

NFACE Commentator

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Commenting from the perspective of an individual experienced in providing adult education and building collaborative efforts

Opening Remarks, Friday, April 28, 2000

Introduction

I am very pleased to be here at the NFACE meeting as a commentator and observer of the conference. I'd like to begin by telling you about my organization, the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) since it is because of the work that we do that I was invited to bring some perspectives to this event.

The Coalition for Networked Information was formed in 1990 and it is a joint program of a library association, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and a higher education computing association, EDUCAUSE. Ten years ago, those associations saw the Internet as an opportunity for developing new forms and vehicles for scholarly communication. CNI has focused on a wide variety of content issues related to networking, including economics of information, architectures and standards, navigating, teaching and learning, government information, and organizational management. Our two founding association, ARL and EDUCAUSE, realized that by leveraging the expertise of both library and networking communities in a collaborative organization, they could accelerate progress in networked information resources. (www.cni.org)

In 1994, CNI's Working Group on management issues developed a workshop called "Working Together" which was designed to assist institutional cross-sector teams to collaborate on network-related projects. Initially, this workshop was conceived as a vehicle to bring together librarians and information technologists to work on such projects as joint faculty and student workshops, campus information systems, and digital publication projects. Soon other professionals joined as team members, including faculty, instructional development specialists, and multi-media designers. In the past couple of years, CNI re-purposed the "Working Together" workshop, through a grant from NHPRC, to focus on assisting teams of archivists, records managers, and information technologists to address issues related to the long term access to electronic records and archives. (<http://www.cni.org/docs/working.together/>)

The Working Together workshop, which has been offered in its current form as a two-day event, focuses on the process of collaboration. Some of the segments included in the program include doing an environmental scan of factors having an impact on the overall organization and the specific units represented on the institutional teams, discussing opportunities and barriers to collaboration, and discussing potential projects that are related to long-term access to electronic records or archives. The institutional teams spend about half of the workshop developing their idea for a specific project and then begin to outline a specific plan for implementation. The participants who have attended the three workshops we have offered thus far have valued the time to focus on a specific project with their institutional team members, the opportunity to share ideas and

perspectives with colleagues from other institutions, and the structured nature of the workshop.
(<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/202/working.html>)
(<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/cem9922.html>)

Collaboration

CNI's workshop emphasizes the collaborative process and uses the terms collaboration, teamwork, and partnership to describe working relationships in which partners from different sectors of an organization (or from a variety of organizations) come together to jointly develop a project that will be of mutual benefit and that will leverage the skills that each sector brings to the project. Collaboration is a specific type of relationship, written about by many management writers such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2), Katzenbach and Smith (3, 4), and Henderson (1). They believe that successful collaborations involve developing a shared meaning among the partners and working towards a common mission. When collaborations flourish, those involved value the different perspectives and different skills that each sector brings rather than seeing those as conflicts or problems. In a collaboration, each sector contributes resources and each sector reaps benefits. They create added value through the combined perspectives that they bring.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter draws a useful distinction between collaborations and "exchange" relationships. In the latter, one party contracts with the other to provide a service. The initiating party sets the goals, determines the strategy, and gets the specific benefits of the work done. The party contracted with does the specific work required, which may be unrelated to its own mission, and gets a tangible benefit, usually money, that may not be related to the actual project's goals. In many cases, units working with a computing or information technology organization describe their relationship on a project as "collaboration" when it is actually an exchange relationship. For example, if a library pays a computing unit to run its integrated library system, that is an exchange relationship since the library sets the goals and reaps the direct rewards of the effort.

Individuals and organizations can also cooperate on a level that is less intense than collaboration. They can agree to co-sponsor or mutually fund activities that do not require an in-depth development of shared meaning or process. This can be the case with the joint offering of professional development events or contributing to a joint publication or website.

Some of the barriers to successful collaborations identified in the literature and by the participants in our "Working Together" workshops include:

- ◆ Lack of shared mission
- ◆ Different vocabularies of the parties involved
- ◆ Different work and organizational styles
- ◆ Imbalance of resources (budget, personnel)
- ◆ Lack of understanding of the expertise of the other group(s)

Overcoming the barriers to collaboration can lead to some important rewards, including that the whole that can be created through collaboration can be greater than the sum of its parts, the opportunity to have access to a broad range of expertise, and the pooling of resources. In a collaboration, relationships move from clients to collaborators and from missionaries to partners.

NFACE and Collaboration

A number of opportunities present themselves to the participants in this NFACE conference. Through collaboration, you can develop joint funding proposals, deliver national, state, and regional programs in a distributed way on the network, leverage technology to achieve your objectives, expose the richness of the records and archives you manage to a worldwide audience, build awareness and support for what you do, and help solve the "Digital Divide" issues. As a foundation for your collaborations, you have a common commitment to historical records and common priority topics, as described in the survey which preceded this conference.

The NFACE participating organizations also face some barriers to collaboration. These include the fact that your organizations have some diverse needs and priorities, your memberships have diverse levels of skills (archival and technology skills), you have limited local funds for professional development, and you have limited resources for the development of collaborative programs.

The Challenge Ahead

In the next two days of the conference, you have many challenges. I encourage you to first address your priorities - what is the most significant problem in continuing education for your constituencies? What exactly is the problem? Can the groups here at this meeting develop a common mission and a shared meaning of what they wish continuing education for their profession to accomplish or what the most significant challenges at present are? Paul Evan Peters, the late Executive Director of CNI, described one of the plenary sessions of the CNI semi-annual meeting as the "oatmeal" session. In that segment, he would feature a speaker who talked about a highly technical issue that he felt was important for the audience of administrators to understand. This session, held first thing in the morning, was "good for you," like oatmeal. Can you, at this meeting, define some specific objectives like this for your audiences? Can you identify the target audience(s) for continuing education and prioritize them? Finally, I encourage you to develop strategies in which adequate resources are contributed by all partners and that include a plan for sustainability that is not dependent on grant funds.

You have many opportunities to build successful cooperative and/or collaborative initiatives. I encourage you to think creatively and fruitfully about opportunities for joint development of continuing education activities.

Sources

1. Henderson, John C. "Plugging into Strategic Partnerships: The Critical IS Connection." *Sloan Management Review* 31, no. 3 (1990): 7-18.
2. Kanter, Rosabeth M. "Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliances." *Harvard Business Review* 72 (July-Aug. 1994): 96-108.
3. Katzenbach, Jon R., ed. *The Work of Teams*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998.)
4. Katzenbach, Jon R. and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994).

Closing Remarks, Saturday, April 29, 2000

Observations

You have all completed some intensive work in the past couple of days and it seems that every participant was engaged in the work of the conference and made a sincere effort to contribute to the outcomes of the workshop.

Overall, as I observed the sessions of the conference, I was struck by the many similarities in needs that were expressed by representatives from many groups and organizations and found that there were many more similarities than differences among you. I feel you have many good opportunities to work together.

As I described in my earlier talk, collaboration involves some specific processes, such as the development of common meaning, shared mission, including the expertise of different communities, and learning together. In many of the areas that you identified as priorities, I feel that cooperation rather than collaboration is called for. Cooperation is not as resource-intensive as collaboration and much can be accomplished through this means. For example, the organizations represented here can identify and publicize each others' programs, you can share information on curriculum, you can take a good professional development program developed by one organization on the road to benefit other constituencies, you can develop programs of staff exchanges, and you can co-sponsor each others' programs.

In listening to you discuss priorities, it seems clear that three items are shared by most participants: development of a clearinghouse, holding a meeting of the professional development officers of various organizations, and sharing models of mentoring programs. All of these strike me as useful initiatives, but I encourage you to reflect on whether these are the compelling priorities for your profession in terms of continuing education and whether they genuinely reflect your top priorities.

Two specific topics that I'd like to address in my comments are technology and distance education. My burning question is, "What happened to technology?" in the priorities for continuing education identified here at this conference? The needs assessment administered to a wide group of professionals clearly revealed that they want more professional development in areas related to technology; this was true of all sectors of the profession. And yet, technology issues are absent from the priorities generated in the Incubator sessions. This is true in spite of two excellent Information sessions related to technology - Phil Bantin's session on electronic records and Renata Webb's session on distance education. Neither of these topics seemed to generate priorities and commitments to action.

I'd also like to address the topic of distance education. I feel that organizations represented in this conference would benefit from additional discussion of the opportunities offered by distance education although I do not mean to imply that distance education is "The Answer." It would be useful to know how many of the associations here are already delivering some programs via distance education or are in the planning stages. One suggestion for all of you here is to take some type of distance education course yourself so that you can make better judgments about its usefulness and its impact on the learner. Distance education courses can vary greatly in the

technology employed and in the depth of content conveyed. I have taken courses in the past year offered by the Association of Research Libraries and the American Library Association to familiarize myself with the varieties of distance education and to gauge my reactions to learning in the networked environment. Since most distance education programs require a high investment of resources, this would be a particularly fruitful area for collaboration or for jointly contracting for programs.

In conclusion, I feel that as a profession, you have a good base to work from. The materials gathered in preparation for this conference and the priorities identified here should provide a solid foundation for progress. The broad participation at this conference was useful in order to gain a variety of perspectives, but now you need to establish smaller groups that will actually get the work done. I encourage you to think hard about your overall priorities, what will really make a difference in the life of your profession, and I wish you much success. Thank you.