

Networks of Expertise: A Model for Implementing and Sustaining New Information Services

Jon Cawthorne, John Culshaw, Geneva Henry and Joy Kirchner

In Absentia:

José Diaz, Susan Fliss, Heather Gendron

CNI Spring 2015

14 April 2015

Our Team



Jon E. Cawthorne
West Virginia University



John Culshaw
University of Iowa



Geneva Henry
George Washington
University



Joy Kirchner
University of
Minnesota



José Diaz
The Ohio State University



Susan Fliss
Harvard University



Heather Gendron
University of North
Carolina, Chapel Hill

Overview of talk

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Key Findings
- Conclusion & Recommendations
- Discussion questions

What

- New services for 21st century libraries include:
 - Digital archiving and preservation
 - Data management
 - Use of multimedia in teaching, learning and research
 - Information discovery
 - Scholarly communications
 - Digital humanities
- Goals
 - Assess viability of centers as an approach to provide services for multiple institutions
 - Provide guidance to centers and funders for the formation of centers of excellence for information services
- Developed profiles for 34 centers
- Interviewed 19 center directors and staff and 7 funders

Who and When

- Meeting of ARL Research Library Leadership Fellows with Mellon Foundation
- Brainstorming about future library directions: does every library need to develop all skills needed to fully support information services for 21st century scholarship?
- Planning grant awarded to explore Centers of Excellence for Information Services as shared expertise

SEI definition of “Center of Excellence”

"A center of excellence is a premier organization providing an exceptional product or service in an assigned sphere of expertise and within a specific field of technology, business, or government, consistent with the unique requirements and capabilities of the COE organization."

Software Engineering Institute, Carnegie Mellon

William Craig, Matthew Fisher et al. *Generalized Criteria and Evaluation Method for Center of Excellence: A Preliminary Report* <http://repository.cmu.edu/sei/278/>

Methodology



Our high-level questions

- How are effective and successful centers formed, how do they operate, and how are they sustained over time?
- What are the criteria for funding both the formation and long-term sustainability of centers?
- How are centers assessed?

Research Methodology

- Preliminary investigation of more than 100 centers
- Narrowed set to 35 centers and 10 funders for in-depth research
- Interviewed staff at 19 centers and 7 funders

Preliminary Analysis

- Individual team members - harvesting of “key quotes” and sections of interview transcripts into a single, shared document
- As a group - rapid-fire analysis:
 - approx 1 hour analysis/interview
 - identify patterns & best quotes
 - articulate high-level insights and reflective questions

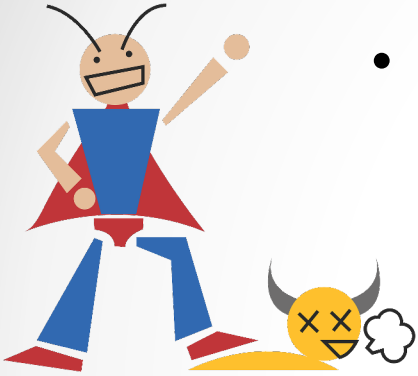
Preliminary Results

- CNI presentation, last April
- Focus groups with library directors

Key Findings

...

CoE Reactions ...



- Term “Center of Excellence” often viewed with skepticism
 - Implication that excellence discourages innovation and collaboration, doesn’t value the people
 - Focus on status rather than value of effort
 - Science and engineering centers & funders much more comfortable with term and fully embraced it

- Agreement on characteristics of a center
 - engine of innovation
 - solving problems across institutional boundaries
 - an evolving, adaptable, agile entity



Organizational Infrastructure

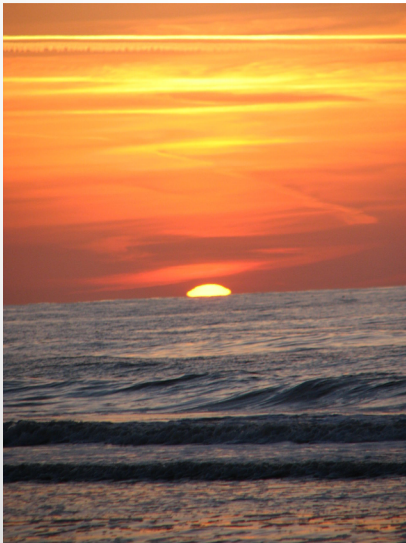


- Most centers are part of a larger institution
 - Benefits include shared services (e.g. HR, financial systems, utilities)
 - Shared faculty appointments
 - Access to students

- Partnerships are valued
 - peers, research & education, industry, supporters
 - some partnerships fail: *“Obstructive partners can really bring down a project.”*

Assessment

- Assessment assures the center remains aligned with its mission
 - motivation driven by funder requirements
 - provides checks-and-balances to help with prioritization and staying on course



- Sunset plans
 - agreement that it's important to have one
 - very few centers have a plan
 - planning for closing is not a priority

Funding and Sustainability

- Funding sources
 - grants, endowments, state funds, institutions, partners, members
 - “Core” staff on institutional funds (e.g. director)
 - Center not funded by institutional operations budgets
- Centers spend 30 - 50% of their time fundraising
- Funders willing to invest short term, but expect centers to find other funding long term

“We’re willing to go several rounds for a good idea, and make sure that it’s well established, but it’s got to stand on its own. ... [T]he idea has to be that there’s not a permanent dependence on us.”



Challenges



“Nobody gives you money because you need it. What they want to hear is that you’re doing great things, you’re confident, you’re optimistic, you’re committed, and they support that.”

- Funders want to hear stories that awaken their own convictions. It takes years to establish credibility and trust
- Leadership changes can destabilize funding
- Funder priorities shift
- Priority to fund innovation, not ongoing support
- Important to attract and hire the right staff

Conclusion & Recommendations

...

**Can the CoE model help
research libraries cope with
ever-increasing demands for
support for information
services?**



Considerations

Nearly all centers appeared to be facing issues of purpose, sustainability, funding, assessment, leadership, succession planning, among others.

What are we good at or what do we want to be good at?

Should Libraries consider such a paradigm or structure?

OR

Should libraries look instead to modify and work in existing organizations?



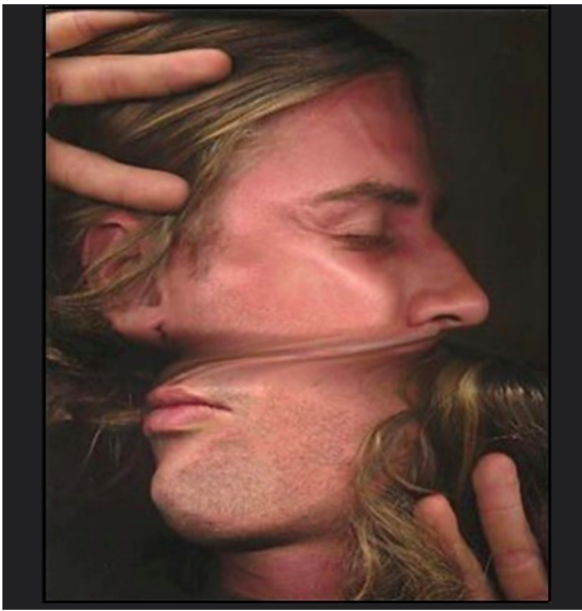
Other Studies

Zorich, Diane. 2008. *A Survey of Digital Humanities Centers in the United States*. Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources.

“It is generally more difficult to share knowledge than data or tools, and it is generally more difficult to co-create than to aggregate.”

- Bos et al. 2007, 668

Bos, Nathan, Ann Zimmerman, Judith Olson, Jude Yew, Jason Yerkie, Erik Dahl, and Gary Olson. 2007. “From Shared Databases to Communities of Practice: A Taxonomy of Collaboratories.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12.2 (2007): 652-672.



Vision ~A i r y ~<https://flic.kr/p/pvVAo>

A more sustainable approach?

Networks of experts (“expert networks”) instead?

A means to leverage institutional strengths and consider solutions beyond local environments.

Allows active network of institutions to address issues.

Integration of new “expertise” back into local environment fostered from the collaborative network.



The Way Forward

1. Identify opportunities to test the notion of “networks of expertise.”
1. Create networks of expertise with careful consideration of environments that foster collaboration and growth.
1. Develop mechanisms for ongoing and regular assessment and analysis of program deliverables and services.
1. Develop a community-building strategy.
1. Create a pilot innovation team (e.g. tiger teams) to engage on an urgent issue affecting the library community.
1. Develop a taxonomy for collaborative activities for library and information services.



Let's Talk

- Do you see a network of expertise model as a transformative avenue to retool our workforce, develop new skills sets in libraries, and create library services that are more agile and responsive to the rapidly changing information landscape?
- If an agile network of expertise is the way for libraries to proceed, what should a management structure look like?
- What role, if any, should information schools have in these structures?
- Where shall we begin?

...libraries must find a way to “assert governance” and become “less receiving and more influencing”

- Center Director

Silvia de Luque
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/alhambra2006/4106623802>

Thank you!

...