Library collaboration: what makes it work? (Keynote paper)

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"LIBRARY COLLABORATION: What makes it Work?"

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Description:
What elements need to be present to make a collaborative library project work?

Abstract:
In previous papers delivered at IATUL Conferences, I described the TriUniversity Group (TUG) library collaboration. I spoke of the advantages and reported that three academic libraries, large (University of Waterloo) medium (University of Guelph) and small (Wilfrid Laurier University) were working together creatively to address a number of issues:

• Remote storage of little used library materials,
• Development of a web-based, unified and integrated online “catalogue”,
• Joint purchases of online resources, and
• Rationalization of information resources

This pioneering collaborative undertaking, initiated in 1995, is now widely emulated, with some success. The TUG librarians found that collaboration is difficult. In collaborative efforts of this size, we need to ensure that we pay attention to the development of the organization. We realized that we needed to bring to the forefront the effect on the cultural environment. We had to examine the collaborative mission in the light of individual and institutional values. What is behind the differences in rules and regulations, for example? We recognized that before we collaborate successful we needed to encourage library staff to examine the organizational changes that collaboration was causing. As the Chief Librarian at the University of Guelph observed, “The most important factor in successful collaborations is human relationships. The biggest investment will not be in hardware or in software, but in people”.

Librarians practically invented collaboration between universities. We have learned to work cooperatively in order to best serve the needs of our user communities. This keynote paper will remove library collaboration from specific institutions in an attempt to identify the factors that might predict the success of library collaboration and analyze the reasons some collaborative efforts are successful. What elements need to be present to make a collaborative library project work?

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A. Definition:
First, let us clarify what we mean by “Collaboration” and how it differs from Cooperation or Coordination

1. Cooperative efforts
   • are less formal
   • do not have common goals
   • lack structure and formal planning
• retain local authority
• are without risk
• resources and rewards are separate
• communication is only as required

2. **Coordination** includes:
• comparison of individually goals for compatibility
• focus on one project of predetermined length
• assigned roles for each organization, which
• act independently of each other
• project specific planning
• establishment of communication channels
• retention of local authority and control
• shared leadership and control
• little shared risk
• acknowledgement of resources needs and the possibility of making them available to other members for the specific project
• recognition of mutual rewards

3. **Collaborative** undertakings must have
• benefit for all the participants
• well defined relationships
• common, new goals
• have the commitment of the organizations leaders
• several projects with long term effort and results
• comprehensive planning, including:
  - development of joint strategies and
  - measures of success i.e. benefits to the user
• mutual risk
• shared resources or jointly contracted
• distributed benefits – more is accomplished jointly than could be individually

A collaborative relationship includes
• a commitment to a mission
• a jointly developed organizational structure, with
• clearly defined and interrelated roles and responsibilities, 
• to manage collaborative enterprises
• shared responsibility and control
• balanced ownership
• distributed leadership
• mutual authority and accountability for success
• sharing of resources and rewards
• means of formal communication, *at several levels*

**B. Factors that help collaboration**
1. Need and Benefits
2. Attitude
3. Communication
4. Vision, mission, goals
5. Resources, Financial, Human and Leadership
6. Community Development

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”
– Henry Ford

**B1. PERCEIVED NEED and BENEFITS**
The initial reason for considering a collaborative enterprise is normally the perception that there is a need. For example, individual libraries might need an integrated online system, a storage facility for little used library materials, to purchase an expensive microform set, or an online database. Participants see the possibility of pooling resources – intellectual, technical and financial – to make a purchase or develop a process with benefits to the user community that override the loss of local autonomy.

*Example:* TRELLIS the combined online catalogue of the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier University libraries is a major example of co-operation. TUG members developed a plan for the selection of one library computer system for three that had grown obsolete. The three libraries examined the marketplace and decided together to implement a common system. The libraries and, especially the users, have derived many benefits from operating one system, with the regular exchange of experience and enhancements. TRELLIS is located and maintained at Waterloo on servers managed by a TUG/Waterloo group; a single database enables other TUG service.

Leaders of a collaborative effort need to convince themselves, their superiors and their staffs that more can be accomplished by working together and that greater benefit accrues to the user community by pooling resources in a formal structure. Benefits are not only economic; they are also related to the informational, educational, cultural and social needs of the clientele.

**B2. VISION, MISSION AND GOALS**
Directly associated to the perceived need for the collaboration is the expected results that each participant expects. These expectations form the collective vision of the collaboration. From these expectations the actions required to accomplish the vision are developed. The participants need to have the same expectations, which will lead to the development of a mission, objectives and eventually to joint strategies. The expectations of the collaboration need to be clear to all participants expressed as both short and long-term goals. This goal setting exercise will be time consuming and frustrating. It will also save enormous effort and considerable time later in the enterprise.

Common goals will generate enthusiasm and a willingness to solve problems collectively. Goals should be set in manageable and definable pieces so that short-term and intermediate goals will allow for a series of joint “successes” as collaborative groups achieve their targets. Regular reports on success to superiors, to the organisation, to each other and to the user community encourage the collaboration partners.

Joint sessions on vision and mission building with a credible and trained facilitator may be necessary and although costly and time-consuming can reap great dividends. Common language and action planning methodology will emerge from such meetings and save time and money over the long haul.

During these exercises, for a variety of reasons, such as strong personalities, there may develop a perception that there is an imbalance of power among collaborating partners. It is important to address these perceptions and ensure that the vision and mission is not compromised.

*Example:* TUG leaders discovered in the mission development phase a payback that should been expected and was quickly advanced – the mission of the group was not merely different from the individual organisation – it was larger, it was special, unique, worthy of attention and praise. Here was
an opportunity, once again and at a critical point to bring the President’s into the picture, to share with the media this progress on behalf of greater efficiency, service and benefit to the user.

B3. POSITIVE ATTITUDE
Participants must have constructive attitude that includes mutual respect and trust. Technical skill, knowledge and expertise are important and are generally regarded to be present in academic libraries; however, these attributes will mean little without a willingness to learn about the characteristics and culture of the other members of the collaboration: their operational techniques, traditional ways of doing things, approach to client relations, and their organisational structures.

At the beginning of a collaborative effort, the impatience of leaders for visible success may cause participants to underestimate the importance of the complex processes of learning about each other. The objectives and goals of the collaboration must be set aside temporarily in order to allow participants, at all levels, to understand staff intentions, agendas, interests, expectations, and incentives.

Example: Early in the TriUniversity Group (TUG) collaboration, the Heads of the Circulation Departments recognised the need to bring all the staff of the three library circulation departments together in a daylong exercise of discussion, exchange and discovery. This seminar led to subsequent sessions of subgroups to address issues of difference in policy and practice; their goal was to ensure that the libraries users were not confused by variations in circulation rules and customs. The model was followed by cataloguing, acquisitions, information services and systems departments with great success.

Important points learned from this series of meetings:
- Collaborating partners need to be willing to compromise; rigid rules make collaboration impossible
- Building collaborative relationships takes time; as long as there is evidence that relationships are producing positive results, leaders need to be patient
- Members need to carefully and generously consider who needs to be involved in these discussions; frontline clerks and library assistants are as important to the success of the collaborative effort as managers and librarians
- The discovery of self interest; staff members began to understand how they could provide better services to the clientele
- Honesty and integrity are essential to success; mutual trust and respect will bring dividends
- Disagreement will occur, usually from misunderstanding; leadership and a willingness to compromise is key to resolving differences

B4. COMMUNICATION
Successful communication takes place at several levels, and in several directions.

a. Upwards in the Organisation
Any collaborative undertaking will require the support of immediate superiors, managers and the library’s oversight or advisory body – board, council or committee. Because of the high profile and potential risk involved, library leadership should also seek the approval of the chief executive officer of the organisation, the president, principal, or chancellor. A means of regular, brief and thorough communication with all of these is important. There should be no surprises, especially from the media or the CEO of a participating member of the collaboration. Occasional face-to-face meetings should supplement written reports at suitable intervals, depending on how rapidly the collaboration develops.
b. Within the Library
The people who are going to make the collaboration work, the library staff, must be brought into the discussion as early as possible. General communication might start with an all staff meeting with question period, followed up with regular divisional and departmental meetings. A newsletter reporting of developments and introducing participants is always appreciated by staff at all levels; staff members should also be encouraged to participate in this publication as well as the meetings. Remember the maxim: tell staff what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them again. Some people absorb information at meetings; others need to see it in writing, others need a personal discussion. It is useful to designate one person at each of the participating organisations to be responsible for working together to prepare meeting agendas, notes, memos and the newsletter. Often the library director wants to assume this role; in time however, the director can lose interest, be diverted by other pressing issues, or may mistakenly assume that all staff members are already informed. Continuous, meaningful communication to and from staff is a critical factor in the success of a collaboration.

c. Among Collaborating Partners
Regular meetings between the library directors and the principal agents of the collaboration are very important. Strong personal links need to be established; membership on committees should have low turnover and infrequent substitutions. Meetings should have published advanced agendas, a recording secretary and minutes. Minutes will form the basis of subsequent newsletters and meetings. The circulation of minutes is not an effective substitute for direct communication with library staff members.

Recognise that communication styles among individuals and especially organisations differ and that a good communications strategy will reflect this. Depending on the size and complexity of the collaboration, a staff position for ensuring continuous communication should be considered (this might be the same position as the recording secretary of the director’s meetings). Difficulties, disagreements and problems will happen; this is not a “bad thing”. Participants may wish to agree to disagree on some issues. Communications about collaborative programs should be easily available to everyone; selective dissemination will cause division. The participants also need to celebrate their successes – and occasional social event can go a long way towards building good communication channels. Similarly, joint staff development programs are an effective tool for gaining new knowledge of processes and techniques, and understanding of a collaborating partner’s culture. Partners should not assume that paper and email and telephone communications are enough; get to know each other!

Example: In the beginning of the TriUniversity Group of Libraries collaboration, the directors met weekly. Once the various projects were underway and under the leadership of library managers, these meetings were held fortnightly. Several other joint committees and task forces also meet regularly. These groups frequently post the results of these meetings on the web. http://tug.lib.uwaterloo.ca/index.html

d. With the User Community
Collaborating partners need to develop effective, formal and informal ways in which the library clientele can be informed of the advantages and benefits of the collaboration. Frequent announcements, visible evidence and concrete examples should be coordinated for release by all the partners for optimum effect. Announcements to governing bodies, University Senates, Faculty Councils, Graduate and Undergraduate Committees, through the campus media and library publications should be brief accurate and frequent. When standing committees are formed to oversee a collaborative program, students and faculty members should be included in the membership.
B5. RESOURCES: Financial, Human and Leadership

a. Financial
Ideally, the collaboration has an adequate and consistent source of new funding to support its programs. More realistically, participants will need to find funding from current operations. It is therefore important that early collaborative ventures realise short-term cost savings. Once the benefits of collaboration are proven, for succeeding projects it may be possible to secure financial support from the parent organisations, or with their help from external funding agencies, or the government.

b. Human
Collaborating will be expensive in the beginning, staff members will need to learn new skills and processes; additional or different equipment may be required. Library leaders need to be able to make resources available. Human resources are as, if not more important. Staff members who are willing and interested should be allowed to visit with their pears at collaborating libraries. Some may even choose to work with, or “shadow” their counterparts.

c. Leadership
Leaders initiating a collaborative venture need leadership, managerial and interpersonal skills. They also must have an easily recognised sense of fairness, good process skills, a credible presence, and knowledge of library practices. Senior administrative commitment is fundamental; the leaders of the collaboration will actively promote and support the collaborative strategy within the libraries and within the academic and administrative groups on campus. Leaders (University Librarians) will model cultural expectations by working collaboratively as a team. The support of this group must be visible, positive and frequent.

Team building in a collaboration environment is hard work; this is not the traditional work of administrators. It requires a commitment to a new approach and a new organisational focus. It is difficult for one organisation to make these adjustments and changes; it is even more difficult to orchestrate several organisations in making these transitions in harmony.

It is imperative, however, that the influential (University Librarians) be committed to leadership and resist the temptation to control or manipulate. Having nurtured relationships among staff, library leaders must give staff the responsibility and authority to make things happen, to shape the emerging nature of the collaboration. Leaders must maintain a careful balance between process and task activities, with an emphasis on the former.

Example: In the TUG system selection process, a diverse staff group had considerable authority. These people, drawn from throughout the libraries, were responsible for the evaluation and selection phase. They managed this process with considerable independence from the University Librarians. This achieved an important objective - leadership becomes a responsibility of all staff members.

Leading by example also means dealing with disagreement and conflict among the leaders (University Librarians). Senior managers do no always speak with one voice; they do not always agree on all issues. Working through disagreements in a public and open manner helps to develop more than tolerance for diversity. It celebrates diversity. It shows an acceptance and encouragement of divergent thinking. It models the application of creative tension towards shared goals.

The empowerment invested in the teams that operate the various collaborative initiatives will encourage commitment and ownership, and demonstrate trust by senior management. A sense of stewardship emerges in which the care of the whole is considered not the individual institution. When an issue arises, the first question will be” what does this mean for the collaboration?” not "what does this mean for my library?"
Example: Consider how the library leadership affected and was affected by other sectors of the three universities. There was little to prepare the university or the library for the consequences of the collaboration. The University Librarians were fortunate to discover, in the process, that those administrative units on which the libraries depend for services and help were supportive.

Succession planning is necessary to ensure that the collaboration continues to operate effectively. Leaders of the collaboration need to groom new leaders and plan leadership transition so that power struggles do not emerge and forward momentum is lost.

**B6. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In the collaborative enterprise, perhaps the most important issue to be recognised is community development. In the course of planning and implementing a team-based approach to managing library services, library leadership consciously and deliberately will enable library staffs to focus on user needs. Community development is not about structures, committees, or supervisors; it is each of these effectively working together. We cannot create organisational climate; however, we can enable a new culture by establishing new methods, approaches, actions, interactions and other aspects of organisational behaviour. Designing community development is not a typical management skill; understanding community development is not easy.

Remember that in inter-organisational collaboration local need is still real and immediate. The collaboration is not one organisation; we are collaborating organisations linked together. There are still local identities and local cultures that need to be respected and enhanced. Maintaining a balance between collaboration focus and local focus is a key aspect of developing a culture that will be compatible with those at the partner’s institutions.

In this context, one can underestimate the difficulty of making the transition to collaboration. The change of perspective from "me" to "us", and from "them" to "us" is difficult. There will be many opportunities to revert to the "old ways." Sustaining the culture of the collaboration requires attention and maintenance. Vision, mission, goals and especially values will need to be reviewed periodically. Discussing these issues will require frank and open discussions; sometimes an arduous and conflict ridden process.

Organisational change may well be the most interesting consequence of partnership. Working through the practical logistics of doing things together, the refining of the process will provide great opportunity for personal growth and learning. The consequences will result in improved services and collections access for the libraries users.

**SUMMARY**

- Successful collaboration requires that Library leaders understand their organizations in order to ensure a positive response from staff to the necessary organizational change
- Change can be implemented successfully only with significant awareness of and sensitivity to existing culture
- Positive attitudes toward the collaborative effort and the associated organizational change, can best be generated by beginning with an inclusive exercise to articulate vision and mission and to establish goals
- Library leaders must be sensitive to prevailing and evolving attitudes among staff members. One or more sessions with a credible and respected facilitator may prove necessary to develop or maintain a positive attitude among staff members.
- Frequent, open communication is essential to the continuing success of a collaborative relationship. Library leaders must work to keep both staff and senior university administrators apprised of ongoing activity, and to keep one another apprised of relevant activity within each individual member institution.

- Library leaders must remain focussed on staff needs and attitudes. The new collaborative community must be developed without adversely affecting the collaborators existing communities.
A. Data Resources Service (TDR) Members of the centres for data resources on each campus and representatives from University of Guelph Computing and Communications Services and University of Waterloo Information Systems and Technology joined forces to create a centralized on-line data service. TDR allows users to access and process large data files over the Internet. This data includes a large collection of survey results from Statistics Canada, a number of surveys from international sources, and data collected by local researchers. The focus of TUG’s centralized service is a joint web site where all shared data is mounted and maintained on a single web site. Individual libraries maintain data licensed for the local community and offer support and service to their community of users. Overviews of each data centre including services offered and hours of operation can be found at:

- University of Guelph Data Resource Centre
- University of Waterloo Electronic Data Service
- Wilfrid Laurier University

B. The TUG Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery (ILL/DD) Web Page provides users with information on Interlibrary Loan Borrowing policies. The site also provides electronic request forms. Each ILL/DD site works on behalf of its users to borrow books or obtain photocopies of items not held in the TUG Libraries.

C. Journal Index Database Services including CSA and ERL. Content coverage includes the life sciences, environmental and aquatic sciences, computer sciences, materials science and engineering, aerospace, social sciences, and humanities.

D. The TUG Full Text Electronic Journals (ejournals) Web Page provides users with a dynamically delivered searchable Web interface to more than 6,000 ejournals. The Web interface allows users to view ejournals licensed to their institution or choose to view lists of ejournals available at other TUG institutions. The site provides various searching options to help users identify ejournals of interest, including quick title keyword or phrase searching, combining keywords in an advanced search, or a browsable subject or alphabetical list. Ejournals are also listed in the online catalogue, TRELLIS.

E. The Electronic Reference Collection developed and maintained by the TUG Electronic Reference Collection Group, is a quick reference that points to a range of major, general-level sources. In the collection you will find links to:

- Encyclopaedias
- Quotations
- Scientific Data & Measurement, and much more

F. TUG Information Resources Group works towards achieving rationalized collections and harmonized electronic information resources, which meet the needs of and can be accessed for, the greatest benefit of TUG users. Each university has unique program needs, and collaborative collections work will occur when there is mutual benefit.
g. The TUG Home Page provides basic information about TUG collaborations and directs users to the individual library web sites as well as to major TUG resources that are accessible to the public (e.g., TRELLIS). Each TUG library has its own home page that is the main gateway to library resources for that university's community.

Tri-University Group of Libraries (TUG)
Program Groups, Committees and Functional or Departmental Collaborations

TUG Program Groups

1. **Administration**
   TUG Executive Committee
   
   **Contact**: TUG Administrative Assistant: Cheryl Kieswetter
   **Chair**: rotates to hosting institution
   **Members**: Sharon Brown, Mark Haslett, Michael Ridley
   **Mandate**: Standing

2. **Annex**
   Annex Management Group
   
   **Chair**: Heather Martin
   **Members**: Pat Hock, Heather Martin, and Alan Male
   **Mandate**: Standing
   **Administrative Contact**: TUG Executive Committee

3. **Annex Board**
   
   **Chair**: rotates
   **Members**: TUG Executive Committee, Vice President Administration from each university
   **Mandate**: Standing

4. **TRELLIS**
   4.1 **TRELLIS Steering Committee**
   
   **Chair**: Rotates to hosting Institution
   **Members**: Sharon Brown, Mark Haslett, and Helen Salmon

   4.2 **TRELLIS Operational Management Group**
   
   **Chair**: Brooke Skelton
   **Members**: Don Hamilton, Brooke Skelton, Martin Timmerman, Scott Gillies, Charles Woods
   **Mandate**: Standing
   **Administrative Contact**: TRELLIS Steering Committee

   4.3 **TRELLIS Prototyping Team**
   
   **Chair**: Scott Gillies
   **Members**: TBA
   **Mandate**: Standing
   Test and evaluate new Voyager software releases and new or added functionality under consideration for implementation within TRELLIS.
   Review changes proposed for TRELLIS and ensuring there is no adverse effect elsewhere in the system, investigating and documenting software bugs or enhancement requests prior to submission to Endeavor Support
   **Administrative Contact**: TRELLIS Operational Management Group

   4.4 **TRELLIS OPAC Committee**
   
   **Chair**: Dan Sich
   **Members**: Lorna Rourke, John McCallum, Dan Sich, and Charles Woods
   **Mandate**: Standing
   Prototype TRELLIS OPAC (Online Public Catalogue) upgrades; co-ordinate local interface issues,
   Plan and initiate staff training re OPAC as needed
   **UW Administrative Contact**: Susan Routliffe
   **UG Administrative Contact**: Helen Salmon
   **WLU Administrative Contact**: Diane Wilkins

5. **TUG Data Resources**
   5.1 **TDR Steering Committee**
   
   **Chair**: Rotates to hosting institution
   **Members**: Sharon Brown, Mark Haslett, and Helen Salmon

   5.2 **TDR Operational Management Group**
   
   **Chair**: Doug Horne
   **Members**: Doug Horne, Richard Pinnell, Helene LeBlanc, and Bo Wandschneider,
   **Mandate**: Standing
   Co-ordinate TDR operations associated with development and maintenance of the TDR web site
   Responsible for planning and developing the service
   **Administrative Contact**: TDR Steering Committee

6. **TUG Information Resources Group**
   
   **Chair**: Rotates annually; 2001/2002 Joanne Oud
   **Members**: Susan Routliffe, Joanne Oud, and Tim Sauer
   **Mandate**: Standing
   Co-ordinate co-operative resource sharing and management.
   **Administrative Contact**: TUG Executive Committee
7. **TUG Statistics & Reports**
   Chair: Rotates annually; 2003/04 Joanne Oud
   Members: Ron MacKinnon, Joanne Oud, Linda Teather
   Mandate: coordinate TUG collaborative efforts in the effective delivery of statistics and reports
   Administrative Contact: TUG Executive Committee

**TUG Functional or Departmental Collaborative Groups**

1. **Access / User (Circulation) Services Managers**
   UG: Donna Sartori, Heather Martin
   UW: Sharon Lamont, Wish Leonard, Ann Naese, Melanie Watkins, and Alex McCulloch
   WLU: Vera Fesnak
   Mandate: Standing
   Interpret TUG Borrowing Policy, and
   Prototype and develop TUG-wide solutions to circulation issues
   Administrative Contact: TUG Executive Committee

2. **TUG Cataloguing**
   Members: Linda Day, Linda DaMaren, Betty Graf, Don Hamilton, Ruth Lamb, Brooke Skelton, Matt Tales, Charles Woods
   Mandate: Develop and implement common cataloguing policies to ensure consistent practices in our shared database
   Devise methods for sharing the workload related to shared resources such as authorities and internet resources
   UW Administrative Contact: Mark Haslett
   UG Administrative Contact: Helen Salmon
   WLU Administrative Contact: Sharon Brown

3. **TUG Electronic Journals Group**
   Members: Christine Jewell, Jo Heimpel, Linda Cracknell, Joanne Oud, and Linda Day
   Mandate: Standing
   Co-ordinates the acquisition of electronic journals and access of those journals through a searchable Web interface
   UW Administrative Contact: Susan Routliffe, Mark Haslett
   UG Administrative Contact: Helen Salmon, and Tim Sauer
   WLU Administrative Contact: Diane Wilkins, Linda Cracknell

4. **TUG Interlibrary Loan / Document Delivery**
   Members: Christine Jewell, Donna Satori, Diane Wilkins
   Mandate: UW Administrative Contact: Mark Haslett
   UG Administrative Contact: Helen Salmon
   WLU Administrative Contact: Sharon Brown

5. **TUG Materials Acquisitons Managers**
   Members: Debbie Tytko, Linda DaMaren, Helen Sagi and Linda Cracknell
   Mandate: Ad hoc
   UW Administrative Contact: Susan Routliffe
   UG Administrative Contact: Pat Hock
   WLU Administrative Contact: Linda Cracknell

6. **TUG Government Publications Group**
   Members: Susan Moskal, Doug Horne, and Marina Wan
   Mandate: Standing
   Address common issues and concerns
   Develop services and resources, e.g. a common web site, joint publication & training & shared selection of Internet resources catalogued for Trellis
   UW Administrative Contact: Susan Routliffe
   UG Administrative Contact: Helen Salmon
   WLU Administrative Contact: Joanne Oud

7. **TUG Science Selectors**
   Chair: Anne Fullerton
   Members: Alan Gale, Pam Jacobs, Jim Parrott, Doug Morton, Mike Skelton, Yulerette Gordon, Margaret Aquan-Yuen, and Doug Horne
   Mandate: Ad hoc
   Informal group of TUG Librarians who select for science and related disciplines;
   Meets twice a year to discuss issues in science and engineering librarianship in the TUG libraries
   UW Administrative Contact: Helen Salmon
   UG Administrative Contact: Susan Routliffe
   WLU Administrative Contact: Joanne Oud