



SCONUL Shared Services

A Toolkit for Library Collaboration

Coordinating author - Richard Parsons, University of Dundee.

This Toolkit was prepared under the guidance of the SCONUL Collaboration Strategy Group in 2016.

The Chair was John Tuck, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Coordinating author was Richard Parsons, University of Dundee.

A wide range of individuals have contributed to the development of the Collaboration Toolkit including Diane Bruxvoort (Aberdeen), Robin Green (Warwick), Ann Rossiter (SCONUL), Tracey Stanley (Cardiff).

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. Any copyright holders we have been unable to reach or to whom inaccurate acknowledgement has been made are encouraged to contact the publisher

SCONUL Shared Services – A Toolkit for Library Collaboration

Aim

To aid the selection and development of efficient and effective shared services within and beyond the HE Library sector.

Summary

The SCONUL Shared Services toolkit has been prepared as a series of defined characteristics (or actions) that are grouped in a logical order. The list of characteristics is some 37 items in length, grouped in five separate areas; strategic, design & plan, operational, sustainability, closure. The characteristics are not hieratical and they are generally independent although some are related and supportive. For different collaborations, different elements will be prominent and some elements may be unnecessary. The toolkit is probably not complete, and learning further from existing and new collaborations will be a rewarding continuance of the work.

Use of the Toolkit

The toolkit is presented in a spreadsheet format, as a table with the opportunity to recognise and consider each potential characteristic of collaboration, and then add comments, perhaps dates, tasks, responsibilities. It may be used simply as a checklist, or as a more sophisticated planning tool to assist in the detailed planning of a collaboration.

The SCONUL originators will welcome the opportunity to further engage with those who may make use of the toolkit, either in the form of further explanation, interaction and development, or in the form of feedback and suggestion for enhancement.

The 37 characters are also presented in table format on the following page. Listed by topics, they are also numbered to permit cross-referencing and the addition of further characters.

The following pages provide a narrative of the background information that has informed the development of the toolkit. The presentation of these is designed as a pragmatic development of the concepts for successful collaboration, and these are experience-based with first-hand reference to the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library and the WHELP LMS collaborative procurement and deployment.

Key Points.

A. Strategic

1. Goal congruence and diversity
2. Business value for all members
3. Understand the requirement for trust and reinforcing trust
4. Recognise that we collaborate to solve difficult issues
5. Engage and positively utilise institutional and individual diversity
6. Communications plan and actions
7. Source an adequate budget

B. Design & Plan

1. Establish a purpose and the timeline
2. Acknowledge collaboration as an essential and sophisticated learning opportunity
3. Utilise distributed leadership
4. Team leadership to utilise task experts – experience and knowledge
5. Hold face to face meetings earlier in establishing a successful collaboration.
6. Involve every stakeholder richly early in the project
7. Use a variety of documentation to support all participants – recognising different learning and working styles – text, diagrams, video etc.
8. Recognise strategic and operational requirements can conflict
9. Recognise complexity in the service
10. Avoid - Waiting to see complete clarity before acting
11. Avoid - Seeking complete resolution and certainty
12. Avoid - Facing misunderstanding and misattribution

C. Operational

1. Regular fully inclusive meetings scheduled and communicated. Milestones.
2. Accept team working
3. Use rich virtual meeting environments to enhance engagement
4. Establish a shared, secure and accessible online environment for file exchange and record keeping
5. Ensure representation for every participant (may be one person representing more than one institution)
6. Sustain trust and familiarity
7. Ensure the social gains, fun where possible, and genuine satisfaction

D. Sustainability

1. Measure and publicise the benefits
2. Tolerance from all members
3. Tolerate moderate gains and losses
4. Engage (not fight) changes in compliance and governance
5. Do not allow the collaboration to get overly complex
6. Manage the nuts and bolts – H&S, succession, security, risk, ownership
7. Include meaningful review at regular intervals
8. Celebrate success and the learning opportunity

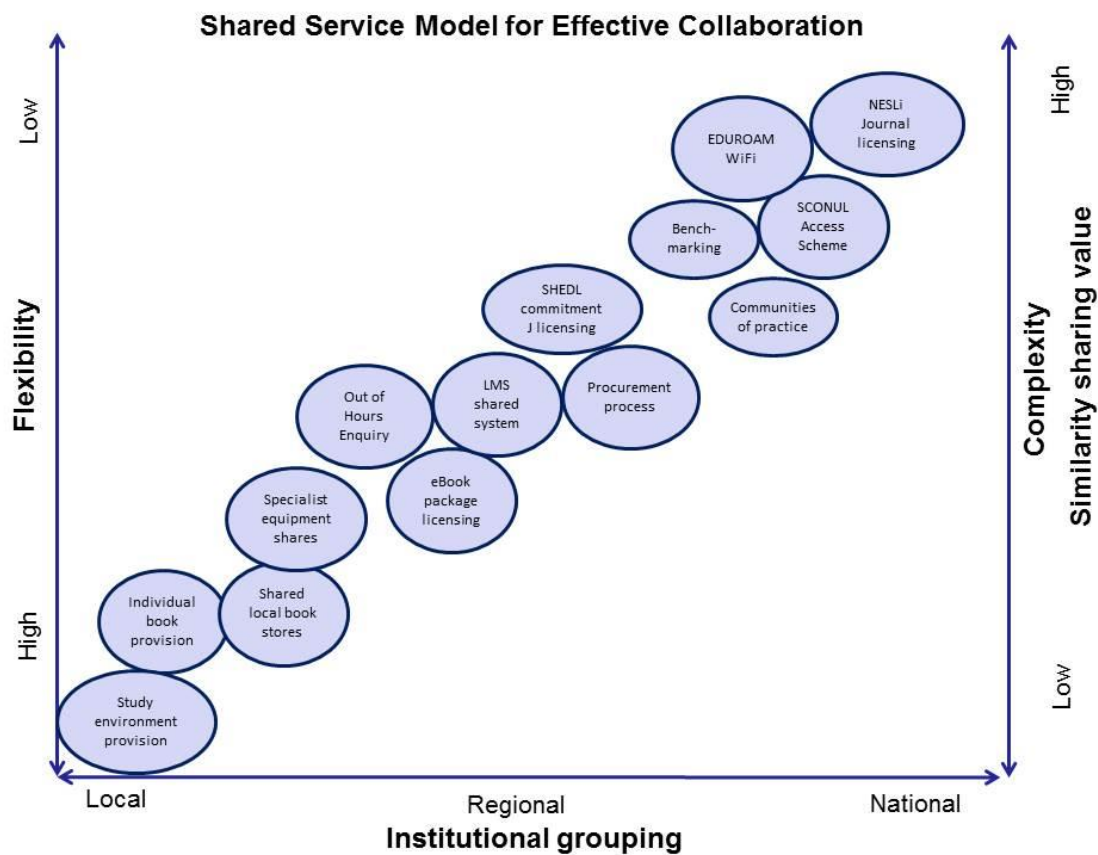
E. Closure

1. Accept collaborations may have a lifecycle
2. Include mechanisms to continue beyond the collaboration
3. Be open and honest about changes in the investment/return equation.

Current position

The University Library community has a range of successful shared services, varying in scale from local to national. These services can be short-lived or sustained over many years, depending on their purpose. With guidance from across the UK, and particularly stemming from a shared service development meeting facilitated by SCONUL, a pattern in the collaboration activity is recognisable. This understanding has been combined with an analysis of the fundamental constraints and opportunities, to permit the development of outline guidance, as a toolkit, to assist in the creation of additional shared services.

The pattern of existing collaborations is presented in the model diagram below.



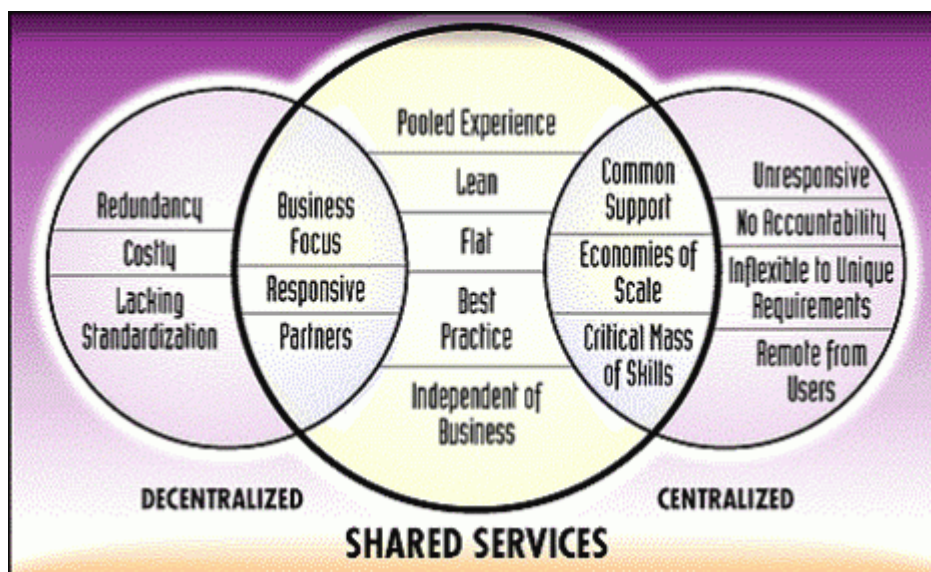
Existing shared services in the Library community extend from local to national groupings, with numbers of institutions involved from 2 to 5 (local), through to 10 to 20 (regional or specialty), through to 100 to 200 (national). It is possible to consider this axis as extending to individual requirements at one extreme and international approaches (such as laws & standards) at the other. Flexibility is generally highest within a single or small number of institutions, extending to the large national approaches such as NESLI licensing, which have limited flexibility. Complexity of the collaboration and the topic is generally high in national shared services, and even at the regional level the complexity of the service may engage specialists from the participating libraries.

A similarity sharing index, or value, can be envisaged where the greater the similarity of process or service, the greater the efficiency gain for participating institutions.

Collaboration brings immediate efficiencies to new areas of service such as research data management or open access publishing. In recent years, with efficient communication and technical connectivity, it is the norm for the initial development to be enhanced by collaboration. Pilot services are developed and shared with the community and may underpin the development of new collaborative approaches such as discipline data repositories or OA publication. Digitisation services and challenges are another current area for further joint initiatives. Collaborative working also plays a role in the very specialist and sometimes diminishing areas of service. Legacy tools for archive access, binderies and other collection or discipline specialities can be effectively managed as a shared service where a single institution could not afford the maintenance costs.

Wider Professional Collaborations.

The effectiveness of collaboration in business and IT environments is well documented. Huxman, Vangen & Hibbert describe the theory of collaborative advantage, and the necessity to avoid collaborative inertia. Central to this is the recognition of the need for alignment of purpose, trust, leadership and tolerance of risk. A diagram from the CloudExpo blog usefully illustrates the “sweet spot” that shared services occupy between expensive decentralised and inflexible centralised services.



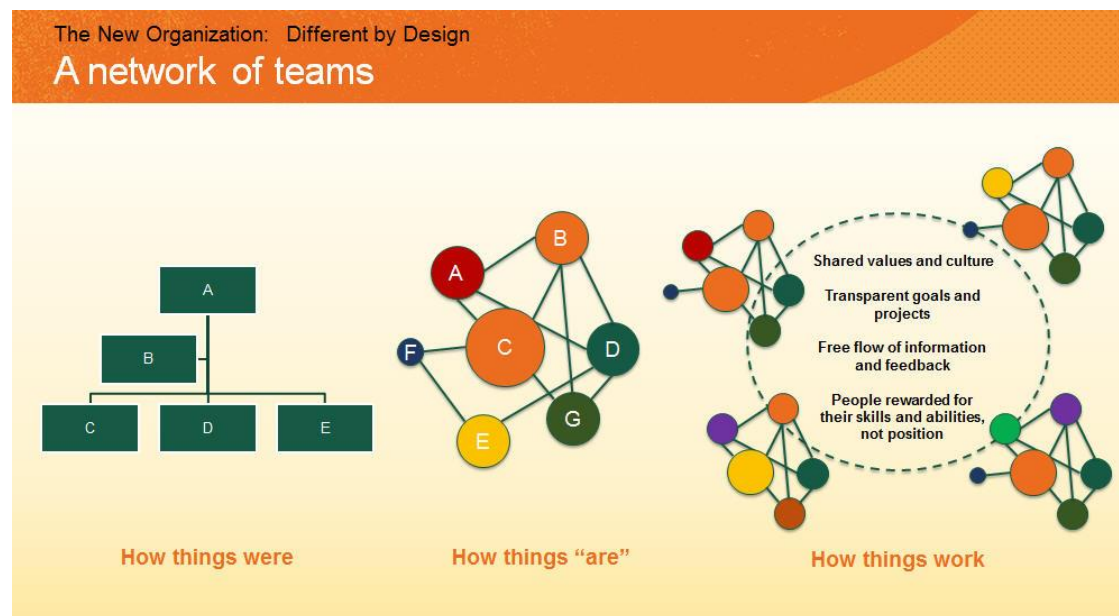
CloudExpo Blog, 2016, <http://govcloud.ulitzer.com/node/2145282>

The pragmatic guidance provided within business development courses such as those from Lynda.com available on international collaborations, resonate well with the theory of collaborative advantage, and the more practical experience of existing and successful collaborations in the higher education Library domains such as procurement and Library Management System services.

Network of Teams

The successful development of shared services through collaborative working between and within existing institutions, matches well with recognised trends in organisational and HR trends for productive and successful working. The global HR consulting firm, DeLoitte, has recently recognised the reality of the modern working environment as utilising a team-based approach (often within a hierarchical structured organisation), with genuine productivity being delivered via a network of teams, collaborating efficiently. This optimal way of working requires modern collaboration tools and effective communication, much as has been discussed here. DeLoitte highlight that goals and productivity is effectively determined by the teams in this mode of working, and performance is judged not by targets, but by collectively and successfully completing the work of the teams. The full report on Organisational Design - The Rise of Teams is presented on pages 17 to 24 (DeLoitte 2016).

One recommendation for successful team leadership is the placement of functional leaders, with skills and experience in the domain of the team, as the expert team leader, rather than a professional manager. This characteristic is well aligned with Library shared services, where an experienced expert from one institution can both lead a project, and pass on important experience and knowledge to collaborating institutions.



(DeLoitte 2016 - <http://joshbersin.com/2016/03/the-new-organization-different-by-design/>)

Our Shared Services development toolkit is provided as an Excel template, with a structure designed to address two key activities.

Firstly, the toolkit may be used for an initial check that the potential collaboration is likely to be viable. At an early stage in collaboration it may be expected that clear aims and likely outcomes can be articulated, and some consideration is given to leadership, participants, communication and the development of trust.

Secondly, the toolkit may be utilised to provide a complete appraisal and opportunity for development and enhancement for an established collaboration. In this mode more complete discussion and consideration of each element may be documented and shared with the collaborators to reinforce a common understanding of purpose, style, development and sustainability. The overall aim is to enhance the success of the service and the satisfaction of the members of the collaboration.

New areas for potential collaboration in the future may be found within the existing new and rapidly developing areas such as transition of mobile environment, commissioning of open educational resources and shared professional development in speciality fields.

References:

Cloud Expo Blog, 2016. <http://cloudcomputing.sys-con.com/node/2145282>

DeLoitte 2016 -Global Human Capital Trends 2016. The new organization: Different by design. <http://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/human-capital/articles/introduction-human-capital-trends.html>

Managing to Collaborate: The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Advantage (Paperback). 2005. Chris Huxham, Siv Vangen.

Collaborative Advantage – A business efficiency model. Huxhman, Vangen & Hibbert

Collaboration to maintain the pace of change. The DNA of Collaboration, Chris Jones 2012.

The Speed of Trust. Stephen MR Covey 2006.

Business benefits of collaboration (e.g. Lynda.com courses)