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TEAMS AND PARTNERS

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"The essence of effective teamwork is to create a product through a collective effort that exceeds the quality of any individual endeavor."
(Smart, 2000: 19)

Technological change has touched everyone in the last few years. It is a shared experience that most libraries and librarians have chosen to embrace. Its universal impact has given librarians the opportunity to converse with others within the campus community on shared issues, problems, technical skills, and educational goals. "Alliance, partnership, networking, relationship, teamwork, collaboration, coordination, cooperation, liaison, building bridges..." (Cook, 2000: 19) are all current terms used in library literature indicating the more active role that librarians have taken in making contact and establishing relations with others in the academic environment.

In a survey of academic librarians (Gallegos, 2000: 99-100), 60% of collaborative faculty/librarian projects were focused on instruction. This interest in instruction is echoed by the increased interest among teaching members of the academic community in the area of information literacy. Information Literacy has "enjoyed a rapid, almost whirlwind period of development and growth" (Baker, 1989: 312). Information Literacy is a definite area of cross-disciplinary interest in the campus community and when coupled with the increase in funding to Instruction Technology projects, you have an environment rich with potential for collaborative web-based projects.

WHY TEAMS

Librarians are not alone in noting an increasing trend toward a blurring of research boundaries between subject disciplines. Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research has been on the rise as researchers have asked questions in ways that cut across disciplinary lines or when traditional research strategies have failed to address key issues. A brief look at the titles of published research indexed in ISI's Web of Science shows an increasing use of the terms interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary over the five year periods 1987-91 (1,255), 1992-96 (1,625) to 1997-01 (2,285). Expanding outside of traditional research area can inform one about the commonalties between seemingly different subjects or suggest innovative ways to approach complex projects.

Advances in technology and the expansion of information resources have also contributed to the increased complexities of researching both within and outside one's own discipline. Projects may require a high level of sophistication or experience not available from a single person or even a single professional organization. This

"increasingly intertwined nature of issues and concerns" (Lippincott, 2000) underscores the importance of partnerships and collaborations to provide a structure for creating a working environment bringing together needed expertise. "The benefits of effective cross-functional teams are great, and the nature of work in the next centry will require even greater collaboration as organizations evolve..." (Smart, 2000: 21)

WHAT MAKES A TEAM OR A PARTNERSHIP

Though there is a wide variety of formats for collaboration, this chapter will look most closely at those within an academic environment and specifically in the context of developing web-based resources. Even within these parameters, a team can still take many forms. In fact, what makes a group of individuals a team?

A team or a partnership is more than just a group of people working together or engaged in a common activity. It is a group that shares a mission and goals, that has a common vision of the shape and dimensions of what they are developing (Lippincott, 2002). Katzenbach and Smith (1999: 45) define a team as "... a small number of people with complimentary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

Web development teams can take many forms. Depending on the project, members may come from an existing single unit or may already be members of a focused group. Many librarians have had experience working on such of teams. More challenging are teams comprised of diverse members with differing experiences and backgrounds. An academic environment holds the potential for membership from a wide spectrum of disciplines, employees may have varying commitments (full time vs. part time) or levels of responsibility, or may come from outside the academic environment (e.g. contracted assistance, community members).

SELECTING MEMBERS

Opportunities for librarians to lead or participate in web development teams with faculty are as numerous as time and energy allow. Connecting with faculty and other potential project collaborators can happen in so many different settings. From informal networking, related committee participation, instructional programs, formal grant proposals, marketing existing web resources, alliances with Instructional Technology/Computer colleagues, to going to faculty directly, librarians can cover a wide area of interests and also provide a combination of development expertise not readily available elsewhere. (For more ideas on networking and initiating collaborative opportunities with faculty, see Jeffries' (2000) essay which provides informative tips based on a librarian/faculty survey.) Most librarians already have experience in developing web resources, working on teams and creating instructional and other materials in support of academic research. Web development skills such as project management, web programming, database development, usability testing, and graphic design describe expertise currently held by many librarians.

In the early stages of team creation it is important to bring together the right mix of people to match the project being developed. Thinking carefully about the dimensions and scope of your project and its intended audience is key in pulling together a good team. Especially important in creating cross-disciplinary projects is the need to secure cross-disciplinary involvement. This may require working with more than one faculty

member, working with computing or technology units on campus, or working with administrators or staff from other departments.

Keep the team size small and manageable. Ten members are more nimble and more likely to be able to interact constructively and reach agreement than twenty members are. Large groups are less likely to reach consensus on specifics (e.g. common goals, approach and mutual accountability) and tend to become more hierarchical and logistically unwieldy.

You may also have members who can devote varying amounts of time to the project. Some may be adding responsibilities onto their existing workload, some may have specific amounts of time scheduled and some may be able to devote as much time as they wish. You may also be working with contracted support that requires specific direction and timelines. Some members, for example faculty, may have technical skills but not the time or commitment to provide this support. All of these considerations need must be evaluated when selecting candidates for your team.

As you consider candidates to provide a balance of technical, social and collaborative skills, take into consideration that a team does not have to have all areas covered in its membership at the start of a project. In fact, team leaders often mistakenly believe "...that without "just the right set of people at the start" an effective team will not be possible." (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999: 120-121). Teams can identify gaps as they go along and may even choose to promote internal learning rather than look for new members. Look for members who come in regular contact with your intended audience, who show the potential and interest to learn new skills if needed and who demonstrate a willingness to commit their time and energy.

TEAM BUILDING

Once you've gathered your initial team members, there are several steps you can take to start the process of evolving from a group of individuals to groups of partners working constructively together. Your first discussions and meetings should cover the following:

Develop an agreed purpose and project definition
Groups need to take time to develop a sense of ownership of their project. A lack of consensus on a common purpose may prevent a true team identity from ever forming. The phrase "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" can be used to define a team that has truly come together in this key phase.

Agree on a how to get work done
Establishing a team contract is often a good approach to ensuring a good working environment for team members. Procedures and team structure need to be discussed. Members should agree on how to get the "real work" done. Jobs and roles need to be clearly defined and assigned (e.g. scheduling, taking minutes, organizing meetings). Recognize that key team roles also include good people skills. "Effective teams always have members who assume important social as well as leadership roles such as challenging, interpreting, supporting, integrating, remembering, summarizing. Each team is unique in how it makes this process happen. Members may assume different roles at different times and ... these roles evolve over time to meet varying needs" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999: 45-81)

Provide goals and accountability

Teams should set specific goals and achievements for themselves in order to maintain momentum and energy. Even small goals can help "... concretize work efforts and maintain a timeline." (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999: 45-81) Project management and calendaring are essential not only in meeting deadlines, but also in letting members see their progress towards project completion.

Set meeting groundrules
Creating a good team is as much about communication and group dynamics as it is about web site development. Though it may seem obvious, going over some basic guidelines around meeting format and conduct can help ensure that members work together smoothly and respectfully. Giving each member the opportunity to speak and learning to listen when others share their opinions is a key characteristic of successful teams. This does not mean that there needs to be total agreement or consensus of opinions, but there should be interest in learning and sharing. Members should honor and appreciate differences, including issues relating to power and hierarchy. The ability to look beyond parochial departmental goals, turf wars and territorial boundaries is also critical. True conflict can arise and paralyze the team if these issues are not clearly discussed and groundrules agreed on at the start. The best way to ensure this is to have a clear set of guidelines around behavior and meeting conduct. A sample contract or set of guidelines might include:

- Set regular meeting times with agreed on durations.
- Require meeting attendance, prompt arrival time, notification if you cannot attend.
- Agree on how to set agendas. Team leader provides agenda prior to meetings.
- Keep action minutes noting responsibilities and timelines. Archive and distribute minutes.
- Make discussions open, productive, confidential and focused on the project, not the person.
- Respect and listen to the opinions of other members. Do more listening than talking.
- Agree to disagree; keep conflict constructive.
- Avoid jargon and explain in clear, concise language. Check if everyone understands.
- Determine how to move from disagreement to consensus (e.g. voting, prioritizing alternatives, continued discussion, etc.).
- Ensure equitable work distribution and that each members contributions. Each action or activity has a member responsible for ensuring its timely completion.

MEMBER ROLES AND LEADERSHIP

Roles and responsibilities within a web development team can develop in different ways. Members are often selected because of specific skills they bring or subject expertise. Some roles are specific and easy to recognize and label, whereas other roles are less well articulated but no less important. Barnum (2000: 328) describes roles that either "... are product oriented and are often easy to understand." but also includes process oriented roles that "...tend to keep harmony and good will, ease tensions and build cohesiveness."

Eventually a team becomes a solid working unit. Most team members may find that they move through several roles that evolve as they develop expertise, learn new skills and/or move with the needs of the project. Even leadership can change or evolve. A team leader or manager may be appointed, selected by team members, or there may be a shared leadership. And a good leader is not born that way, many skills are developed "on the job". Leadership style will vary depending on the group's needs, but there are some key skills that apply to all teams:
- Clarify group goals and ensure that they are clearly understood.

- Ensure that all members are treated as full partners and members recognize team groundrules.
- Listen carefully, actively participate and do a real share of the work.
- Clarify issues, manage group relationships and effectively resolve conflicts.
- Provide supportive, constructive reinforcement.
- Articulate the needs of the group.
- Share outside credit and recognition with the group.

Most successful leaders know they do not need to make all key decisions or assign key jobs. They don't know everything and need other members to succeed. Anyone who believes in the team purpose and the team can lead successfully. "Key is striking right balance between providing guidance and giving up control." (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999: 85-86, 131-)

COMMUNICATION

One of the most important features of a successful team is good communication. Though easy to acknowledge as basic common sense, without proper attention it is easy to stop or impede the flow of information. Interpersonal styles, terminology and assumptions about technical skills can all be barriers to providing a good information exchange. It is important to keep all group members in mind when establishing how communication is shared. Burdman (1999: 76-) describes several common causes of poor communication:
- Differing disciplines and lack of mutual terminology.
- Personality conflicts and fear.
- Hidden agendas.
- Ineffective meetings (e.g. poor agenda setting, meetings too long, no sense of direction, etc.).
- Unspoken assumptions about others or project goals.
- Discourage the "Expert" solo team member and encourage team participation.

The key to addressing such problems is to establish a sense of trust around the sharing and understanding of communication between all team members. Start by acknowledging that communication preferences and styles vary. For example, face to face meetings allow the sharing of more contextual clues that may be missing in email exchanges. Email allows faster and more frequent communication. Rather than choose one over the other, you may want to use each as your project and needs evolve. Face to face meetings are good for brainstorming and idea development or for when the group needs to discuss issues. Electronic mail is excellent for sharing factual information or reaching decisions that need a quick turnaround.

Communication is also dependent on members being able to understand one another. This means that terminology and jargon need to be explained and understood by all in a respectful and supportive environment. As members learn to speak the same language, the mutual knowledge base of the team grows and develops as well. Sharing expertise will also promote good communication. For example, not all members need to be able to do HTML coding, but sharing some basic concepts will allow conversations to proceed with all members as participants.

Good communication also means establishing an infrastructure for sharing and archiving information. Are all members satisfied with the way information is shared? Smaller team size means that there is the potential for all members to be up to date on issues. However, this does not preclude the necessity of assigning responsibility to create meeting agendas, maintain project calendars, archive email or keep and distribute meeting minutes. The availability of online resources such as group calendar and project

management software, listservs, and web archives can make most of these tasks easier to initiate, more efficient, and more productive.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict management is probably one of the greatest fears team members face. Conflict can erupt and paralyze a team. Few of us enjoy addressing the "problem participant" and members often work under the false assumption that group consensus is the only way to avoid confrontation. This is not true. In fact, it is a poor team that does not have issues with conflict. Well-managed conflict can provide a new perspective and discussions that can bring about changes or shifts in thinking and approaches. "Conflict is a necessary part of becoming a real team. (The) challenge is to make it constructive instead of just enduring it." (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999: 110-).

Frank and open communication must be encouraged and supported. This means providing a supportive environment where members can trust that their comments can be heard without misunderstandings or animosity. As noted above, not all conflict is bad. However, it is key to be able to determine if it is helping or hurting the process. Barnum ("Building a team for user-centered design" IEEE pg. 329) points out two kinds of negative conflict:
"*Affective*, interpersonal disagreement and emotional reactions, and *Procedural*, disagreements about how a group should be run. These two types need to be managed and minimized and can cause bad feelings, lower cohesiveness." Members will look toward the team leader to aid in resolving these issues. For example, team leaders can meet privately with individuals or collectively remind members of the group's guidelines. A healthy type of disagreement is one that is *Substantive* and "deals with disagreement about content, context and concepts." (Barnum, 2000: 329) This type of conflict can be very productive and should be accepted and encouraged.

The best way to head off most negative conflicts is to have in place a clear set of guidelines around behavior and meeting conduct. Revisiting these periodically during the project will remind members of their original agreement. It is also important to revisit the concepts of flat vs. hierarchical structure. Members may need to be reminded that colleagues are equal partners within the team structure even though they may hold differing levels of power in the general academic environment. Team members do not have to be best friends, but they do need to be able to work with one another in a respectful and professional manner and be able to compromise.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TEAMS

Whether yours is an informal team of faculty and librarians or a formally appointed working group, a self-directed partnership or top down hierarchy, there are many common traits successful teams share. Some of these traits focus on the development process with the use of revisable prototypes, design based on informed opinion, modular development and early testing. But even traits such as these are based on a team's ability to be flexible and let ideas evolve.

The literature on successful teams offers many recipes for creating a productive team. In fact, many of us might find it easier to list what makes an "unsuccessful team". Poor leadership, bad communication, unmanaged conflict, lack of project management, and lack of trust are all clearly examples of how to ensure a team's frustration and failure.

Describing a successful team synthesizes the entire process of team selection, building, role development and conflict management. As Barnum notes (2000: 331) "Successful teams define tasks and resolve problems before they get out of hand. Value group cohesion and social interaction. Realize that teams take time and have a life span involving phases of development.".

Successful teams can be characterized as having many of the following traits:
Roles are agreed on, though members may rotate these roles as the team evolves.
Technical and social roles are equally valued as key contributions to the work of the team.
Individuals are clear about their commitments of time, skills and energy. Though members may vary in the amount of their contributions, all are equal partners in the process.
Procedures and structures are clearly understood and agreed on regarding communication, meeting formats and conflict management.
Effective leadership is on hand, requiring a balance between guiding and letting go of control.
Conflicts are an important part of teamwork and are resolved in a constructive and productive manner.
Members promote working together respectfully and professionally and are self-monitoring on issues such as meeting deadlines, sharing information, and positive reinforcement.

KEEPING THE TEAM GOING

Teams and partnerships may go through many cycles depending on the nature of the project. Projects may require ongoing commitments, while others may need new team members for changing developments. All teams go through up and down cycles of work during a web development project. Sometimes teams must let go of long-held ideas that just aren't working, face major redesign issues, or loss of key members.

Maintaining cohesion and communication are key to keeping the team's momentum going during these hard times. By being aware of these issues, librarians can contribute to keeping members involved in a number of ways:
Don't lose touch
Maintaining personal contacts within and outside the meeting environment can keep interest alive. Sometimes all it takes is the acknowledgement of how hard the work has been and how stressful and intense it can become.
Recognize contributions
Honoring examples of members work, giving credit to the entire team and providing positive feedback are also both crucial to keeping members active and involved
Share results
Teams may also find new energy from planning on how to share their results via conference papers, articles or books.
Rethink team membership
Being able to discuss the addition of new members and other plans for change can invigorate and enliven discussions. New members can bring a fresh outlook on issues and contribute new perspectives. Or your project may have moved on to a point that no longer requires input from all members. In this case, members may choose to leave, participate as needed or on a consulting basis. A reduction in group size can also make a team more efficient and faster in responding to updates and revisions.

CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING A WEB-BASED ONLINE LITERACY TUTORIAL

The following project is one example of how using many of the guidelines outlined in this chapter can lead to the creation of a successful and effective web-based product that continues to be an active collaborative project.

In spring of 1997, a campuswide conference on undergraduate education at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) started a conversation among a group of librarians, computer center staff and faculty. This is a good example of how a diverse segment of the campus population were drawn together by a similiar interest, in this case undergraduate education. This large conference group broke into several smaller interest groups including one that focused on technology and undergraduate education. This interest group became the pool from which a self-selected collection of interested faculty, librarians and staff formed to brainstorm a pilot project that would provide cross disciplinary instruction around online research for new undergraduates. The group came together on a specific goal and determined what areas of expertise or administrative support would be needed to carry the project out. This led to inviting more faculty from various disciplines as well as more technical and computing staff support. All members met together again and agreed on a set of basic design goals and development procedures. This process ultimately allowed the group to coalesce into a team with the goal of developing UCSC's first campuswide online literacy course and work began in the summer of 1997 on a web-based online literacy tutorial.

Team members were those who worked closely with undergraduates and online resources, had been interested in the instructional issues and were willing to develop supporting resources. Representation on the committee came from academic staff, administrators and faculty members from a variety of divisions such as the Computing Center, Humanities, Science, and Social Science Divisions, and the Library. The diverse opinions and perspectives this brought to discussions were ultimately key to the project's success. Overall leadership was taken on by the Director of Campus Computing, but all members were equal partners in the development process with aspects of the leadership role rotating through the membership as differing project areas were addressed. For example, Computing Services directed the process of hiring outside consultants to design an overall look for the web site, but all members had input on the final decision. Later in the project, individual content authors handled development of specific tutorials and directed layout and design.

The timing of this project could not have been better from a library perspective. Librarians were had been in the midst of beginning work on a similar resource at almost the same time as the campus conference occurred, so they were able to make effective contributions from the beginning of the project. A short timeline was agreed on for the prototype, so regular face to face meetings, email communication and sub-groups were initiated from the start and were key in keeping the team on track. This foundation of regular meetings and good communication in both electronic and face to face formats created environments for both independent and group decisions. Even with a diverse membership, numbers were kept relatively small (nine members) to allow for quick responses to development needs. Though not without conflicts, these were resolved in a manner that ultimately benefited the project by affecting change at crucial points. One area of disagreement focused on how to effectively present tutorials to students, e.g use more graphics and less text or vice versa. This was resolved by conducting early usability testing and allowed resolution of differences in a positive and productive manner.

Many initial decisions around development involved areas which had to be deferred to a later date due to time and funding constraints. Looking ahead to maintaining this project, the development team competed for a campus wide Instructional Technology grant, based in part on the successful initial introduction of The NetTrail, were awarded $36,000 that allowed the team to revisit a deferred list of actions and take development further. A Continuing Development Group consisting of a smaller number of original team members works on refining and updating modules as needed. This group currently consists of librarians, Instructional Technology staff and a part time programmer who continue to meet and revise the course, consulting with past faculty team members as needed. A newly revised version of The NetTrail (nettrail.ucsc.edu) is due out in Winter of 2002.

CONCLUSION

Cross-disciplinary web development teams are increasingly needed as research and instruction move across subject and technology boundaries. There are no clear cut "how to" guides for creating an inter-disciplinary team, whether it's selecting members or dealing with conflict. There are, though, ways to encourage the success of such a partnership. Clearly articulate the nature of the web project, its goals, purpose, audience and scope - this is the foundation from which all else derives. Look for potential members who are open, good communicators, who show a willingness to learn and teach what they know, and who are team oriented participants. Agree on responsibilities and leadership roles, but allow flexibility for members to move among roles as the project evolves. Use managed conflict as an important and positive tool. And finally, keep momentum going by sharing information, positive reinforcement and occasional reviews of the group's membership.

Ultimately, a team is much more than the project it develops - the process of becoming partners changes each member and their perceptions of one another. The increasing number of the faculty/librarian partnerships described in this chapter can have a long lasting impact on the direction of higher education, and the recognition of the importance of librarians' contributions to innovations in education.

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