The following article is on a topic of great interest to me as co-general editor of Collaborative Librarianship and because collaboration is a crucial part of Minitex. This article is a shorter version of a more lengthy one, "Going 'All-in' for Deep Collaboration," that has just been published in Volume 5 No. 2 of Collaborative Librarianship. It reflects my current thinking, and I'd welcome your thoughts and comments. Valerie Horton (vhorton@umn.edu)

Delving Deeper into Library Collaboration

Valerie Horton

The concept of 'deep collaboration' is starting to appear in library literature, blogs, and in conference programs. There is a growing consensus that collaboration is no longer just a powerful tool, but, also, an indispensible one. William Jordan, referring to the Orbis Cascade Alliance, recently summed up this sentiment as "libraries have a choice: we can collaborate, or we can die." [1] Or, consider Marshall Breeding's recent statement on libraries being "drawn to massive collaboration."[2] Collaboration has become an intentional strategic decision as showcased by the development of Kuali Ole's community-sources software allowing access to collections, licenses, and digital content. [3]

So what is deep collaboration?

Collaboration, at its most basic level, is two or more people working together to achieve some end result. As a tool, collaboration in libraries has gained wide acceptance, with a general sense within the profession that by collaborating we are following a future-focused, logical path during austere times. This perception is summarized by a librarian who writes that libraries are "in an age of scarce resources, competition and complex community issues—organizational collaboration is essential." [4] Deep collaboration is seen as providing more advantages for participating libraries than less in-depth cooperation. In this sense, deep collaboration in libraries has a meaning akin to more skin-in-the-game, more organizational commitment, and more risk assumed.

Many articles define the term 'collaboration' with most drawing a distinction between cooperation and collaboration. In general, cooperation is defined as "agreeing to abide by a set of common rules or principles," while collaboration is seen as requiring "greater levels of engagement and goal alignment." [5] Some writers broaden this view to see more of a continuum from Contact - Cooperation - Coordination - Collaboration - Convergence. [6] From my perspective, one of the best definitions comes from work of the Ohio State University Libraries Collaboration Task Force[7] : "Collaboration is two or more people or organizations combine their resources and work together to achieve a common and mutually-beneficial goal."

Having defined collaboration, the question arises as to how deep collaboration is different? I would argue that deep collaboration has the following characteristics:

- Shared vision
- 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
- Shared power and decision-making

One growing trend in libraries is a willingness to put more resources and efforts into collaborative ventures. Very few institutions in today's economic environment consider themselves able to meet all the resource needs of their patrons.

1 Kelley, Michael. 2012, "Consortium Makes Radical Shift Away from ILS,"
    http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/12/software/academic-consortium-
2 Breeding, Marshall. 2013. "Automation Marketplace 2013: The Rush to Innovate."
    http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2013/04/ils/automation-marketplace-2013-the-rush-to-innovate/
3 http://kuali.org/ole
4 Gajda, Rebecca. 2004. "Utilizing Collaboration Theory to Evaluate Strategic Alliances." American Journal of Evaluation 25,
    no. 1: 65-77.
5 Wheeler, Brad, and Hilton, James L. 2012. "The Marketecture of Community." EDUCAUSE Review 47, no. 6: 66-82.
6 Waibel, Günter, and Erway, Ricky. 2009. "Think global, act local – Library, archive and museum collaboration." Museum Management
    and Curatorship 24, no 4: 323-335.
7 Ohio State University Libraries Collaboration Task Force. 2008. "Definition of Collaboration."
    https://carmenwiki.osu.edu/display/libraries/Definition+of+Collaboration

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As a result, it is possible to argue that many libraries are choosing to "go-all-in' to collaborate. Library leaders are more willing to give up autonomy than in the past and are more willing to commit to whatever it takes to make deep collaboration work. This commitment to collaboration is now so deep, that failure in joint ventures is no longer considered an option. You could argue that many collaborative efforts have become too big to fail.

A couple of well known projects are often described as deep collaboration. One of the most important is HathiTrust. At its center, HathiTrust is a worldwide partnership of 60 major research institutions and libraries, including the University of Minnesota Libraries, working to digitize and preserve the cultural record. At this writing, HathiTrust has over 10.6 million volumes and is growing. One of the more interesting things about this collaborative is they are using their pooled resources and expertise to tackle problems that have long needed attention, such as digital preservation and archiving, meaningful shared collection development, copyright issues, and evolving standards for bibliographic information. HathiTrust is a prime example of how large scale collective action on mutual problems can be one of the most positive outcomes of deep collaboration.

Over the decades, many institutions have created shared union catalogs, such as the University of California system, the Triangle Research Library Network, MnPALS, and the Marmot Library Network. These shared catalogs are evolving into deeper platforms for collaboration often based on next generation catalogs. Many consortia are now integrating remote storage materials, digital objects, and e-book collections into the catalog. Many consortia are also building structures to support shared collection development, technical services, and even administration. One of the more powerful trends is that, instead of treating these shared catalogs as

conglomerations of individual collections, a number of organization are now moving to consider their collections to be jointly owned by the cooperative.

For all these example of deepening collaboration, most experienced librarians can name two or three major failed collaboration projects. In most cases, these failures were based on not fully understanding the amount of leadership, staff time, and staff training required for success. Equally important was failing to understand the scope of work involved, and a lack of true commitment to shared vision and goals coming from a committed leadership also led to a number of significant collaborative failures. Further, the lessening of autonomy can be difficult for library staff who see their work mainly through the prism of the needs of the local institution. One of the striking aspects of failed collaborative efforts is how often it was tied to a change in leadership at participating institutions. New employees may see only the drawbacks that occurred over time, rather than the benefits foreseen when the project was launched.

Knowledge gained from past failures has been one of the most important factors driving deep collaboration. The working premise here is that deeper levels of commitment will create a new culture within participating organizations through which the commitment to collaboration is so great that failure is not considered an option. The "all-in" commitment builds towards transformation and convergence that are often seen as the ultimate results of deep collaboration.

Part of the change to a library's culture to truly accept collaborative works 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 explain and build consensus before launching new projects, and they must commit to building staff skills. Not every staff member comes to the table with a strong skill set in negotiations, communication, and interpersonal relations. Giving up autonomy is never easy -- and given the different backgrounds, expectations, and history of participants -- much work must be done in dealing with potential barriers and building up trust and open lines communication. None of the requirements listed above are easy to achieve; all are time-consuming and require ongoing attention. The importance of this point cannot be overestimated. The commitment to launch into a deep collaborative process is, by definition, a commitment to providing extensive resources to the project.

As a new director looking at Minitex, it is clear to me that the organization has been built upon a foundational

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commitment to collaboration. If you look at the list of Minitex programs below, you will see that many of our programs are built on shared commitments within the library community:

- Resource sharing network including MnLINK
- Library Delivery
- ELM – the Electronic Library for Minnesota
- AskMN – online service for information and research help
- Minnesota Digital Library (MDL)
- Minnesota Library Access Center (MLAC)
- Cooperative Purchasing & Electronic Resources Services (CPERS)

The Minitex resource sharing networks work because all types of libraries in Minnesota, as well as our partners in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, are willing to respond quickly to requests to share information. The Minnesota Digital Library is a classic example of a deep collaborative project with partners including the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota, many area universities and colleges like St. Cloud State University, and cooperation from over 150 smaller libraries and historical societies. A complex project like MDL succeeds because of a firm commitment by participants to provide great information resources to the residents of the state and region.

In EDUCAUSE Review, 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. The new trend in libraries toward a deeper level of organizational commitment is fixing some long-standing problems as the library community ushers in a new era of deeper collaboration.

Finally, when considering launching a collaborative effort, consider the following questions:

- Why collaborate? What is the vision you hope to achieve?
- What are the goals required to achieve the vision?
- What staff expertise is available on your joint teams or what expertise do you need to develop?
- How will shared-decision making work? Who has the authority?
- Is reciprocity equal? Are all partners providing acceptable levels of resources and commitments? (Note, not all partners can or should provide equal resources.)
- How will problems and conflicts be resolved?
- How will you define success? How will you measure our progress?

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