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The Business of Collaboration and Electronic Collection Development

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Abstract

Purpose – Strategic business partnerships inform business faculty-librarian (BFL) collaborations. This paper seeks to address how the motivations for business partnerships and faculty-librarian collaborations are similar. A conceptual model suggests that the depth of the BFL relationship significantly enhances electronic collection development outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – Literature concerning strategic business alliances, faculty-librarian collaborations, and collection development was examined to determine whether principles that are applied to strategic business alliances can also be applied to BFL collaborations. A case-in-point is included for illustration.

Findings – Specific principles of strategic business partnerships can be applied to BFL collaborations aimed at improving electronic collection development. In addition, driving forces such as assessment, communication, and technology influence the nature of alliances across the business and academic arenas.

Originality/value – The findings are significant because they demonstrate how BFL collaborations can be made more effective through the application of business principles. BFL collaborations can positively influence electronic collection development in a variety of ways. The paper offers a new and unique conceptual model that improves understanding of the nature and depth of BFL collaborations in the context of electronic collection development. This paper will be of interest to business faculty in particular and faculty in general, and librarians working in diverse library settings, especially librarians aligned with management and business departments. Librarians in management positions will likely find this information useful as a means to increase faculty-librarian collaboration across all disciplines.

Keywords Academic staff, Librarians, Strategic alliances, Electronic media, Collections management, Academic libraries

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Faculty-Librarian collaborations are not new; academic library literature is rich with articles and books on the topic (Raspa and Ward, 2000; ACRL, 2005). The nature of these collaborations, born primarily out of the collection development role of library liaisons, has evolved and developed over a period of many decades (Jackson, 2003). Ducas and Michaud-Oystryk (2003) categorized faculty-librarian collaborations into five areas: teaching/instruction, information services, information technology, research, and collections. Cook's (2000) review of the literature identified several terms that were associated with faculty-librarian relationships, including collaborative, partnership, team building, alliance, networking, coordination, and liaison.

This paper posits that business-faculty librarian (BFL) collaborations should view strategic business partnerships as a "best practice." BFL collaborations can positively impact electronic collection development, among other outcomes, by emulating strategic business alliances. Electronic collection development pertains to free and fee-based resources available on the web and/or in CD-ROM format, including websites, government documents, electronic journals, e-books, and subscription databases. We re-examine the impact of faculty-librarian collaborations on electronic collection development through the business lens and attempt to answer the following questions. What are the implications of applying business principles and definitions to the BFL collaboration? Is the collaborative role different in the electronic collection development arena?

A review of the purposes and potential outcomes of strategic business alliances focuses on the application of strategic business principles to business faculty-librarian partnerships. We highlight the ways in which an effective BFL collaboration, assuming the appropriate application of the business principles, can positively influence electronic collection development.

Strategic business alliances

Joint ventures and strategic alliances are commonplace in business. Strategic alliances between businesses are "collaborative organizational arrangements that use resources and/or governance structures from more than one existing organization" (Inkpen, 2003, p. 402). The reasons for these collaborations include various driving forces (see Table I), mutual benefit, synergy, extension of resources and competencies, overcoming barriers to organizational

Table I Commonalities across strategic business alliances and BFL collaborations

	Strategic business alliances	BFL collaborations
Reasons/purposes	Mutual benefit	Mutual benefit
	Synergy	Synergy
	Resource sharing	Resource sharing
	Competency acquisition and development	Competency acquisition and development
	Continuous development	Continuous development
	Joint assessment	Joint assessment
External environmental analysis/driving forces	Industry dynamics	Changes in technology
	Increased competition	Emphasis on information literacy
	Changes in technology	Librarian liaison model
	Social trends	Collection development opportunities
	Demographic trends	Research-oriented curriculum
	Marketplace shifts	Faculty-librarian desire for information exchange
Internal integration/process and structure	Newly created divisions	Joint course website and development
	Matrix organization	Librarian instruction and assignment creation
	Improved management information system	Faculty involvement in collection development
	Executive involvement	Joint assessment of course and collections
	Resource reallocation	Continuous information exchange
	Joint assessment of alliance	
Outcomes	New products	Blended librarian
	Improved and new technologies/processes	Improved student information literacy
	Increased market share	Increased faculty understanding of library and collection development
	Organizational learning	Increased librarian understanding of subject area
	Shared patents	Continuous improvement of course and collections
	Increased client/customer satisfaction	Avoiding sunk costs
	Continuous improvement	

development and growth, and continuous improvement through joint assessment (Inkpen, 2003).

Gonzalez (2001) argues that strategic business alliances are vital to organizations for several reasons, including increased access to markets and operational efficiency, reduced research and development costs, and mitigated risk of failure. Strategic business alliances are also likely to lower costs of failure when it does occur and help firms to avoid sunk costs.

The transfer of learning is a significant motivating factor for organizations to form strategic alliances (Hanna and Walsh, 2004). Strategic alliances allow for the sharing of technical information, human knowledge, and organizational tactics and practices in a legal and cooperative manner. Information sharing is performed in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and benefit rather than in a competitive context that can create long-term ill will. The sharing of competencies is also especially critical when the partnering organizations differ with respect to specific knowledge, skills and abilities or resources, as is the case of a service organization partnering with a manufacturing organization or teaching faculty partnering with subject librarians.

Commonalities of strategic business alliances and BFL collaborations

The structure of strategic business alliances ranges from contracting relationships to mergers. Decisions concerning the structure of strategic business alliances are made in the context of the companies' mission, goals, and specific strategic objectives as related to the alliance. Similar to a

strategic business alliance, an efficient and effective BFL collaboration will likely produce significant outcomes such as improved electronic collection development. In addition, courses within the scope of the BFL collaboration are likely to undergo positive changes through the continuous input and influence of the subject librarian. This is similar to the operational changes that firms experience in a strategic alliance. For example, best practice implementation and benchmarking are more likely to occur as a result of the sharing of knowledge and competencies in strategic alliances. BFL collaborations heighten faculty and librarian understanding and appreciation of each other's tasks and potential contributions to the academic environment of the college.

Driving forces influence the structure of the BFL collaboration as well as the processes created to facilitate it. Changes in technology, a pervasive driving force, may result in an increased focus on electronic collection development and course website development. Similarly, courses that experience an increase in the frequency and depth of research assignments as a result of new technologies often inspire faculty to improve their own information literacy. This development often translates to a more substantial relationship with the subject librarian. Driving forces, to the extent that they are intense and enduring, are likely to create demand for a blended librarian.

Faculty and librarians' desire, to better understand each other's academic domain represents a similar situation to business firms wanting to share knowledge and resources. Firms often engage in strategic business alliances in order to

acquire and develop competencies that would be nearly impossible to achieve alone. Advances in electronic collections often require BFL collaboration because the two roles have such distinct knowledge, skills and competency requirements.

Firms monitor their environments and then make decisions regarding which responses will be most productive and provide the most value to their shareholders. The notion of monitoring the environment and responding appropriately applies to almost every type of organization, including educational institutions and libraries. Changes in the curriculum, such as a new major or a programmatic emphasis in international business, will certainly necessitate a corresponding response on the part of the subject librarian in terms of electronic collection development. Table I delineates the commonalities between strategic business alliances and BFL collaborations.

BFL and electronic collection development

BFL collaborations can positively impact electronic collection development through increased:

- communication between faculty and librarians;
- awareness on the part of faculty members concerning the current state of print and electronic resources as well as future opportunities in terms of collection development;
- librarian awareness regarding faculty, student, and course related collection needs; and
- faculty and librarian appreciation of the challenges that they each face with respect to electronic collection development.

As Table II illustrates, the depth and outcomes of the BFL relationship have a direct effect on electronic collection development. In the absence of a BFL collaboration there is minimal impact on electronic collection development while BFL collaborations with an embedded or blended librarian can have a high impact.

Faculty-librarian collaborations exist as a response to internal and external conditions. Sugarman and Demetracopoulos (2001) identified such driving forces as the accelerated change in technology, the information literacy movement, and the pervasiveness of the liaison model of librarianship which have produced an increase in BFL collaborations. Driving forces come in other forms as well. The need for improvements in the library's collection often influences the development of a partnership between librarians and business school professors (Crawford and Barrett, 1997). Thus collaboration stems from the motivation of librarians to attain a high quality collection and the desire of faculty members to have access to a relevant and complete collection.

BFL collaborations also provide mutual benefits to both parties. Bell (2005) argues that faculty-librarian collaborations allow librarians to "blend" into the teaching and learning process. This blending results in an interactive environment in which faculty and librarians can make joint, simultaneous, and on-going collection decisions. The constant interaction provides a climate of continuous assessment and improvement of electronic collections by both parties.

In addition, these collaborations allow for the achievement of synergy in several key areas. Crawford and Barrett (1997, p. 76) argue that BFL collaborations "provide their participants with an opportunity to pool scarce or limited resources, skills and capabilities to achieve common objectives." BFL collaborations can have a positive influence on collection development, faculty knowledge of library resources, and librarian-student relationships (Donham and Green, 2004). The BFL collaboration also creates task and interpersonal synergy that allows for the removal of structural barriers and resource constraints. The elimination of such barriers facilitates more effective and efficient collection processes and activities.

Sanborn (2005) cites several reasons that librarians decide not to participate in collaborations with faculty including time demands, lack of support, and perceived lack of interest. In fact, the benefits of faculty-librarian collaborations often include outcomes that counter these concerns. For example, some have reported that librarians are able to make more effective use of their time due to the structure that results from faculty-librarian collaboration (Boudreau and Bicknell-Holmes, 2003; Ducas and Michaud-Oystryk, 2003). Characteristic of successful strategic alliances, the faculty member and librarian thrive independently while experiencing an increased interdependence. Faculty members retain their primary role as teachers and librarians continue to be organizers and managers of information, but both do so while sharing knowledge and resource capabilities.

Bazillion and Braun (2001) suggest that faculty-librarian collaborations that involve the development of course web sites can reduce challenges related to faculty members' lack of knowledge concerning the library's electronic resources, improve students' access to the library, and lessen the library's shortcomings with respect to the lack of electronic resources in some disciplines. BFL collaborations expand the notion of collection when the definition of collection is extended to include BFL created websites and/or multi-media and electronic offerings designed or selected through the BFL. Business web pages are one medium that has grounded and nurtured the business faculty-librarian partnership (Hiris and Marino,1999; McGuigan, 2003).

BFL collaboration facilitates continuous improvement in collections because it allows for the identification of relevant and appropriate electronic resources. Joint assessment helps to identify collection shortcomings and needs. Some of the most important benefits of a business faculty and librarian

Table II Impact of BFL collaboration on electronic collection development

Depth/outcomes of BFL relationship			
No BFL collaboration Faculty notified of electronic resources by e-mail	On-demand course resource	Librarian viewed as external resource	Formal interaction during assessment
BFL collaboration Integrated jointly created web site	Joint selection of subscription databases	Join course development	Embedded and blended librarian

partnership in evaluating, selecting, and assessing electronic resources for business research include greater faculty access to and understanding of the tools as well as increased librarian understanding of product demand and use (White, 2004). This is critical because electronic resources now consume a greater portion of a library's acquisitions budget and the sheer number and complexity of these resources place greater demands on librarians.

Joint problem recognition and resolution is highly relevant to electronic collection development in terms of experiencing cost savings (e.g. duplicate resources (White, 2004)) and avoiding sunk costs (Crawford and Barrett, 1997). Sunk costs are those costs that cannot be recovered once spent (Terry, 1995). The annual subscription fee for a database that is rarely used by students and faculty is an example of a sunk cost. Joint assessment as an outcome of BFL collaboration can save time and money, and increase the relevance of the electronic collection.

The following case-in-point involves the direct application of best practices and principles of strategic business alliances to BFL collaborations (see Table I). It discusses significant outcomes of a BFL collaboration including outcomes related to electronic collection development. Also, it captures the depth and impact of a BFL relationship as illustrated in Table II.

A case in point

MB107, Business and Organization Management, is the introductory and cornerstone course of the Management and Business program at Skidmore College. The course has a number of distinguishing characteristics: it is taught via the case method, commonly used at the senior and graduate level, to first-year students; it is delivered across five or six class sections; and Executive Presentation project, a major research assignment that requires student teams to develop a business plan for a selected company. The student teams are comprised of students from across all class sections, enabling students to work with peers taught by different instructors. The Executive Presentations are evaluated by "real-world" corporate executives from across the country, adding to the uniqueness and rigor of the students' executive case presentation experience.

The Executive Presentation project represents 25 percent of the student's course grade and places a heavy demand on library resources, including the subject librarian, collections, inter-library loan, and facilities such as multi-media presentation rooms. The rigorous evaluation process requires MB107 students to become information literate quickly and presents an opportunity for the librarian to engage the MB107 students directly. Upper level students, who have previously taken MB 107, serve as coaches to the MB107 teams and are able to share their knowledge about the library and collections with MB107 students. The existence of the coaching system promotes the reinforcement of information literacy and business research skills.

The MB107 Faculty Coordinator, who manages the program, recognized the need to develop a stronger relationship with the subject librarian. Several driving forces including faculty and executive evaluators' assessment of student's research skills, the availability of larger and more relevant electronic collections, the opportunity to create an integrative and interactive course website with electronic collection links, and the positive relationship that existed between the MB107 Coordinator and the subject librarian, were all factors that contributed to the development and enhancement of the BFL collaboration.

This BFL collaboration resulted in many significant outcomes including:

- A library instruction session for each section of the course taught by the subject librarian. The librarian also created, distributed, and graded a library research assignment designed to improve students' business information literacy skills.
- A continuous review of library collections related to the MB107 course with the faculty coordinator making suggestions for additions/deletions throughout the academic year. Also, the faculty coordinator is able to make special requests related directly to the executive presentation assignment.
- The development of an interactive and integrated course website that provides links to course and library resources. The website is jointly mastered by the business department and library, and contains links to a list of selected course readings available through the library's electronic collections.
- The level of collaboration has deepened over time. The faculty coordinator and librarian have become research partners, experienced increased understanding of one another's fields, and are able to provide critical analysis concerning all facets of the collaboration.

Conclusion

The management and library literatures indicate that BFL collaborations have taken on a greater prominence in the electronic collection development. Collaborative relationships are needed more now than ever before. It was found that specific principles of strategic business partnerships can and should be applied to BFL collaborations aimed at improving electronic collection development. Driving forces such as assessment, communication and technology have influenced the nature of these alliances across the business and academic arenas and have increased the frequency, intensity and depth of these alliances, all to the betterment of the collaboration.

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