Going "All-in" for Deep Collaboration

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Regular collaboration can be defined at its most basic level as two or more people working together to achieve some end result. As a tool, collaboration has gained wide acceptance with abundant literature, and with a general sense within the profession that by collaborating we are following a future-directed, logical path during austere times. This perception of collaboration is summarized by Gajda who sees collaboration as way to achieve results that are not possible by an organization working alone. He say, "in an age of scare resources, competition, and complex community issues – organizational collaboration is essential." I would argue that if collaboration is a good choice, then deeper collaboration might well be a better one. I am not alone in this opinion, as quoted in this journal before, William Jordan recently summed up this sentiment as "libraries have a choice, we can collaborate or we can die!"

The term deep collaboration appears in articles on shared print collection (Lawrence), library and faculty partnerships (Leeder), digitization collaborative (Courant and Wilkins), integrated library systems (Winkler and McDonald), and school librarian and teachers collaborations (Stafford and Stemple). While use of the term in the library literature is still relatively new, deep collaboration is appearing with increasing frequency in conversations, blogs, press releases, and conference programs. Deep collaboration is frequently applied to library projects like Kauli Ole, HathiTrust, Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), and to several next generation integrated library systems.

Perhaps one of the clearest signs of the rising importance of the concept is a 2011 Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) symposium on deep collaboration. The symposium organizers asked "What does it take to engage in deep collaboration – to share resources and expertise with the goal of improving services and realizing benefits beyond the individual organization?" Three initiatives were presented, including a system for an open-access, general purpose repository; cross-disciplinary discovery tools; and a virtual research environment for the arts and humanities. Interestingly, the symposium summary stated, "Collaboration does not necessarily save money, but it will make things possible that wouldn't otherwise be possible."

So why are libraries engaging in deep collaboration? Lawrence sums up the main reason why libraries collaborate stating, "it is evident that any single library, even the largest, is really too small to compete successfully in today's information technology and publishing marketplace." Waibel argues that "collaborative activities exist on a continuum of low investment / reward to high investment / reward," with the deep collaboration quadrant having the ability to be transformative for participating institutions. The trend is to move along a continuum advancing from CONTACT to COOPERATION to COLLABORATION to CONVERGENCE.

Defining Deep Collaboration

Many library writers have taken a stab at defining collaboration, with most drawing a distinction between cooperation and collaboration. Merriam-Webster defines collaboration as "to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor." The typical construct is summarized by Wheeler and Hilton as cooperation being defined in terms of "agreeing to abide by a set of common rules or principles," while collaboration is seen as requiring "greater levels of engagement and goal alignment." Montiel-Overall stated "collaboration is a ubiquitous term" with definitions varying across professional and academic disciplines.

So at its most basic, collaboration is two or more people working together to achieve some end

result. The general assumption is that with collaboration shared goals are defined, agreements are reached, and joint learning takes place together with the hope of maximizing the outcome (Kossuth). In 2008, the Ohio State University Libraries' Collaboration Task Force examined many sources and came up with what I consider one of the best working definitions: "Collaboration is two or more people or organizations combining their resources and work together to achieve a common and mutually-beneficial goal."

So with that definition of 'collaboration', how is 'deep collaboration' different? The following characteristics have been applied to deep collaboration, including:

- Clearly defined, shared vision among participants
- Greater level of engagement, time commitments, and goal alignment
- Higher levels of responsibility, risk, and commitment
- Optimization of information resources and staff expertise
- Significant imagination and perseverance
- Ability to adapt and change as the process evolves and deepens
- Reciprocity and congeniality, and staff skilled in negotiation and compromise
- Shared power and decision-making

From these considerations, I believe a working definition of deep collaboration, borrowing heavily from Ohio State, could be: *Deep Collaboration is two or more people or organizations contributing substantial levels of personal or organizational commitment, including shared authority, joint responsibility, and robust resources allocation, to achieve a common or mutually-beneficial goal.*

The "All-in" Trend

The defining hallmark of deep collaboration is a willingness to put more organizational resources and staff efforts into collaborative ventures. As Lawrence said, it is unlikely that any institution today considers itself able to meet all the resource needs of its patrons. This need to expand the resource base is pushing libraries into going 'all-in' on collaboration. Library leaders are

showing they are more willing to give up autonomy than in the past, and are also more willing to commit to whatever it takes to make deep collaboration work. To borrow from modern political parlance, in many cases this commitment to deep collaborative projects is now so deep that failure is no longer an option. Many new, large collaborative efforts have become too big to fail.

Examples of these projects that are too big to fail include HathiTrust. At its center, HathiTrust is a worldwide partnership of sixty major research institutions and libraries working to digitize and preserve the cultural record. At this writing, HathiTrust has nearly eleven million volumes and is growing rapidly. One of the more interesting features of this collaboration is the participants decision to pool resources and expertise to tackle problems that have long need attention such as digital preservation and archiving, meaningful shared collection development, copyright issues, and evolving standards for bibliographic information. HathiTrust is prime example of how large scale collective action on mutual problems can be one of the more positive outcomes of deep collaboration.

Shared catalogs are a common example of collaboration; with many institutions creating shared systems such as the University of California system, the Triangle Research Library Network, Orbis Cascade Alliance, MNPALs, and the Marmot Library Network. What's new in this area is that these catalogs are evolving into deeper platforms for collaboration often based on next generation systems. It is also growing more common to find digital objects and digital collection being purchased by the cooperative, rather than contributed from participating libraries. In addition to contributed print and digital collections, new structures to support shared collection development, technical services, and even shared administration are maturing and deepening. Kauli Ole, a new community-sourced integrated library system, defines its strategic direction as including deep collaboration.

The Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) is the latest example of a deep collaboration. In essence, DPLA is a warehouse of metadata col-

lected from many partners. The DP.LA website has the following statement of purpose: "The DPLA offers a single point of access to millions of items—photographs, manuscripts, books, sounds, moving images, and more—from libraries, archives, and museums around the United States." DPLA started with data from six regional Service Hubs including Minnesota Digital Library, Massachusetts Digital Commonwealth, and Mountain West Digital Library, and six Content Hubs including Harvard University, Smithsonian Institution, and New York Public Library. They have just announced a joint collaboration with HathiTrust. While at this writing DPLA is still in its infancy, its open policy of encourage use of its metadata for new intellectual creations as well as seeking application to be built using its data structures are already making a deep impact on the entire field of digital library management.

The Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) created "The Committee on Coherence at Scale" to look at the impacts of deep collaboration within higher education. The committee wrote, "New digital projects have begun to flourish within higher education that, if successful, would create genuine interdependencies: deep collaborations that could redefine our academic environment." They listed a significant number of digital projects that fit this Coherence at Scale model, including the aforementioned DPLA, HathiTrust and Kauli Ole, but also Linked Open Data, Data Curation, Digital Preservation Network (DPN), DuraSpace, Digging into Data, to name only a few. They see these new initiatives as transforming higher education and academic libraries.

Passive Collaboration Fails

Yet for every example of a successful deep collaboration, most experienced librarians can name two or three major collaboration projects that have failed. Naylor in discussing British consortia cooperation, state that "the history of libraries in the twentieth century provides many examples of attempts at 'deep collaboration'. Some have delivered genuine benefit … almost all have sooner or later failed." Naylor goes on to say that while past experience suggests cooperation is difficult, that with a commitment of

'significant imagination and perseverance' deep collaboration could be successful.

Lawrence states that deep collaboration is the best way to successfully compete for resources, but he also states that collaboration is "deeply challenging and very difficult. It raises complex problems to which current professional practice and available technologies do not offer any ready answers." Lawrence's article outlines the steps that the University of California (UC) libraries are taking to address shared cooperative licensing, bibliographic access, de-selection, space management, financial management, operating system, service models, and organization and administration services. The level of cooperation between the nine UC libraries has, according to Lawrence, become "very complex and highly interdependent." He believes the UC System is starting to see fundamental changes in the way the libraries operate as a result.

In most cases, failed collaborative efforts were based on not fully understanding the amount of leadership, resource commitment, and staff training required for success. Equally important was failing to understand the scope of work involved or the necessary staff time commitments. Further, giving up autonomy can be difficult for both library leadership as well as frontline staff. Finally, lack of true commitment to shared vision and goals coming from a committed leadership has directly led to a number of collaborative failures. In fact, a change in leadership at participating institutions is one of the riskiest times for any collaborative ventures.

Part of changing library's culture to truly accept collaborative projects is a recognition that staff must be provided with an understanding of the importance of the project, adequate training and skills, and time do the actual work. Library leaders must repeatedly explain the long-term benefits of the collaborative project, while building consensus, and they must recognize the need for improving staff skills. Not every staff member comes to the table with a strong skill set in negotiations, communication, and interpersonal relations. Head argues that "while humans may well be disposed to interact in a collaborative fashion, collaboration is nevertheless

a complex and problematic process that requires participants to employ a repertoire of skills… The various parties involved in any collaborative act will come to the task with different backgrounds and knowledge, and only when these are explicit can potential barriers to effective collaboration, such as misunderstanding and misconceptions, be addressed."

The knowledge gained from past failures has been one of the most important factors driving the creation of deep collaboration projects. The working premise here is that deeper levels of commitment will create a new culture within participating organizations. The "all-in" commitment builds towards transformation and convergence which are often seen as the ultimate results of deep collaboration.

Conclusion

This idea that deep collaboration requires substantial resource commitment cannot be underestimated. The commitment to launch into a deep collaborative process is by definition a commitment to providing extensive resources to the project. Wheeler and Hilton describe successful collaboration as "aligning around shared objectives and actively working together to pursue those objectives. Passive collaboration fails. Unbalanced collaboration, in which participants bring different expectations and relative resource commitments to the endeavor, also fails. Collaboration requires an intense and continuous focus on purpose and investment."

The literature suggests that those who clearly define the 'why' and 'how' of collaboration are more likely to succeed. There is a clear trend from cooperation through collaboration to convergence, and this trend is showing the first signs of making substantial impact on higher education, and indeed, in all types of libraries. It is apparent to me that libraries are at the beginning of a new transformation movement with deep collaboration as one of the critical tools. The trend in libraries toward deeper level of organization commitment is fixing some long standing concerns in the library community. The days of libraries as autonomous islands seems a relic of a different era as we continue

numerous, often grand experiments in deep collaboration.

Resources on Deep Collaboration

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