Working Together: Building Collaboration between Librarians and Information Technologists

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CNI's Working Together professional development program is designed to provide institutional teams of librarians and information technologists with the tools they need to work collaboratively on projects of mutual interest and need. The development of the Internet and networked information content has provided the impetus for many collaborative projects on campuses, bringing together the content and service skills of librarians and the networking and technical skills of information technologists. The Working Together program provides participants with a conceptual framework for successful collaboration, a means of analyzing collaborative situations, and a process for developing successful collaborations in the home institution.

The Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) was formed in 1990 by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and two computing organizations, CAUSE and Educom. The heads and governing bodies of CNI's sponsoring associations felt that bringing together the content expertise of librarians with the networking expertise of information technologists could help enrich the developing Internet, which had up to that point focused primarily on large scientific experiments and communication between scientists. The CNI founders believed that the Internet could become a virtual library for the academic community, and that librarians could develop, select, and service content while technologists built a network infrastructure for higher education and the larger community.

Early in CNI's history the program of work was organized around themes, including architectures and standards, commercial publishing, transformation of scholarly communication, directories and navigational services, and government information. These themes primarily addressed network content and technology issues. Two additional themes—Management and Professional Development, and Teaching and Learning—addressed the impact of the network and networked information on institutions, the information professionals within those institutions, and on users. Several years after the launch of CNI, working groups were constituted to develop projects and programs related to each theme. The Management and Professional Development working group took as one of its charges the need to systematically address the process of collaboration between campus librarians and information technologists.

CNI's Working Together program was developed in the early 1990s by the working group on Management and Professional Development.[1] Working Together is a workshop planned to provide institutional teams of librarians and information technologists the opportunity to develop techniques that increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. The workshop also allows teams the opportunity to begin planning processes for specific collaborative projects. From its inception, one of CNI's goals has been the integration of efforts supporting the overall information resources and services mission for institutions. Bringing together librarians and information technologists to facilitate genuine partnership activities was a way of working towards one of CNI's goals.

Early discussion of the workshop by the working group focused on differences in the cultures of librarians and information technologists. The group discussed ways in which those differences might be addressed in a positive light during the workshop. However, the group soon decided that such emphasis might result in a negative atmosphere, emphasizing stereotypes instead of commonalities. The focus shifted from "culture" to "collaboration."

■ Collaboration

Librarians have contracted services from computing centers for a number of years. However, these contractual relationships have little in common with the genuinely collaborative projects that many groups wish to develop in the networked environment. In a contractual relationship, one party states its goals and provides resources, usually financial, to a second party that provides the needed service. In a collaborative relationship, both partners have mutual goals for the project, and each party brings skills and resources to the endeavor. However, many institutional teams embarking on collaborative projects have little understanding of what it takes to forge a successful collaboration. The team members may enter the arrangement with different conceptualizations of the project, divergent views of what resources are necessary, and diverse learning and operational styles.

Collaborative projects have been successfully developed by teams of librarians and information technologists in a number of institutions, such as the Information Arcade at the University of Iowa, the

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development of campus information policies at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, the campus implementations of the TULIP project in a number of universities, and a variety of new courses showcased in CNI's New Learning Communities program.[2] Such collaborative projects have involved the development of facilities, creation of policies, implementation of networked information resources, and teaching and learning. Other efforts have focused on the development of joint service points, technology workshops, and faculty training programs.

However, collaborative projects do not necessarily proceed smoothly on campuses, and many higher education institutions have not even attempted such relationships. Although there is little in the literature that documents the problems in collaborative relationships between librarians and information technologists, three articles do shed some light on several of the issues. Branin, D'Elia, and Lund wrote candidly of their project to develop a joint service unit combining library and computing services, and stated, "Conflicts and competition over access to end users and jurisdictional and resource allocation disputes were as much a part of the experience as were cooperation and collaboration."[3] Schiller surveyed librarians and information technologists about their efforts in Internet training, and reports that librarians were concerned about being "made obsolete" by the computing center, and computing professionals felt they were being "encroached upon" by librarians.[4] Davidson and Rusk reported on the collaborative development of a university Web environment, and found early in the process that differences in underlying values and styles of librarians and information technologists created difficulties in reaching consensus on how the project would proceed.[5]

Collaboration is a new mode of working together in the networked environment.

The planners of the Working Together workshop focused on the reasons for collaboration between librarians and information technologists, especially the environmental factors motivating partnerships. They believed that a deeper appreciation of these factors would convince workshop participants of the genuine need for collaboration, and prevent them from perceiving collaboration as just a fad or a temporary "fix." In addition, the planners felt that workshop participants would require both an understanding of the nature of collaboration and exercises in its practical applications. The planners placed a strong emphasis on practical benefits. They designed the workshop so that attendees would be given time to work on issues of central importance on their own campuses, and return home with an action plan and next steps.

The Workshop

With this vision for the workshop, the Working group turned to Susan Jurow, then head of the Office of Management Services (OMS) of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), to develop the instructional materials. The OMS was known for the high quality of its management workshops and its blending of theory and hands-on activities.

The overall objectives for the workshop are for participants to

- become more effective in working together as partners;
- share some ideas and mental models of collaboration;
- provide time and opportunity to practice skills of collaboration;
- focus these ideas and skills in practical ways on their own work life and organization.

The workshops are structured to move from theory to application of theory in hypothetical situations (case studies), to application of theory and analysis within an institutional collaborative project. Each workshop is facilitated by a librarian and an information technologist. Their partnership is in itself a demonstration of a collaborative effort.[6]

The workshop begins with an identification issues that are sources of pressure or concern for the professionals in their institutions. Participants have identified such topics as increasing overlap in services and functions between library and IT, the difficulty of keeping current with rapidly changing technical developments, the expanding demand for computing support services, difficulty in providing training for the campus and obtaining adequate training for computing and library staff, the need for physical space that is wired and equipped for network access, developing and providing access to electronic information, and monitoring and educating users about copyright and fair use in the electronic environment. The discussion of these issues highlights the many items of mutual concern to librarians and information technologists, as well as some areas where one group has more of a stake than the other.

Next, workshop facilitators provide an introduction to the changing environment in which libraries and computing centers currently operate, and the need for change in how we approach problems, develop services, and respond to institutional needs. Within the context of force-field analysis, which emphasizes the identification of factors that propel individuals and organizations towards change and those that impede individuals and

organizations from making change, the facilitators elicit from the participants the environmental factors in their institutions that have an impact on partnerships between librarians and information technologists.

Working Together participants have identified a number of factors motivating collaboration, including executive mandate in both merged units and in separate units, scarcity of financial resources, the desire to consolidate overlapping functions and activities, the need to incorporate the other professional group's perspectives into project design, the interdependence of librarians and information technologists, the need to develop new services in the networked environment, and overall institutional survival.

Participants also readily identify factors that mitigate against successful partnerships in their institutions. These have included the significant amount of time needed to invest in successful partnerships, lack of financial resources for projects, "territory," campus geography (making face-to-face meetings or development of joint facilities difficult), personality conflicts, differences in organizational culture, lack of respect for the other profession, and failing to see the benefits of partnerships.

The facilitators then move to a discussion of the theory of partnerships or collaboration, deriving their framework from the work of John Henderson.[7] Henderson describes partnerships as working relationships that reflect a longterm commitment, a sense of mutual cooperation, shared risks and benefits, and participatory decision making. In his study of partnerships in the corporate sector, Henderson found that the extent in which these elements were present were critical factors in the success of the partnership or collaboration. The facilitators also discuss derailment factors and identify warning signs that indicate something may be going astray in the partnership.

As a followup to the discussions of environmental factors influencing collaboration and the key elements of partnership, the participants split into small groups and are given a set of case studies. They apply the conceptual framework that has been reviewed earlier in the day to provide some analysis and next steps to the problems posed in the case studies.

After application of theory in a hypothetical situation, the focus of the workshop turns next to the institutional teams in their home context. The participants, working together in their institutional teams, proceed through a set of exercises to begin planning their collaborative project. They discuss issues of mutual importance on campus, identify one project on which they would like to collaborate, and use force-field analysis to analyze driving forces and constraining forces in their institution and in the general environment. Participants next write a goal statement for their project, outline initial steps, and identify key success factors in their local situation. They are instructed to

- discuss what risks and what benefits are associated with this proposed course of action;
- identify the resources needed for the project, such as capital expenses, human resources, ongoing resources, and one-time expenditures;
- suggest governance arrangements, such as formal written agreements, and joint planning groups;
- describe how they will ensure that the partnership will be an ongoing one as the project proceeds.

The workshop concludes with each institutional team sharing the project they have planned with the larger group.

Previous participants have stated that one of the most valuable aspects of the workshop is the time away from day-to-day work to talk with colleagues from the other units and to systematically begin work on a joint project. Many have appreciated the opportunity to learn about collaborative projects on other campuses, and others have benefited from time to reflect on the elements of a successful collaboration. Participants have also stated that they liked the emphasis on the commonalities and convergence between librarians and information technologists compared with a focus on differences and distinctive competencies.

One decision made early on was to make no distinction between institutions whose libraries and technology units had been administratively merged and those that have remained separate. The workshop is neutral on that issue, while recognizing that it is a factor in how the professional groups work together in an institution.

The workshop has been offered in a variety of formats and has been held in half-day, full day, and two day sessions. The first workshop targeted senior administrators of libraries and IT and was held over two days in the fall of 1994. Most frequently, Working Together has been offered as a preconference to the CAUSE/CNI regional conferences that have been held in various parts of the country and in the U.K. These preconferences are generally full-day programs. In addition, Working Together programs have been offered on individual campuses. In those instances, many more team members from campus units can participate than in off-campus programs, when travel expenses mitigate against large numbers of participants from a single institution.

Academic administrators, media developers, and instructional designers have also participated in the Working Together program. Although the workshops have been targeted at higher education institutions, other types of institutions have participated. The broad

focus on collaboration in the first part of the workshop, and the narrow focus on institutional priorities in the latter part have accommodated a broad range of people, perspectives, and projects. The workshops are highly interactive, with sharing among the full group, pairs of institutional teams, and the individual institutional teams.

■ Impact and Future Development

While we have not implemented longitudinal assessment measuring the impact of Working Together attendance on collaborative projects at institutions, we have anecdotal reports that the workshop assisted participants in better defining issues for their campus, gave them the time to think clearly about collaboration, and provided a platform for future growth of collaborative projects.

Working Together has had an impact outside of the U.S. In June, 1997, Gerry Bernbom and Joan Day facilitated a Working Together workshop at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. As an outcome of that program, the British are planning a campus workshop with one institution to test the Working Together model and, if successful, disseminate the workshop at the campus level to the broad U.K. higher education community.

In 1998, CNI received a grant from the National Historical Preservation and Records Commission to develop and implement a Working Together program for archivists and information technologists. That program is currently in the planning phase.

As the Working Together facilitators refine and revise the curriculum for the workshop, they will pay particular attention to broadening the examples used to include additional professional groups beyond librarians and information technologists. At a recent Working Together workshop, 20 percent of the attendees had titles related to instructional technology or distance learning. As we have seen in CNI's New Learning Communities program, a wide variety of parties need to be involved in collaborations for successful networked teaching and learning programs.

Working Together has helped CNI make progress towards its goal of assisting librarians and information technologists work together collaboratively to build networks and networked information infrastructures for institutions. Collaboration cannot be taken for granted in higher education institutions; it is something that is difficult to achieve and requires genuine commitment from the parties involved. Working Together has provided many institutional teams with skills that will allow them to build successful collaborations within their institutions.

References and Notes

1. Working group leaders Meredith Butler, SUNY Albany and Martha Fields, State University System of Florida led the effort with a committee including Gerry Bernbom, Indiana University, Susan Perry, Mt. Holyoke College, Julia Rudy, CAUSE, and the author.

2. Joan K. Lippincott, "Team-Building, Collaboration, and the Reengineering of Library Services," in *Finding Common Ground*, Cheryl LaGuardia, and B. A. Mitchell, eds. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1998 and a theme issue of *CAUSE/EFFECT*, volume 17 (Fall, 1994) provide an overview of collaborative projects. References for projects referred to are: Anita Lowry, "The Information Arcade at the University of Iowa," *CAUSE/EFFECT* 17, no. 3 (1994): 38–44; William H. Graves, C. G. Jenkins, and Anne S. Parker, "Development of an Electronic Information Policy Framework," *CAUSE/EFFECT* 18 (Summer, 1995): 15ñ23; Nancy Gusack and Clifford A. Lynch, eds., "Special Theme: The TULIP Project," *Library Hi Tech* 13, no. 4 (1995): 7–74; CNI's New Learning Communities Program, http://www.cni.org/projects/nlc/.

3. Joseph J. Branin, George D'Elia, and Douglas Lund, "Integrating Information Services in an Academic Setting: The Organizational and Technical Challenge," *CAUSE/EFFECT* 17, no. 3 (1994): 26–31, 36–37.

4. N. Schiller, "Internet Training and Support Academic Libraries and Computer Centers: Who's Doing What?" *Internet Research* 4, no. 2 (1994): 35–47.

5. Jeanne Davidson and Cherie Rusk, "Creating a University Web in a Team Environment," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22 (July, 1996): 302–05.

6. Facilitators have included Gerry Bernbom, Indiana University; Malcolm Brown, Dartmouth College; Kathryn Deiss, Association of Research Libraries; Susan Jurow, now at the College and University Personnel Association (CUPA); and, Susan Perry, Mt. Holyoke College.

7. John Henderson, "Plugging into Strategic Partnerships: The Critical IS Connection," *Sloan Management Review* 31 (Spring, 1990): 7–18.