

What's Next for Collection Management and Managers?

Successful Collaboration

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Collaboration is not new to libraries and library professionals. There are an ample number of successful examples of library collaboration in the United States and Canada, especially related to collection development and management. In the United States, a long history of systemwide planning within the University of California (UC) system developed into a stellar model of collaboration among the UC campus libraries. The UC system's successes, such as the establishment of two shared storage facilities or the formation of Melvyl as an integrated access point for materials in all UC libraries, culminated in 1997 with the creation of the California Digital Library or CDL (University of California Libraries 2009). The CDL originated as one of four strategies put forth in the final report of the UC's Library Planning and Action Initiative Advisory Task Force. This Task Force was charged to "identify organizational, budgetary, and functional changes required to ensure the continued scholarly and economic vitality of the University of California's (UC) libraries" (University of California 1998, 3). Specifically the Task Force sought to visualize some effective and collaborative means of confronting an increasingly unsustainable model of scholarly communication, largely the serials economic crisis, that threatened "the ability of UC's libraries to support adequately the University's education, research, and public service missions" (University of California 1998, 3).

On the other side of the continent, cooperative collection development efforts between Duke University and the University of North Carolina began in the 1930s. The "visionary Presidents and Librarians of Duke University and the University at North Carolina used funds

from the General Education Board to overcome the economic limitations imposed by the Depression and, through cooperation, begin to build the world-class institutions of higher learning and libraries they have now become”(Research Triangle Cooperative Collections 2005). In the 1950s, North Carolina State University joined the cooperative venture known presently as the Triangle Research Library Network (TRLN); North Carolina Central University became a TRLN member in 1995.

In Canada, a premier example of collaboration has to be the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN). A not for profit organization, CRKN is a direct and successful descendant of the Canadian National Site Licensing Project (CNSLP), an initiative that the Canadian academic and research library community established to help secure and maintain better access to research content for Canadian researchers. According to its website, “CRKN provides desktop access to electronic versions of scholarly journals and research databases for 72 participating universities across Canada. Currently, more than 2,200 scholarly journals are available online to over 650,000 university researchers and students” (Canadian Research Knowledge Network 2008). What is so remarkable about CRKN is that Canadian higher education community only includes about 100 universities and roughly 800,000 faculty and students (deBruijn 2006, Licensing). That means that CRKN provides equitable access to content for approximately 81 percent of the higher education community.

All of these collaborations can claim that harsh economic realities influenced their genesis, whether that reality was the Great Depression or the not so great serials crisis spawned in the 1980s. Given the 2008 global economic downturn, clearly collection managers ought to deduce that our future should be ripe with collaborative opportunities. While it is interesting to recap some of the successes that libraries have had working together, I find myself asking: What

needs to be in place to make collaboration across libraries successful?

Certainly excellent communication is key. Years ago at a workshop for the University of South Carolina Library System, George J. Soete, ARL library consultant, stated that simply sharing information is the first and perhaps most important step on the road to cooperative collection development. Not sharing books or journals or catalogs or storage facilities—just information. That particular workshop took place in the pre-email era making communication among potential partners harder to maintain since we would have had to rely on faxes, phone, and face to face meetings. Since then, technology has eased the burden of communication. Email, listserves, wikis, blogs, project management software, and other interactive tools will be the underpinning of our collaborations as we move forward. For those of us interested in more personal interactions while going green, we can replicate face to face meetings through voice and video conferencing.

While searching the published library literature and the Internet for wisdom about collaboration, I serendipitously happened upon a white paper authored by and/or for an IT company known as Mongoose Technology. Based on sociologist Cynthia Typaldos' work investigating the 12 Principles of CommunityTM, Mongoose's white paper puts forth 12 Principles of CollaborationTM in an attempt to "help define and drive the development of successful web communities" (Mongoose 2001, 4).

These 12 Principles are interesting in and of themselves, but because most library collaboration in the future will occur on the Web, these 12 Principles may bear repeating for the relevance they have for library communities:

- Purpose: Community exists because the members share a common purpose which can only

be accomplished jointly.

- Identity: Members can identify each other and build relationships.
- Reputation: Members build a reputation based on the expressed opinions of others.
- Governance: The facilitators and members of the community assign management duties to each other, allowing the community to grow.
- Communication: Members must be able to interact with each other.
- Groups: Community members group themselves according to specific interests or tasks.
- Environment: A synergistic organizational and institutional environment enables community members to achieve their purpose.
- Boundaries: The community knows why it exists and what or who is outside and inside.
- Trust: Building trust between members and with community facilitators increases group efficiency and enables conflict resolution.
- Exchange: The community recognizes forms of exchange values, such as knowledge, experience, support, barter or money.
- Expression: The community itself has a "soul" or "personality"; members are aware of what other community members are doing.
- History: The community must keep track of past events and must react and change in response to it. (Kodhandaraman 2006).

Upon examining the mission statements or principles for most library consortia, you will find that these 12 Principles share some similarities with them. Both note the need for collaborative efforts or initiatives to create a statement of purpose, identify jointly held values, define membership categories, and support effective means of communication among members.

In an interview in FastCompany magazine, Typaldos restated the principles as questions “Are we able to share information and ideas that fit our purpose?” “What tells us that it's safe to deal with other people in the community?” “How can we build trust?” ([Mieszkowski 2000](#)). What interests me most about these Principles is how they might be repurposed (even simply restating them as questions) to assess and/or improve our collaborations.

In the same interview, Typaldos stressed that an online community is not significantly different from a community that meets and interacts offline. She said:

“Tone of voice, facial expressions, body language -- these are tools that people use to communicate, but they aren't fundamental to building community. In fact, most ideas about online communities focus too much on the digital tools that people use to communicate: bulletin boards, chat rooms, email lists. What really make or break a community are issues of trust and identity, clarity of purpose, and boundaries -- the same issues that affect real-world communities” ([Mieszkowski 2000](#)).

In our collaborations, collection managers, and libraries in general, need to pay attention to the issues of trust and identity. Excellent communication ought to pave the way for building trust and identity, but I believe that what Typaldos was trying to say is that the best tools, whether digital applications or communication tools, don't guarantee that trust will be developed and identities or boundaries clearly drawn.

In an essay on Canadian and international library cooperation, Timothy Mark provides an important clue to overcoming the trust and identity barriers. Mark drives home the importance of taking care of business at home before partnering with other libraries or other library

coalitions. Mark states:

Each library must have a clear idea of the community which it serves - its composition, its characteristics and its expectations. It should also know, of course, how it expects to meet these expectations in terms of collections, staffing and services. The needs of the home community are paramount. To neglect them is to do so at one's professional peril. If each library has its own clear vision as to its mission, guiding principles, goals and objectives then perhaps there will be less danger that the urgent questions will obscure the important ones. (These might not be one and the same) (Mark 2007, 3).

Mark goes on to describe a continuum with full autonomy on one end and full coalition at the other end. He plainly states the conventional wisdom we already know about collaborating—that in order to collaborate, an individual library must surrender some of its independent decision making ability in order to “gain strength in numbers and resources” (Mark 2007, 5).

What bugs me is that we have not optimized our strength in numbers. At least in collection management and development, we continue to measure our success largely in the number of deliverables we gain. Examine any number of library consortia sites and you will find evidence tauting the dollars saved via group purchases or the number of articles and books shared. We are pleased with ourselves when we negotiate 5 percent inflation in some Big Deal even when most of us will not be seeing a 5 percent augment in our materials budgets. How has this model of collaboration changed since Duke University and the University of North Carolina began sharing decades ago?

By no means is this meant to denigrate our past efforts at collaboration or suggest we throw in the towel because it is all a lost cause. Maybe it is time to recognize that our model has not completely embraced an important distinction between cooperation and collaboration. So often we use the two terms interchangeably, but are they really? In his well-conceived article on library collaboration, Murray Sheperd delineates the differences between the two. He uses concepts like “less formal,” “without risk,” “without structure and formal planning,” “communication only as required,” “local authority retained” to describe cooperation. He describes collaboration as “benefitting all participants,” “taking mutual risk,” “development of joint strategies,” “shared ownership and accountability,” and “distributed leadership” (Shepherd 2004, 1-2). CRKN Executive Director Deb deBruijn also distinguishes between just cooperating and collaborating when discussing the success of CNSLP. She exhorts libraries to “look beyond institutional self-interest” and to “build interdependence” (deBruijn 2006, Digital Content, 22).

I would conclude by saying that if we want to engender and sustain successful collaboration, we need to build on our past successes and reputations and deepen the trust fostered there to use our “strength in numbers” in a different way. Looking beyond our own individual doorsteps, we as collection managers could become a force shaping the future contours of scholarly publishing just like the Greater Western Library Alliance did when it expressed its dissatisfaction at the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s decision to withdraw Science content from the JStor platform. More of us could also unite in a single voice influencing state, regional, provincial, or national policy with messages like the CRKN conveyed, “Research content IS infrastructure” (deBruijn 2006, Licensing). We can and should intensify our collaborative efforts and make them transformative.

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