

**Adventures in collaboration:  
library and information workers as 'Master Builders' of knowledge  
(Public Libraries Supporting Communities)**

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Abstract

***Introduction***

Collaborations are key to much work being done in a range of different libraries. Some collaborations are accidental while others are more purposeful. This paper explores a variety of ways to capitalise on planned collaborative projects, while offering guidance for adding planning to more ad hoc projects, to facilitate better outcomes for the project as well as for the participants. There are no guaranteed systems for ensuring success, there are however, a variety of mechanisms and tools which are available that will make success more likely.

***Method***

This paper, through the presentation of two very different examples (one outlining working with one other person; and another outlining working with a group) of how projects can work, explores opportunities to not only work better but to work differently. The first example will look at experiences in co-editing a collection of essays and how working with one other person brings both benefits and challenges. The second example will look at some of the experiences in working with a multi-national group of library professionals as part of the coordination of a global effort to encourage reading through a themed Twitter reading group. Both examples will highlight some of the positives of collaboration in addition to looking at how to overcome some of the challenges that can arise working on projects in this way. Moreover, these examples will provide frames of reference so that those who have not worked on a collaborative project will be able to relate the mechanisms and tools discussed in this paper back to real-world examples.

***Results***

The examples utilised within this paper explore a number of aspects around collaborative practices including 'tools of the trade', working with diversity, maximising long term as well as short term benefits, and transferring benefits to a broader community.

***Conclusions***

This paper reveals how, through working with the mechanisms and tools outlined, in addition to learning from achievements and failures in the examples provided, can contribute to: capacity building, knowledge transfer and succession planning. This paper also highlights the importance of negotiations around assigning / sharing / taking credit, adapting to change throughout a project and working with different levels of availability, capacity and commitment of other group members.

***Relevance***

This paper engages directly with the conference theme of "Together we are Stronger" by encouraging library workers, from all areas within the information sector, to take on collaborative projects, thus realising personal and professional benefits of working in this way.

## Introduction

“[...] don't follow the instructions on the box.”<sup>1</sup>

Collaboration is a key part of work and these interactions can be very effective when they are truly collaborative, supportive, are based on trust and a culture of experimentation. Some examples of collaborative practice are so simple that most people would not even consider them collaborations, such as: who does the morning coffee run? or who organises a particular birthday celebration? These everyday situations utilise the same skills of organising and working together which larger collaborations depend upon for success. The coffee run requires, for example, budget skills (making sure everyone receives the correct change), attention to detail (making sure the orders are right) as well as a grasp of the big picture (is it time for the coffee run?).

This, on the surface very simple undertaking, also needs an understanding of the foibles of ourselves and others (it might be that most people share in coffee run duties, but some people never do it). *Creativity Inc.: overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration*,<sup>2</sup> by Ed Catmull, provides some very useful ideas about collaboration from his work at Pixar. Collaboration is an important way to move work forward, and to achieve far more impressive outcomes than someone could deliver by themselves; because, as this paper will argue, together we are stronger. Critically, collaboration brings together different skills, ideas and experience: people will ask different kinds of questions, and be able to problem solve in different ways.

The authors of this paper are writing from their experiences in collaborative situations, as library workers who are learning about how to make collaborations more effective and to deliver better outcomes for clients and colleagues. One of the key points of this paper is that each collaboration will teach us something new, and that this knowledge can be applied in the next collaborative effort.

### An overview of collaboration

Harry S. Truman is reported to have said: “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”<sup>3</sup> These words are a helpful attitude for collaborative work as it allows for the focusing on a collective credit and benefit rather than an individual one. It is not an excuse for people to not pull their weight, but rather, it can enable better interactions if the people involved are clear about broader outcomes rather than individual implications. The authors have found that this framework facilitates a clear focus on the end goal. This focus, in turn, better allows for the learning of new skills from the numerous collaborations that they have been involved in, some of these learnings were planned while others have been surprises.

For some really good information about collaborative possibilities it is suggested here that readers watch the *Lego movie*.<sup>4</sup> This film highlights some of the many benefits of

<sup>1</sup> Chrzan, Paul (12 February 2014). A Real-Life Lego Master Builder on How You, Too, Could Have One of the World's Coolest Jobs, <https://movies.yahoo.com/blogs/yahoo-movies/lego-master-builder-interview-220617918.html> accessed 28 May 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Catmull, Ed (2014). *Creativity Inc.: overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration* / with Amy Wallace, New York: Random House.

<sup>3</sup> Truman, Harry S. (n.d.). cited on Goodreads, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=harry+s+truman&commit=Search> accessed 30 May 2014

<sup>4</sup> *Lego movie* (2014). <http://www.thelegomovie.com/> accessed 23 May 2014

collaboration and how the collaboration process can always benefit from people who actually enjoy working with others (you can also watch the *Lego movie* because it is fun).

Some of the aspects of collaboration shown in the *Lego movie* are difficult to describe without revealing too much of the plot. For the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to outline a scene where several Lego characters are building together, they know the big picture outcome, but each can build their own section in a way which works with the other sections being built. This does not need to be micromanaged, because all of the characters know what the outcome is, and are working at it together. Batman can, for example, choose to build his section using black, or really dark grey, bricks while the other characters are building with all the different coloured bricks available.

This is possible because the outcome was agreed upon at the outset of construction. In another part of the film, there are useful points made about the need to use a mix of conformity and diversity in collaboration. Both are needed, and people should have both skills sets, knowing when to 'do stuff' to achieve some of basic groundwork of a project, while still keeping the big picture in mind, and when greater diversity and skills around what each person does is required to ensure completion.

In the *Lego movie* the song *Everything is awesome*<sup>5</sup> starts out as a sinister refrain about conformity and no allowance for independent thought but as the film progresses it becomes an anthem of freedom as the characters really focus on what is important and work together effectively rather than mindlessly following instructions. Thus, there is the realisation that everyone is special, that great ideas come from everyone and people bring diverse skills. Indeed, library and information workers can, just like the Lego characters, be 'master builders': of knowledge. The song also highlights that everyone has something to contribute, and that ideas are not the domain of a few. Sometimes people think they are the only ones who can have workable ideas rather than seeing that good, or even great ideas can come from anyone (as well as anywhere or anything - even a film).

Using another entertainment-based example, Pixar relies upon collaboration extensively within their workplace. As Ed Catmull says:

"What's equally tough, of course, is getting talented people to work effectively with one another. That takes trust and respect, which we as managers can't mandate; they must be earned over time. What we can do is construct an environment that nurtures trusting and respectful relationships and unleashes everyone's creativity [...] community matters."<sup>6</sup>

Pixar has operating principles which state that:

1. Everyone must have the freedom to communicate with anyone
2. It must be safe<sup>7</sup> for everyone to offer ideas
3. We must stay close to innovations happening in the academic community<sup>8 9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Everything is awesome*, *Lego movie* (2014). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vx5n21zHPm8> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiTqXEQ2l-Y> accessed 23 May 2014

<sup>6</sup> Catmull, Ed. 2008. "How Pixar fosters collective creativity. (cover story)." *Harvard Business Review* 86, no. 9: 64-72. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost accessed April 27, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Safety is a very important point: we can all contribute to creative collaborations provided we are given sufficient encouragement and a safe environment in which to explore and test our own capacity for collaboration.

<sup>8</sup> Karpel, Ari (25 June 2013). *5 monster management lessons from Pixar*, <http://www.fastcocreate.com/1683268/5-monster-management-lessons-from-pixar> accessed 14 May 2014

<sup>9</sup> The first two are great points for any collaboration, while the third will depend a bit more on the context of the collaboration but is still an important idea to consider.

Dan Scanlon and Kori Rae, both of Pixar, highlight some further useful points, from the aspect of managing creative teams, but these are still very relevant for anyone involved in a collaboration:

- Management is cheerleading
- It is also meetings (sigh)
- Collaboration is communication
- Demonstrate your dedication in order to get ahead
- It's okay to admit you don't know things - sometimes<sup>10</sup>

Having the right people involved is critical. This idea comes through strongly from Jim Collins in his book *Good to great: why some companies make the leap...and others don't*.<sup>11</sup> Collins says: "In fact, leaders of companies that go from good to great start not with "where" but with "who." They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats."<sup>12</sup> Ed Catmull, in *Creativity Inc.* says something similar: "Find, develop and support good people, and they in turn will find, develop and own good ideas."<sup>13</sup>

Two long-term New South Wales public library examples of effective collaboration, both with a fairly loose structure, are the ref-ex wiki and the annual Reference Seminars. The ref-ex wiki<sup>14</sup> is a reference training wiki developed and maintained by about eight library workers. More people have been involved at different times, and there are regular changes to who is working on the project. Some people are active for a couple of years, and then other people come in to work on the wiki balancing a sense of stability with regular fresh input. It is a loose collaboration but projects such as this one do not need to be highly structured in order to be effective. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that the amount of structure will vary from collaboration to collaboration.

This is an important point to remember because you only need as much structure as you need; generating structure above a project's requirements diverts energy and resources from the true task at hand. For the ref-ex wiki management there is an email list for communication but mostly people edit and make changes as needed, with occasional emails to discuss issues, and even very occasionally face to face meetings. These meetings are usually scheduled for when new modules are planned or a major review is done.

The second of these examples, the annual Reference Seminar for Public Libraries is organised by the Reference and Information Services Steering Group (RISG). These public library staff (and one of the authors) organise a seminar based on feedback and evaluation from the previous year. Email and Google Drive are used for planning. Google Drive means that version control is not a problem and people can annotate a document to keep others up to date. It also saves emailing attachments around. Earlier planning included teleconferences, but for the last couple of years Google+ Hangouts have been used for a couple of meetings to facilitate the seminar planning.

<sup>10</sup> Karpel, Ari (25 June 2013). *5 monster management lessons from Pixar*,

<http://www.fastcocreate.com/1683268/5-monster-management-lessons-from-pixar> accessed 14 May 2014

<sup>11</sup> Collins, Jim (2001). *Good to great: why some companies make the leap...and others don't*, New York, Harper Business.

<sup>12</sup> Collins, Jim (October 2001). *Good to great*, [http://www.jimcollins.com/article\\_topics/articles/good-to-great.html](http://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/good-to-great.html) accessed 26 May 2014

<sup>13</sup> Catmull, Ed (2014). *Creativity, Inc.: overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration / with Amy Wallace*, New York, Random House, location 1203 of 5068.

<sup>14</sup> ref-ex [https://wiki.libraries.nsw.gov.au/index.php?title=Reference\\_excellence](https://wiki.libraries.nsw.gov.au/index.php?title=Reference_excellence) accessed 14 May 2014

The seminars are planned, presented at the State Library of NSW, and material made available via a wiki.<sup>15</sup> The teleconference or Google+ Hangouts are important as the people organising the seminar rarely meet in person as they are in libraries all over NSW. Even for the seminar this year all of those who planned the seminar were not able to participate in the final event.

### **Collaboration as practice**

There are, of course, challenges of working with others, as everyone has different strengths which is complicated by the fact that people do not always know their own strengths, or the strengths of others. Some people can overstate their skills which can be awkward, and the same is also true when people understate their skills. It is important to have *optimistic* but not *unrealistic* expectations about what each person can (and cannot) contribute. This will lead to some very good surprises, and hopefully will help to minimise the less pleasant ones.

Discussing working styles for projects can be helpful so that people do not have different assumptions about what will happen when. Different methods can work well, just like in the *Lego movie*, but sometimes they need to be discussed (again like in the *Lego movie*). Sometimes people forget that the other people they are working with will probably have a good idea of how much is really being done. Communication is crucial. Not replying to emails, phone calls or online discussions can appear as an avoidance strategy and may cause people to think there is a crisis (when letting people know when you are swamped or have had illness, for example can help).

With any work project you need to think about how important the end result is, and if the end result is the key and there are several options to getting to the outcome, or if there really is only one way to get there. There are times when the collaboration is tough and focussing on the big picture of the outcome is all that will help, and often the outcome is better if the way of getting there is not as prescriptive as it will encourage people to try out new tools and ideas. This can lead to a better result, and add to the quality of the experience of collaboration, as well as the outcome of the collaboration, being a better one for all involved. The improved results in particular are important as people can keep the big picture in mind, and make improvements in the detail, which is not as easy if someone is trying to micromanage what is happening, or does not have the capacity to imagine a different version of the outcome, or a different way of achieving it.

Collaborations are really powerful, because when done well they bring diverse personalities and skills together for a much more exciting outcome than would otherwise have been possible, because they are including several people's ideas, rather than the ideas of one or two. When done badly it is often because the communication within the collaboration has broken down and so the work is less interactive and more prescriptive.

### **Collaboration: five keys to success**

For collaboration to be better for all involved, encourage people to keep each other informed without overwhelming each other with detail, unless the detail is really needed (and often it is not). Discussing and agreeing on preferred communication tools early can assist in alleviating stress later. Let the team of collaborators know they can make use of any available communication tools, Hangouts, email, Instant Messaging, Twitter and the telephone, as well as Google Drive (or other cloud service) if that is where all the guiding

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<sup>15</sup> Reference @ the Metcalfe, Reference and Information Services Wiki, <http://referenceandinformationservices.wikifoundry.com/page/reference+%40+the+Metcalfe> accessed 14 May 2014

documents live. Some people may be happier updating the documents but be slow to reply to emails, or unable to engage in Hangouts. All communication is good.

1. In the much bigger picture, an unsuccessful collaboration can still lead to very positive outcomes; just not where you think they will be, or maybe not when you expect them. People often talk about failure as being a good thing, but most people will not describe it that way when something they do fails, because they do not want to admit to failure. Failure can be a very positive learning experience and has the potential to still deliver amazing and incredible outcomes as well as good service. Admitting to failure, though often difficult, can also clear the way for moving forward, rather than trying to cover up what happened (or what did not happen), or trying to change the outcomes.
2. You need to share the boring stuff in collaboration. Not every part of a collaboration is equally glamorous. The grunt work should be shared around, and not simply done by the person who is the most gracious. In fact doing the boring stuff, can be a great way of expanding skills but it can also be an opportunity for thinking about the big picture of what is happening, so you know that the work is really needed.
3. Credit is important, so you need people to share it. There is always lots of credit to go around. Not everyone works together well. Sometimes it is personalities, other times it is timing. Unfortunately, some people are not good at sharing credit either, and may even exaggerate about how much they did or what ideas or actions they contributed. Benjamin Jowett, in a reflection of Harry S. Truman's thoughts on collaboration, is quoted as saying: "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit of doing them."<sup>16</sup> This is an important aspect to keep in mind as it can keep a tricky collaboration moving forward rather than see a project stalling. This is not saying that it is okay for someone to take credit for the ideas or work of others, but it is a reminder that the big picture can be more important. Acknowledging the good work people have done, giving credit where credit is due, also builds momentum and belief in the project, especially if it is a long term or repeating collaboration like the Reference Seminars, ref-ex and the Twitter reading group.
4. Remember, it is not about you, it is about the collaboration. This is critical as otherwise you can potentially wreck the experience of collaboration for others. Effective collaborations are greater than the individuals involved, and so it has to be about everyone. You have to have a healthy sense of the value which *everyone* can contribute, as they have to have of what *you* can contribute. An outcome can be adapting to change, with an openness to new and evolving ideas and technologies. Be willing to change if change is needed. The ability to adapt is important for any type of collaboration, large or small, as change is often inevitable (unless the collaborative effort is for a very short term). Changes can be seen around the goals of the project, the dates on which the project milestones are due, the technology being utilised to support the project and, for collaborations that take place over a longer time frame, the people involved can also change.
5. Another key to a successful collaboration is in the management of collaborative projects. Consistent and strong leadership is often associated with successful projects. Yet, like sharing the boring stuff and sharing the credit, sharing the leadership can have a powerful impact upon a collaborative project. Providing a space for people to step up and lead in areas at certain points can provide valuable experiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Jowett (n.d.) cited on Goodreads  
[http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/28887.Benjamin\\_Jowett](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/28887.Benjamin_Jowett) accessed 23 May 2014

## Benefits of collaboration

There are many benefits to collaboration, including:

- **That many can achieve more than just one.** Part of this is about the volume of work which can be done, part is about shared inspiration and ideas. People encourage each other as they work together.
- **The opportunity to develop and share ideas.** Some of the Pixar and Lego ideas are important here because of the collaborative culture at Pixar and the collaboration shown in the *Lego movie*. Sharing ideas can bring useful tangents into the discussion, but can also help prevent people being side tracked or bogged down in their ideas. It can provide a useful reality check so that the collaborative work progresses effectively.
- **It can work well for large and small projects.** Collaboration scales well, from two people working together, like the authors of this paper, to a New South Wales wide reference and information services collaboration which produces the ref-ex wiki and the annual Reference Seminar, or even a loose international collaboration which develops and manages the Twitter reading group.
- **There is an opportunity to contribute.** For a collaboration to be effective everyone has to contribute in a range of ways, with ideas and hard work coming from everyone. It is helpful if people are not caught up with status, but can listen to ideas wherever they come from (rather than only taking them seriously if they come from particular people).
- **There are opportunities for mentoring, as well as skill development for the individual and career development for the individual.** Collaboration can encourage people to increase their skills or in some instances may require it so that things can happen. People can mentor each other. This may be peer to peer mentoring, but there are a range of options depending on the skills and willingness of the people involved.
- **There are long term as well as immediate benefits.** With collaborations, like with most work, you need to keep an eye on the present, while also thinking longer term. There will often be pleasant surprises to collaborations. Some collaborations always will be hard work, with limited joy, but with impressive outcomes. This is not the preferred method as it can be very frustrating to work this way, however, progress can still happen. Even in collaborations where people all get on well together there will be tough times as someone may behave badly, people may be reluctant to follow up on something because of shared history or other complications. There are times when very difficult conversations are needed. Do not resort to email, or social media for these tough times. You may not always be able to have the tough conversations face to face, which is the preferred option because people can read all the signals better. Telephones can also work at these times as, when people do not have to look at each other, it can be less confrontational.
- **Depending on the size of the collaboration there can be strong community benefits, and benefits for wide community.** The benefits may be for the community of library workers, or a wider community which your library serves, hopefully it will be a combination. Always stay alert to wider benefits as they can mean that the same amount of work but with a bigger reach and potentially more significant benefit, and may be able to be effectively reused or repurposed by someone else.

- **Can you repurpose or share?** How are you telling people about your collaborative work? Is it via your library or council website, are you writing it up in some way, or making a video available? This will not be necessary for every collaboration, although there could be a very interesting paper in the collaborations of coffee runs, but it is something to consider to help people learn from what you have learned, and the outcomes.

### **Editing a Collection of Essays (collaborating with one other person)**

For this first Case Study we will be reflecting on experiences from the editing of a collection of essays: a collaborative project being undertaken by a team of two librarians.

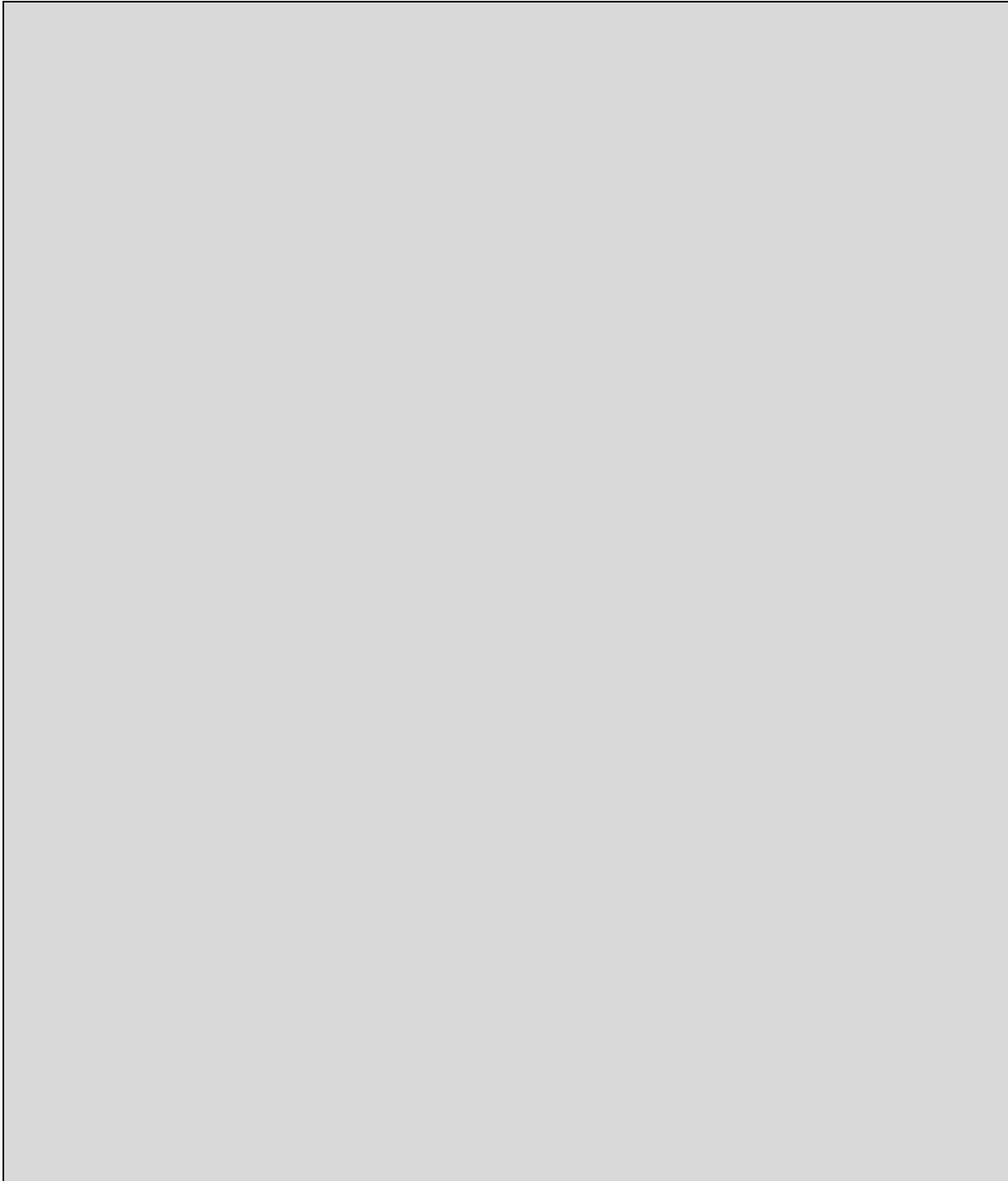
Two librarians, working actively within the information services profession were presented with an opportunity to co-edit a volume on a subject area that was of great interest to both of them. There were some initial difficulties in resolving some of the basic logistical issues – the two collaborators lived in different time zones and, as is often case with those participating in any collaborative effort, had very different sets of family and work commitments. These factors were flagged early in the collaborative relationship and a variety of measures, predominantly designed to facilitate communication, were discussed and then put into place. The project then began to move forward.

Two of the issues that emerged, within the early stages of the project, were around the different expectations that the two librarians had around deadlines and some of the specific outcomes of the project which was very important to both of them. A failure of the two team members to define and deploy a schedule of work and to clearly articulate standards for contributions made the working relationship increasingly difficult as the project progressed. Superimposed upon this stressful situation was the need for these two collaborations to then, in turn, collaborate with numerous essay contributors and coordinate content. Over time each started to feel that they were shouldering the bulk of the responsibility for the project's success thus diverting energy into an ever more negative relationship instead of on the delivery of a large-scale text.

On reflection it was agreed, by both librarians, that resolving issues as soon as they became apparent would have made the project both easier and more enjoyable. Indeed, the main breakdown within the relationship was realised to be communication (despite a heavy emphasis on establishing lines of communication in the earliest stages of the project) with a key learning being that it is important to reply to all email, and other, messages rather than avoiding these when things go wrong. Such avoidance can generate anxieties around one party feeling harassed and another party feeling ignored or developing concerns that some crisis has befallen their colleague.

It is important to note that the project was successfully realised – despite both struggling with each other and the process. Both participants in this collaboration achieved their goal: the production of a high quality textbook of significant scale and scope. Yet neither party takes from the project a suite of positive experiences and neither is willing to work with the other on similar projects in the future. The main lesson here being around lost opportunities due to an unpleasant experience that could have been avoided through early and more consistent communication in addition to following through on some individual tasks in a timelier manner.





***Table 1: Case Study 1***

**Twitter Reading Group (collaborating with a team)**

For this second Case Study we will be looking at the Twitter reading group, Read watch play,<sup>17</sup> as it is a collaboration which has different parts to it. It started in New South Wales, but there are now partners in New Zealand, Singapore, England and Denmark, and many different aspects to this collaboration.

Planning for the year is a very important part of this collaboration. It uses a mix of a wiki,<sup>18</sup> Google+ Hangouts, email and face to face discussion. This starts by April each year. Clear time lines are important, and clear expectations. For example all the topics to be considered for the themes must be on the wiki. This is fairer for the library staff who cannot be present at the meeting where the themes are discussed. This is critical because of the libraries involved across New South Wales as well as other locations. It means people have to think in advance, and not turn up a meeting hoping to wing it. We use facilitation to sort out the twelve themes, and then add information about what these themes cover. For the 2015 planning there was a Google+ Hangout with the partner libraries so that their input could be better represented at the face to face planning session which took place a few weeks later. The next stage is for steering committee members to write this information up for the descriptive pages for each month. The writers have to keep as much of the information which was discussed collaboratively as possible, as it has to be representative of the collaboration, rather than individual preference. This is often done by two people working together.

Writing this way is possible because shared tools are used, including Google Drive. Use of cloud solution is necessary because several people from different workplaces are doing the writing, and it makes version control manageable, and trackable. It is also useful when dealing with multiple time zones. The posts are turned into blog pages, to describe each month. These are, in turn, made into blog posts for the first day of every month. These pages can be linked to by libraries using Hootsuite or some other scheduling tool for promotion, well before the blog posts go live each month. The discussions online each month are a collaboration between the libraries involved using a range of library accounts. It starts with Nelson Libraries and @readwatchplay (the collective account) facilitating the discussion. The months Singapore Public Libraries are involved, they come online later, and Surrey Libraries with the three discussions they facilitate go across a few time zones. Other social media tools are used as well, including Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr and Instagram<sup>19</sup> so that people can choose how they interact with the online reading group.

This is a flexible collaboration with different libraries involved in different ways. Some libraries do two Tweets a month on the first of the month and the last Tuesday of the month. Others like Singapore Public Libraries use Instagram more than Twitter to discuss reading. Each month emails are sent with the statistics from the previous discussion, containing encouragement about participation. Encouragement and feedback is important, perhaps more so, when people are not able to meet face to face. Where people can be together it is easy to get together around food (for example) as way to encourage and share. Online the encouragement is more about making sure people acknowledge each other's work. We started using Google Groups this year as a way to help streamline communication. It is not used much, but it helps. This is the fourth year of the Twitter reading group, and it has no cut-off date.

**Table 2: Case Study 2**

### **The collaborator's toolbox**

<sup>17</sup> Read watch play <http://readwatchplay.wordpress.com/> accessed 25 May 2014

<sup>18</sup> Readers advisory wiki <http://readersadvisory.wikifoundry.com/> accessed 23 May 2014

<sup>19</sup> Read watch play - social media <http://readwatchplay.wordpress.com/social/> accessed 25 May 2014

Many library programs and services are provided collaboratively every day. Increasingly library workers are collaborating with people they have not met face to face, but who they have come across online because they share a particular interest. The International Librarians Network<sup>20</sup> is one way this can happen, but connections on social media are effective too as people have conversations online with others who share similar interests.

With collaboration it is important for people to accept responsibility for the work they commit to, and to keep others informed, without over communicating. This can be a really tough balance, and will vary with each collaboration. Working across different workplaces is excellent, but also can create tensions as each workplace has different priorities and focuses and this can be difficult if people are reluctant to talk with each other about the different work peaks.

Online tools can help connect people in different workplaces or even in the same work place. It is important to consider how they are used as someone spending a long time formatting a work tool may not be the most effective use of time or skills.

Effective communication as mentioned in both case studies is critical. For example people need to inform others about any hitches to workloads which may impact on the collaboration. It is important to know, that if you need help, to ask. Also if you know that someone is particularly suited to a task or role, suggest it to them. Offering to help or participate in a collaboration is valuable. Asking for help is valuable too. Checking social media can be useful to determine if something has been happening in one of the people's lives which is effecting their contribution. For example if someone goes from being very active on social media to quiet it may mean that something dramatic has happened in their life, or it may simply mean they are on holidays. It provides hints to know whether to follow up, how to follow up, or give someone space. You can always resort to an email or a phone call asking how someone is, and then inform the others who need to know.

Email is important, and meetings may be, although some people enjoy meetings as an end in themselves rather than for the outcomes which an effective meeting can provide. Not all meetings are equally effective. You do not need to meet unless you really need to, there are other ways to check on how things are progressing. Email still can be good for bringing information together and for providing regular reminders. You may decide to use an email group. There are various options for this including Google Groups or other collaborative spaces like BaseCamp, which may be public or private depending on the work being done. This gives threads for different discussions enabling tracking back to find out what has been happening earlier and keeps all the communication in one place.

It is a luxury to have an in person meeting especially if people work in different locations, and the travel time may outweigh the benefits of meeting together, or because of costs totally stop the collaboration. Consider online meetings and the use of tools such as private Google+ Hangouts, Adobe Connect or Skype can work well. These can save travel time as people can use the tools at their desk. People react differently if they can see other people in a meeting, and this can get around some of the teleconference issues like how do you know who will speak next without taking a highly structured approach. Shared screens in online meetings, which is possible through Google+ Hangouts and other tools can also help as everyone can see the same screen at the same time and can comment and interact with it. You may be better having 15 minute meetings at short notice just to sort out a few issues rather than longer meetings which repeats information in documents which should have been read and acted on. A chat meeting can also work well, as people are discussing things at the same time, by typing rather than talking. Really think about what communication is needed.

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<sup>20</sup> International Librarians Network <http://ilnetwork.wordpress.com/> accessed 25 May 2014

A shared online workspace is important. If the collaboration is all in one workplace it can be a shared drive, but this will not be possible if there are people from different workplaces working together. Google Drive with the folders which can be shared so all the documents in them are also shared, can be a critical tool. Tracking back is also possible, or you may choose other conventions such as editing in different colours. There are other tools like Basecamp which can be used in similar ways.

Post-it notes still have a place. These can work for face to face discussions as well as online. Having people put their ideas down, without initially discussing them increases the number of ideas suggested. If there is initial discussion people think their idea has already been suggested, when they may have a subtle difference which is important. Depending on the work being done a wiki may also be a valuable addition, and pages can be used a bit like post it notes to contribute ideas to a wider discussion. Other social media tools may have a place. There will be times when Pinterest can be used to bring ideas together well.

Clear and agreed deadlines for different parts of the work is important, and people should be putting these in their calendars (whether print or electronic). For some work you will need to set up official files to comply with internal work practices. Make sure you keep these up to date as they can be a vital asset.

Talk about the tools with the person/people you are working with. Learn from each other. You will have your favourite tools, but there could be some great ones you have not used yet. Do not undervalue simple scheduling tools like Doodle which can save a lot of emails trying to sort out a meeting time.

## **Results**

Celebrate key points – even when things are not working out well. Do not blind yourself to (or hide) failures, learn from them. Discuss them in constructive ways, so that people understand they are points to learn from, rather than points of blame. Collaborations are great ways to get work done, and deliver better outcomes than would have been otherwise possible. They develop technical and communication skills, and can also develop networks. There will be short term as well as long term benefits. They will often be enjoyable, but not always, and even the enjoyable collaborations will have their tough moments. There is a creative and productive nature to collaboration which through the generation of positive energy through engaging in a creative process which in turn builds productivity.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a summary of the why and how of collaboration with a focus on libraries. Utilising two case studies that provide real-world examples we have outlined some of the challenges but also many of the benefits of collaborative effort. These case studies are supported with a summary of collaborative practices and a toolbox that presents some of the more valuable ‘tools of the trade’ which we hope will be useful for experienced collaborators and those thinking about collaborating for the first time.

Some collaborations are accidental, some are more purposeful, others are not even considered collaborative: they just happen. There are no guaranteed systems for ensuring success but it is true that ‘together we are stronger’. There will always be challenges to working collaboratively but it is argued here that for all library workers, from all areas within the information sector, there are numerous personal and professional benefits of working in this way. We can, all of us, be ‘master builders’ of knowledge.

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