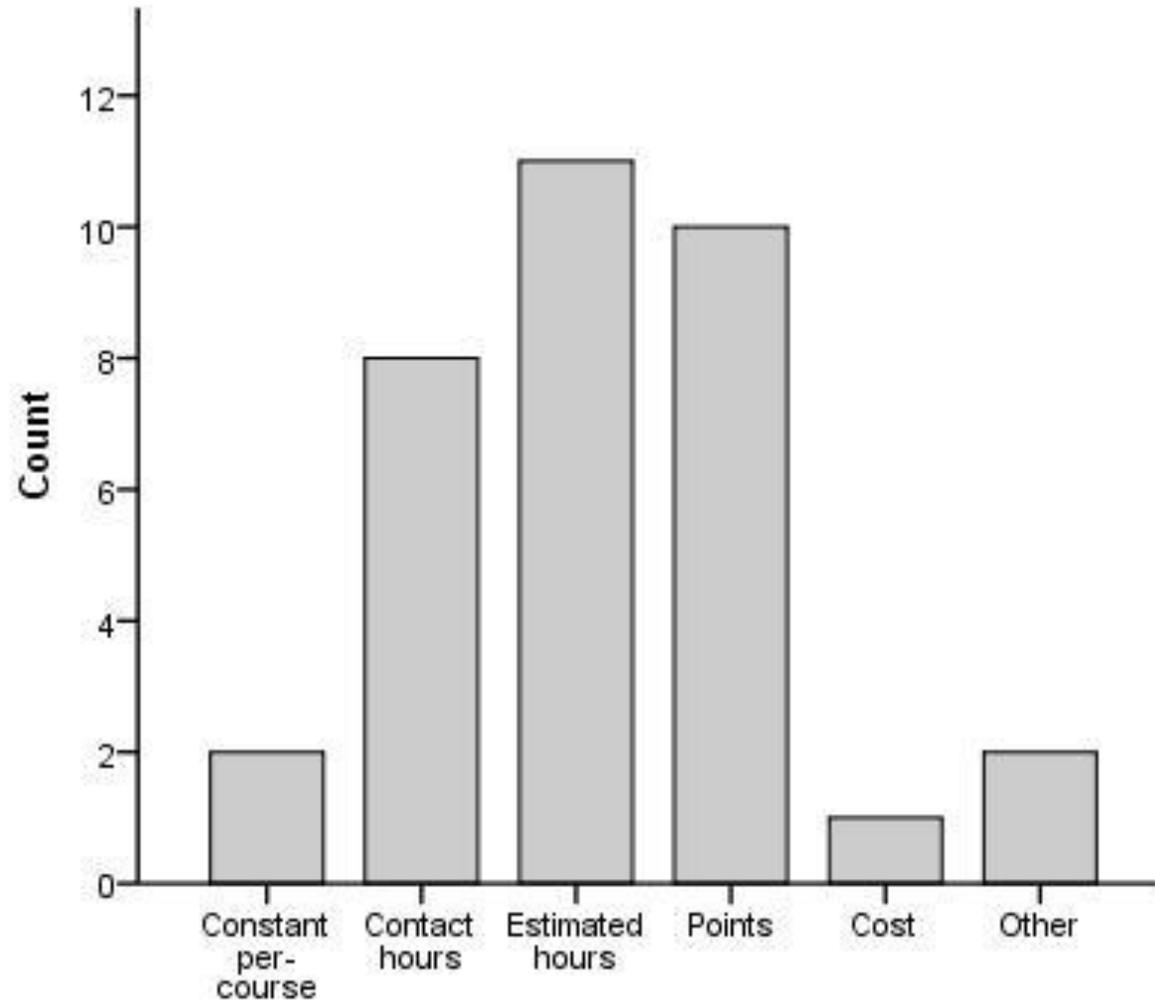


Research and Service allocations

- No specific duties: about 55% in both cases
 - Service is usually a standard allocation
 - Research is standard or performance based
- Specific allocations:
 - Research: 30% of respondents
 - Supervision? Grant applications?
 - Service: 45% of respondents
 - Program Coordination? Committee work?



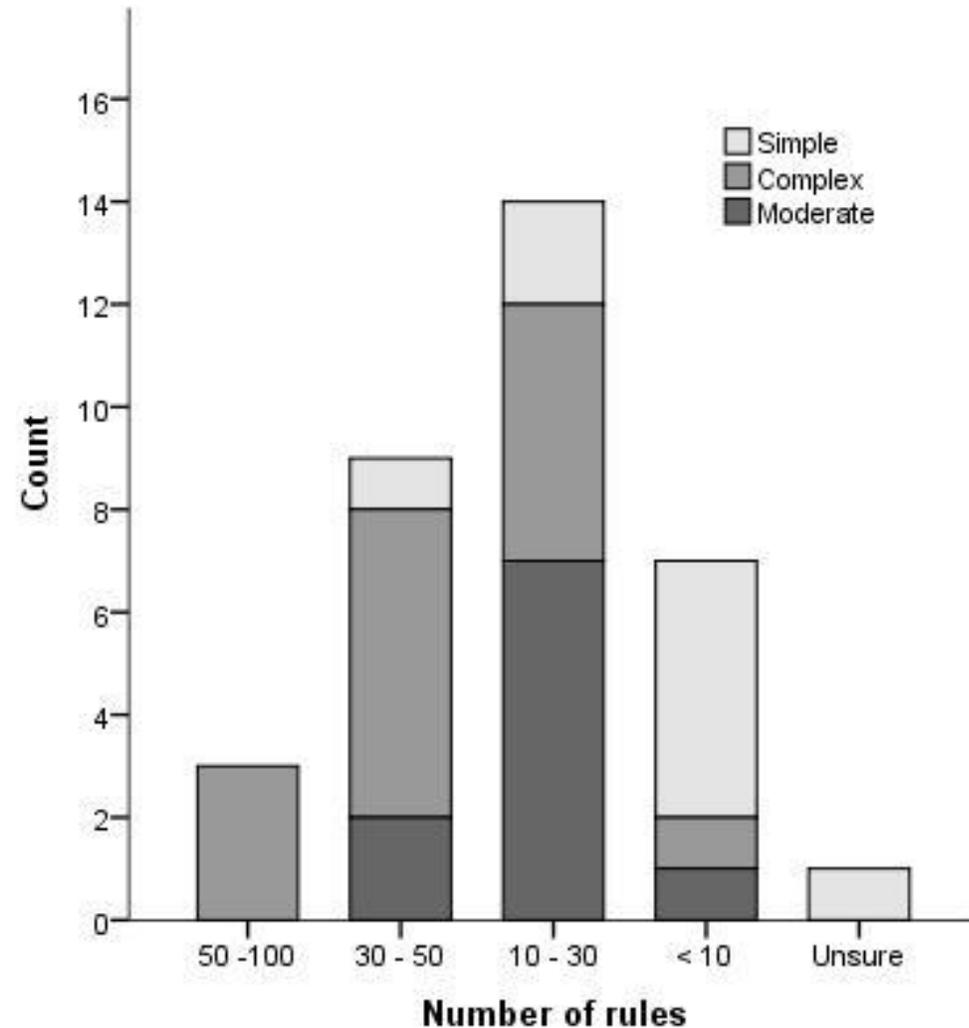
Teaching allocation



- *How is teaching modelled?*
- 64% use estimate (hours or points).
- Contact hours still popular.

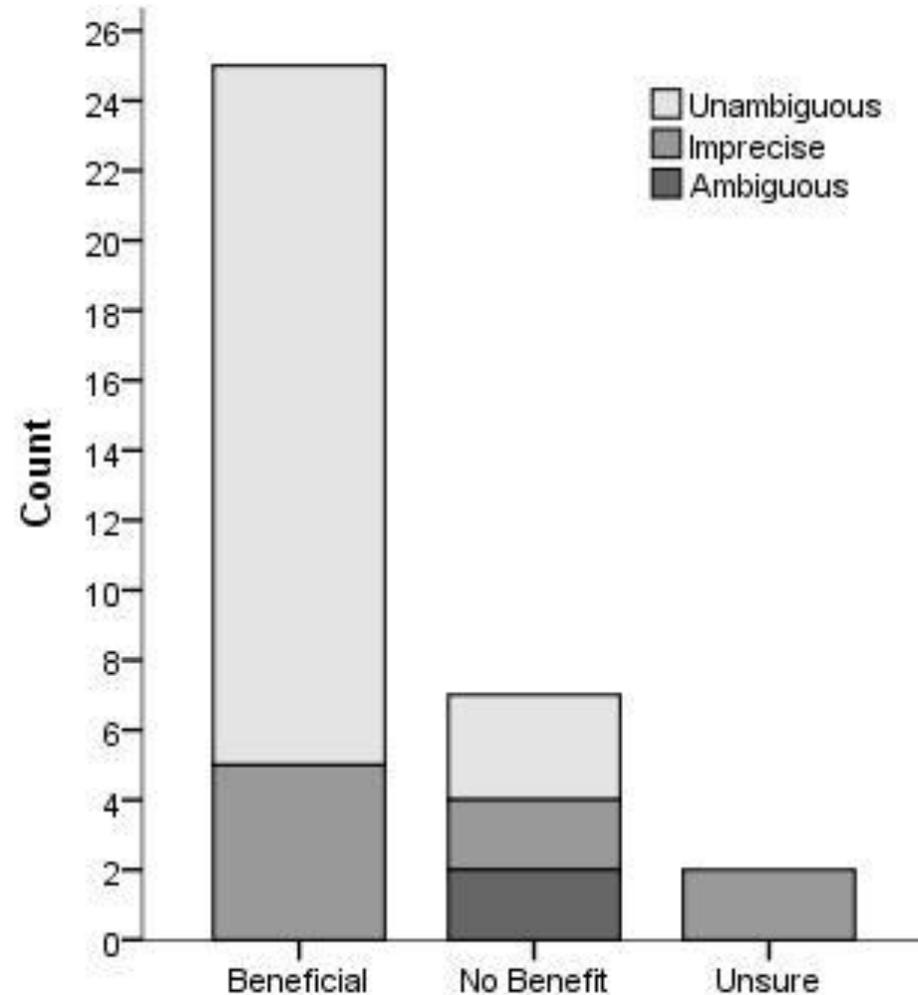


Model size and complexity



- Wide range of rules
- Models with more rules are seen as complex
- Some variation in understanding of 'complex'

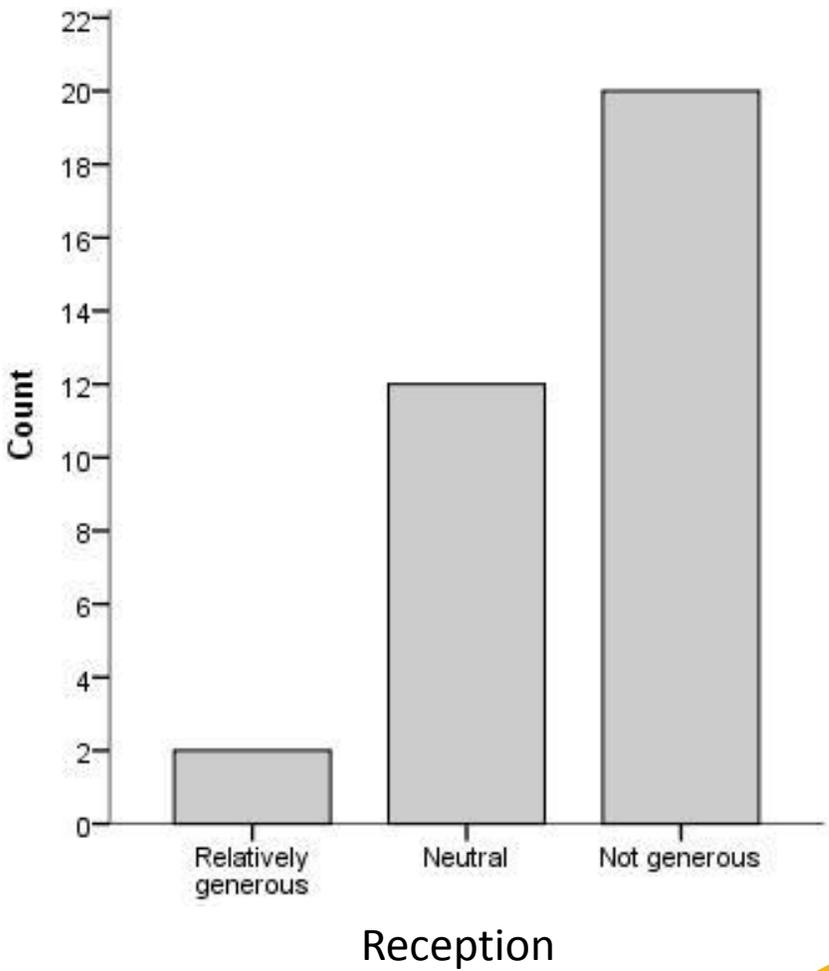
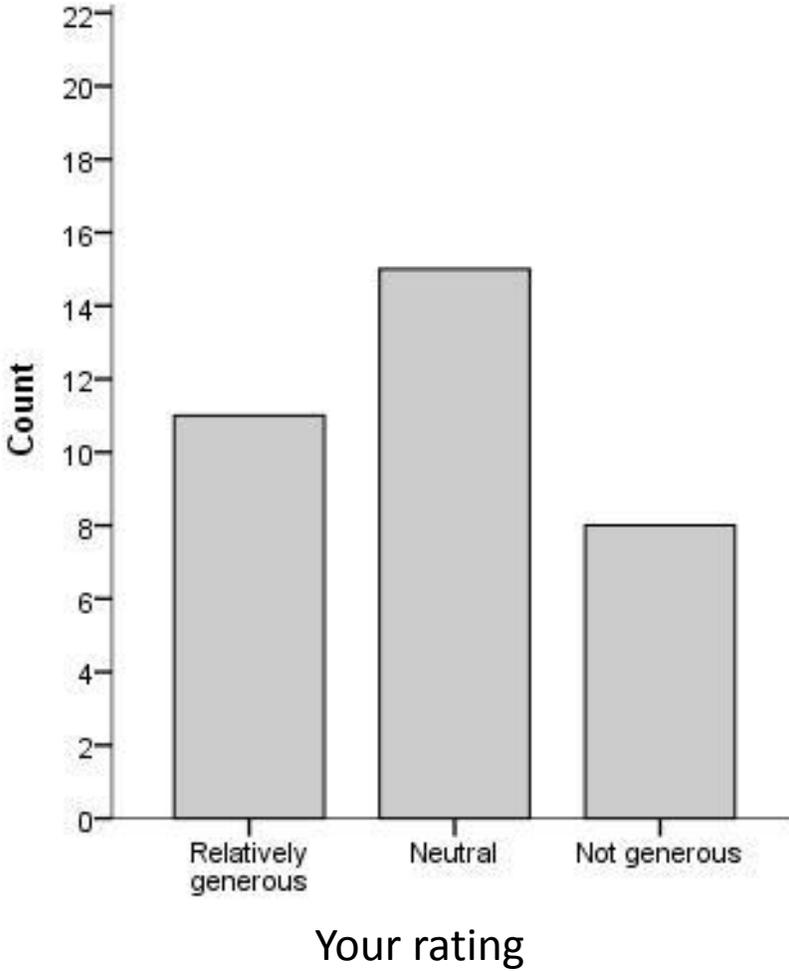
Utility and Clarity



- Strong association between clarity and benefit

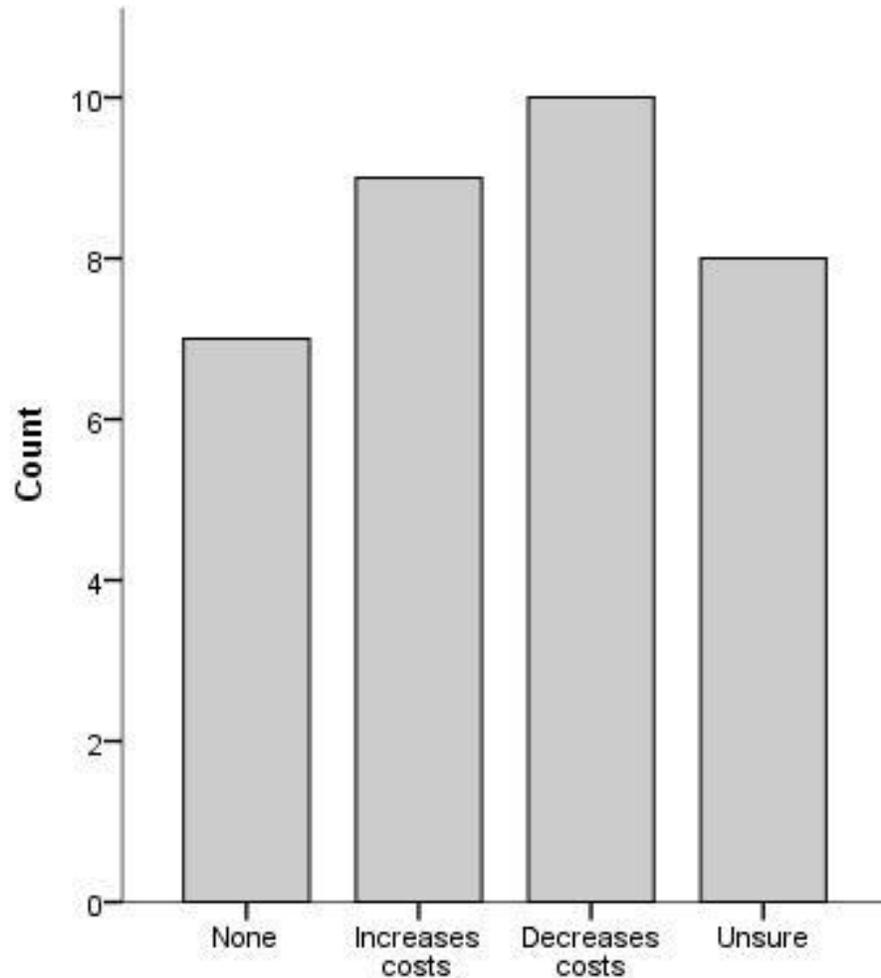


Generosity





Financial impact of model



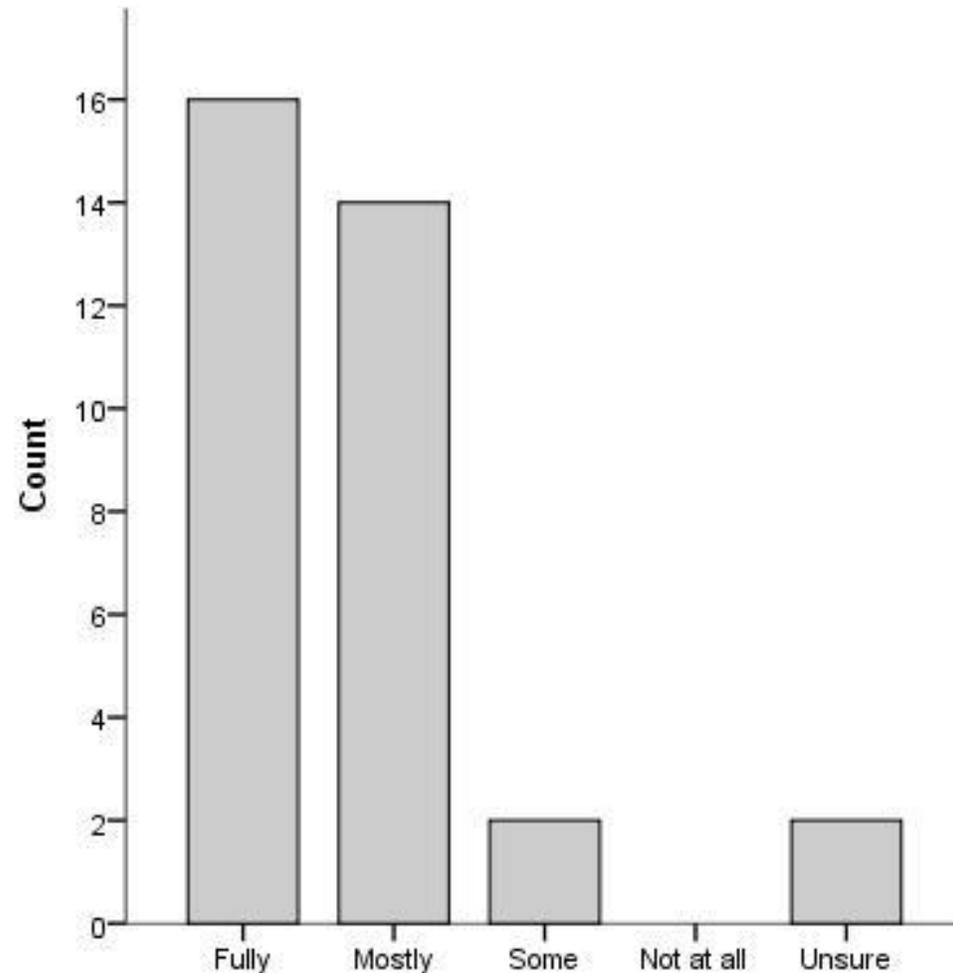
- 90% of 'reduces cost' respondents had 'ungenerous' models
- BUT only 11% of 'increases cost' respondents had 'generous' models



Policy and process

- Issues are unclear
 - Focus on issues from workload manager perspective
- 9 questions
- Results are mostly unsurprising
For example: 88% of workload allocation done by section manager or associated academic.

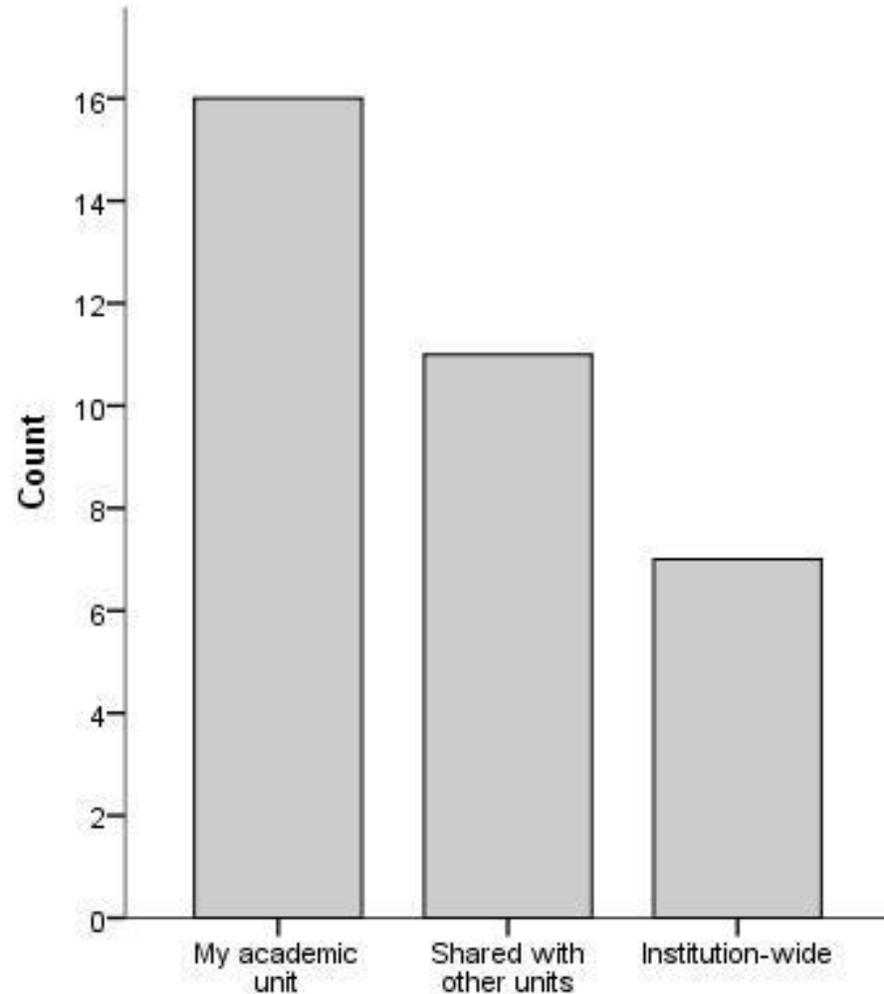
Enterprise Agreement Compliance



- 88% fully or mostly EA compliant



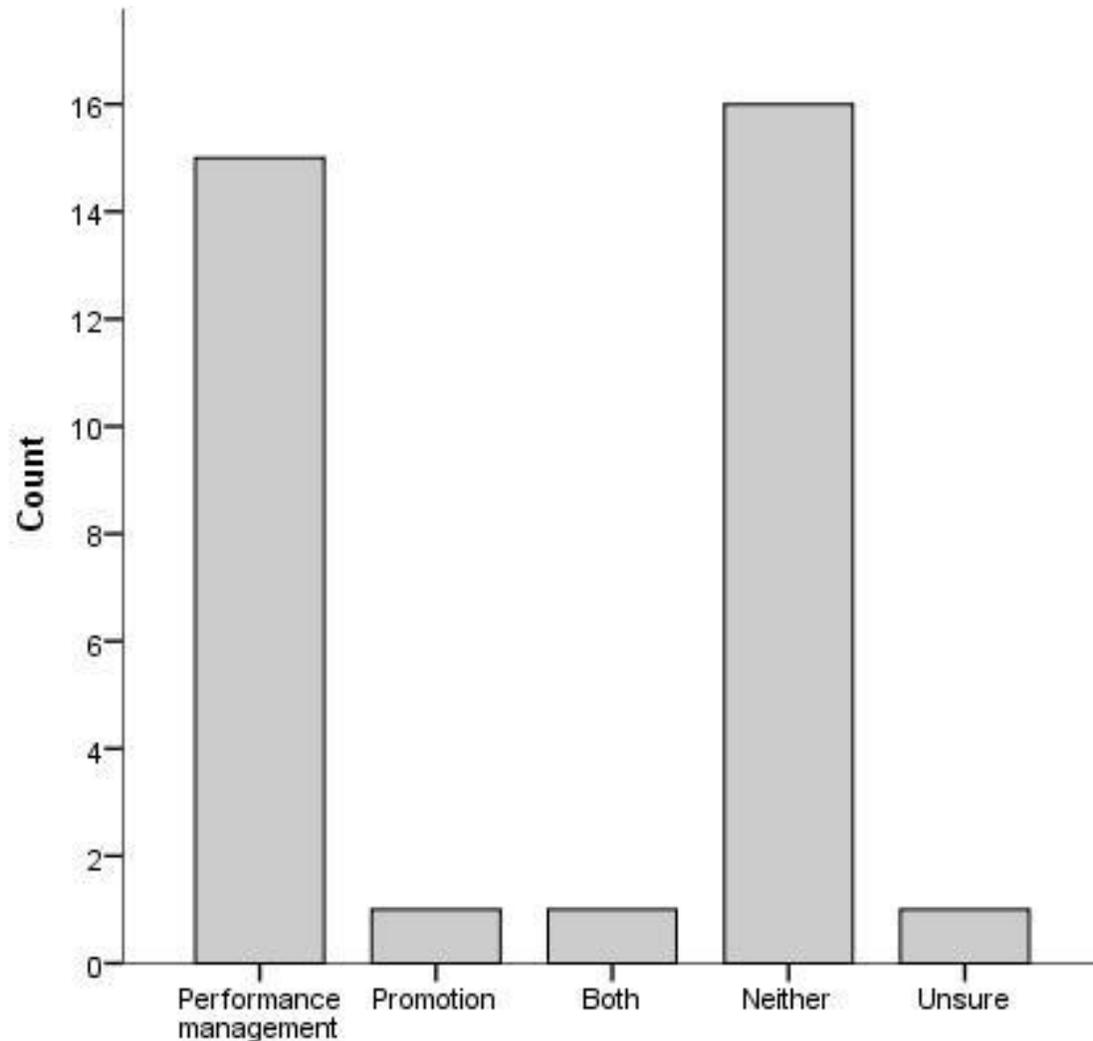
Process locality



- Institution-wide process is strongly associated with institution-wide software support.



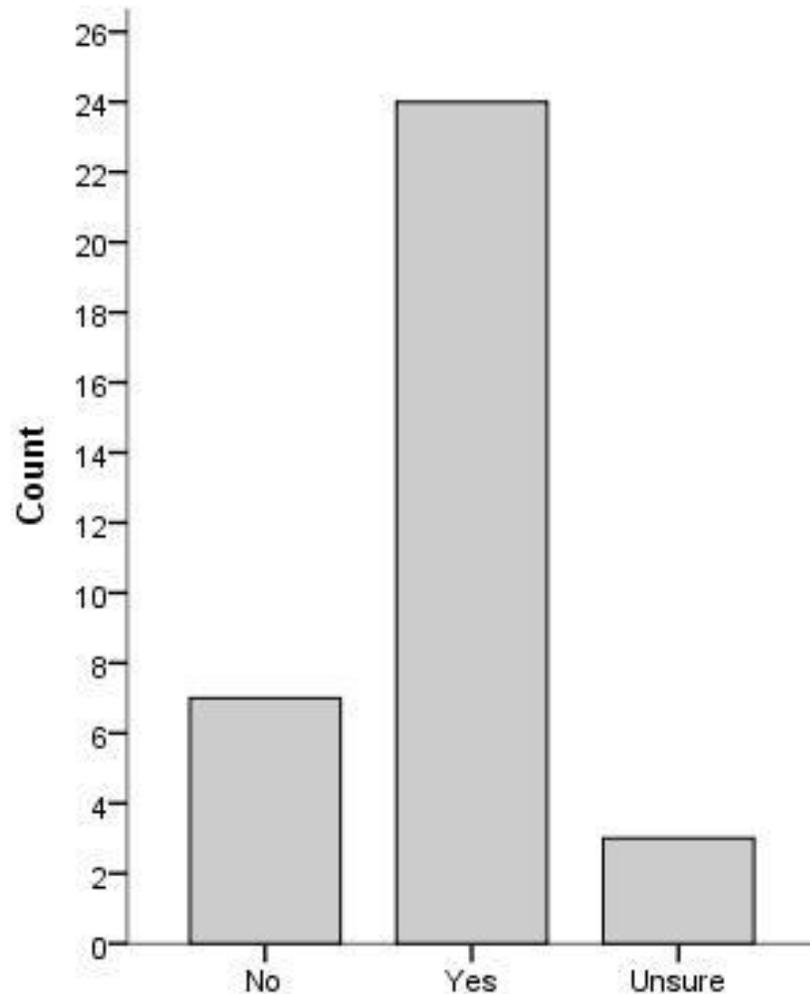
Promotion and Performance



- *How well is workload management integrated with standard HR processes?*
- Not well – only half!
- Promotion almost invisible



Perceived efficiency



- *Is the process seen to be efficient?*
- No association was observed between these perceptions and model characteristics such as model complexity

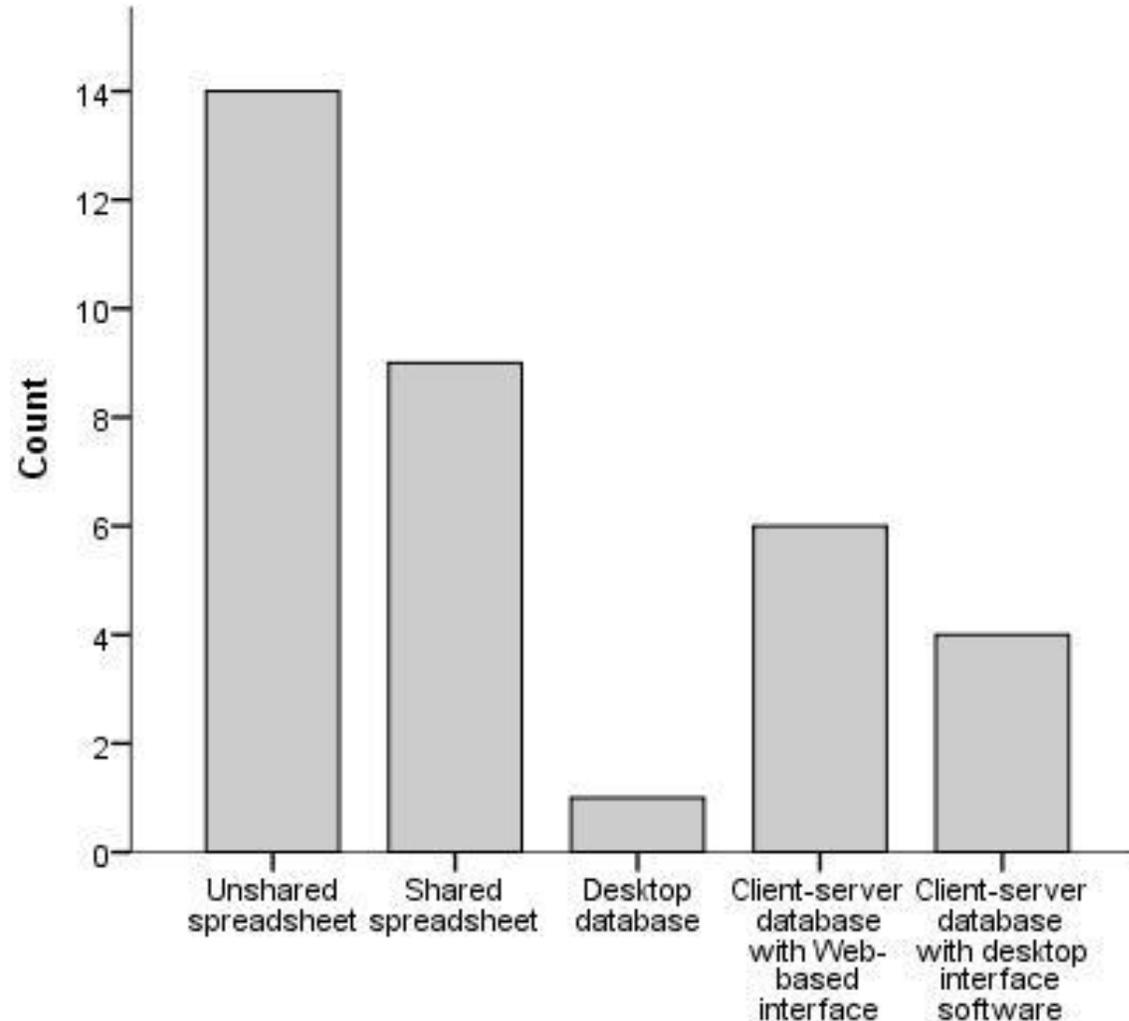


Software and systems

- 5 questions
- Key issues:
 - *Data integrity*: spreadsheet vs. database
 - *Visibility*: Single vs. multi-user systems
 - *Genericity*: breadth of deployment



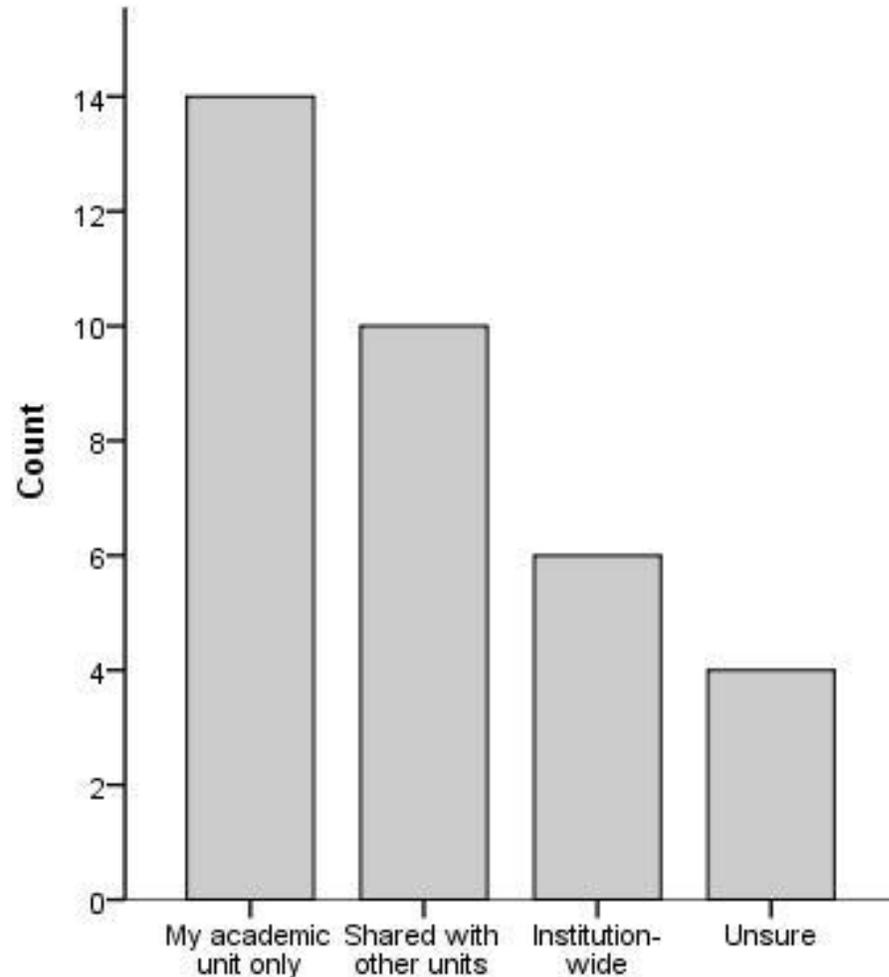
Software Architecture



- 68% spreadsheet
- 32% database
- > 44% unshared
- Relatively unsophisticated tools



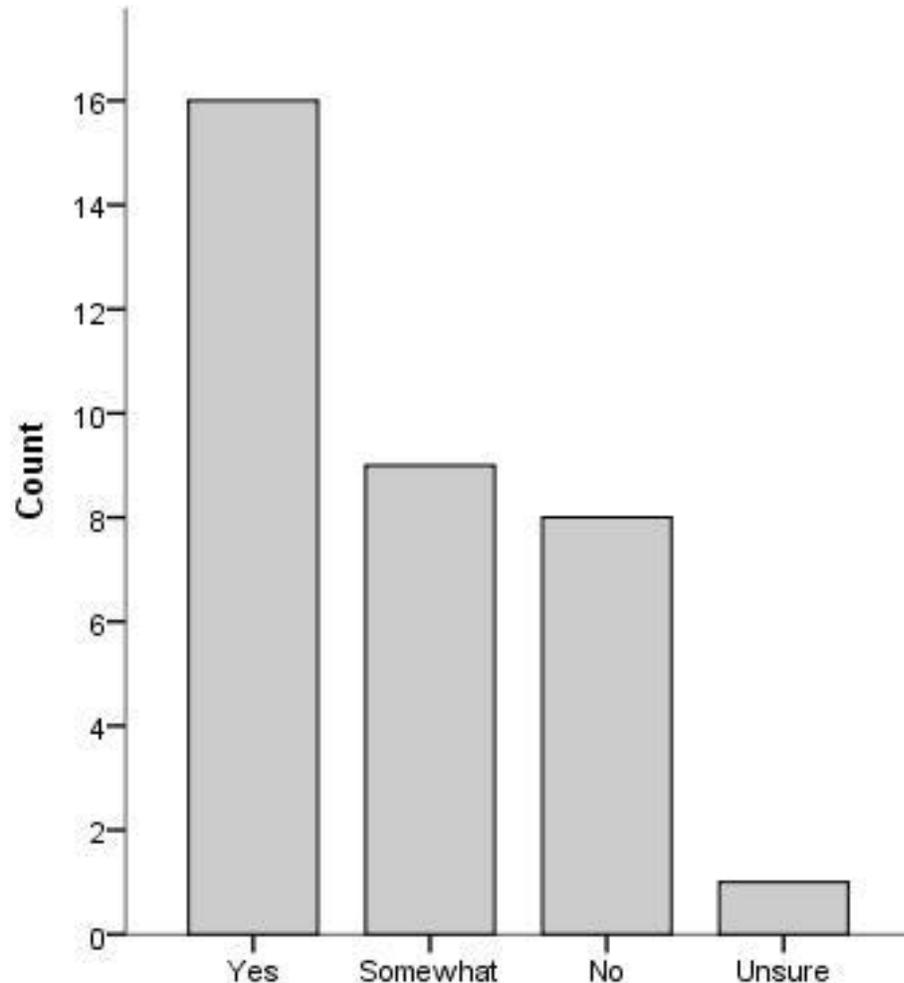
Scale of Deployment



- *All* institution-wide deployed models use an institution-wide software platform (and vice versa)



Transparency



- *Can staff see each other's workload?*
- Transparency is a contentious issue among workload managers
- About half are fully transparent
- Expect this to increase over time



Conclusions: multi-choice questions

- Small size and bias precludes definitive conclusions
- Larger sample will allow statistically valid cross tabulations
- Some indication of dominant practice
 - Variable proportion Service/Research/Teaching
 - Points/hour estimate used to allocate teaching
 - Mostly EA compliant
 - Mostly transparent
 - Institutional model \Leftrightarrow institutional tools



Consistent association

‘Model works for me’ is strongly associated with:

- Clarity of model
- Alignment with performance management
- Efficiency of use
- Deans
- Estimated hours model for teaching
- Model judged to be relatively generous
- Moderate rule complexity



Free text questions

1. Issues with their current workload model (16 responses)
2. What alternatives/improvements would they suggest?
(8 responses: 7 expressed dissatisfaction with current model)
3. Issues with current policy/process (13 responses)
4. Issues with overall workload tool (9 responses)



Workload model issues

- Research as a driver for time allocation with consequent negative impact on teaching
- Difficulty of catering for on-line teaching
- Impact on staff behaviour
 - unwillingness to accept additional duties
 - limitations on experimentation in teaching
- Difficulty of identifying and quantifying all aspects of academic work



Alternatives and improvements

- Need flexibility to cater for new types of work
- Need a simpler system
- Better alignment of income to work allocation



Process issues

- Planning when enrollment numbers unknown.
- No formal model review process for adding new kinds of work, changing weighting values.
- Equity in allocation models between Schools and Faculties.
- Integration with other university systems.
E.g. performance management.



Emerging themes

- System flexibility to adapt to the changing nature of work
- System simplicity
- System integration with other university data bases
- Can workload management systems operate effectively independently of other university processes, eg performance management, income generation?
- Balancing teaching, research and service.



These survey results have ...

- contributed to our understanding of model design and deployment issues
- informed subsequent research
 - TEMC'2014: “Designing a Blended Model”
 - Universities HR Benchmarking Conference – September 2015
 - Ongoing project with LHMI: models and staff workloads
- informed our own software development project
 - WAMS3 <https://tau.usq.edu.au/wams3/pub/> <[live site](#)>



Questions?