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Biography

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Biography

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Biography

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CLIC @ CLICK06: A consortial success story

Abstract

'CLIC go the rotas, CLIC, CLIC, CLIC,
Wide is our scope and requests move quick,
The users look around for docs to help them know,
And thank the consortium for making a service grow'.

This paper celebrates 5 years of successful collaboration by members of the CAVAL VDX Consortium (CLIC). CLIC comprises a group of 6 academic libraries using VDX software to manage busy interlibrary loan and document delivery operations that now also include cross campus services and services to external, remote and offshore students. Library consortia provide many benefits for participants and users. A consortium offers the opportunity to provide innovative user services and for libraries to share costs, knowledge and expertise, resources and experiences. Yet a consortium may also potentially limit independence, enforce unhelpful bureaucratic processes and procedures and steer participants into unintended territory. This paper discusses the value the CLIC consortium has offered participants and what compromises have been necessary to achieve success. These include formal processes such as configuration, training and helpdesk support, meetings, teleconferences and workshops; as well as range of informal factors including a combined commitment to share, the maintenance of good communication channels, effective problem solving and minimal bureaucratic barriers. The complex relationships between the consortium and institutions, and the impact of those relationships upon service provision and development within the institution are also explored. CLIC members continue to work together to improve software implementation and therefore excellent service delivery to clients.

Introduction

This paper celebrates five years of successful collaboration by members of the CAVAL VDX Consortium (CLIC). CLIC comprises a group of six academic libraries using VDX (Virtual Document eXchange) software to manage busy interlibrary loan and document delivery operations that now also include cross campus services and services to external, remote and offshore students. CLIC was established in 2001 to provide configuration and support to member libraries, to share expertise and to assist libraries in managing a complex automation product. The CLIC VDX system is delivered via a shared hosted system managed and maintained by OCLC-Pica (formerly Fretwell-Downing Informatics). The system consists of a single database with individual institutional views and a separate, institutionally branded web interface for each institution.

The members are:

- • CARM Centre (CAVAL)
- • La Trobe University
- • Macquarie University
- • RMIT University
- • University of Newcastle
- • Victoria University.

A review of the literature identified a range of papers about successful consortia, indicating that success is only achieved following the identification of a common need, planning to meet that need and then co-operation and ongoing communication between members. It would seem that Librarians have always worked cooperatively in

order to reduce costs and provide better service and the development of consortia, both formal and informal, can be viewed as a natural progression. In the United States the *Library Journal* first published articles in the 1880s about libraries working together to share collections. One of the first recognised consortia was the Triangle Research Libraries Network which was formed in 1933 (Bostick, 2001). Ann Okerson from Yale University Library observes that 'a condition for success is that a consortium must comprise members who trust each other and know each other well enough to take advantage of cooperation'. She further suggests that economic advantage (i.e. price) and intellectual advantage (i.e. improved service and access for users) are the two key measures of success (Okerson, 2000).

In Australia, Consortia are an established part of the library environment, and there are many examples of successful sharing of costs and workloads. The three universities in South Australia have a long history of co-operation. In 2002 they each launched the same new library system having collaborated on its selection and implementation, but having chosen to install and administer each system separately. Parnell lists a number of factors that contributed to the success of this informal approach, including a willingness by all members to make realistic 'trade-offs' in terms of sharing costs, labour, expertise and time; and an openness in sharing of information that reflected through regular effective communication (Parnell, 2003).

The Queensland Government Libraries Consortium (QGLC) identified some critical success factors, including:

- a business-like approach with a simple functioning structure;
- demonstrated progress through actions;
- time to implement the strategies and actions;
- universal contribution – commitment and support by all those participating;
- marketing of the strategy and quick wins;
- communication – simple and regular including effective relationships; and
- resourcing – people, time and dollars (Drummond & Campbell, 2003).

Another Australian Consortium, AGLIN (Australian Government Libraries Information Network, formerly FLIN, Federal Libraries Information Network), identifies the definition of clear goals, a coherent membership and a structure which matches its goals and membership as being success factors (Vitulo, 2003).

The beginning

Following the successful completion of the CIDER (CAVAL Interlending and Document Delivery Electronic Requesting) Project in 2000 a number of the participating libraries actively explored a consortia approach to implement an unmediated requesting system and saw this as an opportunity to re-engineer their interlibrary loans processes (CIDER, 2000). CIDER was implemented through participation in, and contribution to, the development of the AVCC funded LIDDAS (Local Interlending and Document Delivery

Administration System) interlibrary loans management system project (Tucker, Beaumont & Hicks, 1998). The fledgling consortium called itself the CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium, which was soon abbreviated to CLIC. Following the successful completion of the LIDDAS project in 2003, and the implementation of VDX in the operational environment, the consortium re-named itself the CAVAL VDX Consortium but kept the abbreviation CLIC.

The development of costing and business models showed that a consortium model would be considerably cheaper to implement compared to each individual institution installing, configuring and managing its own system. The sharing of essential expert technical support and administration of the Oracle database, the UNIX operating system and the VDX software facilitated not only sharing the risk, but also sharing the learning experience and the collective gaining of expertise in the operation of the system. CAVAL, as the consortium manager, took on the role of system manager, encompassing the administration and configuration of the system, the coordination of licensing requirements and the provision of training to staff of member libraries.

Initial configuration and training began in 2001, followed by pilot operations in 2002 and 2003. In June 2003 CLIC libraries began interoperating with the National Library of Australia's KDD (Kinetica Document Delivery, now LADD, Libraries Australia Document Delivery) system, a 'landmark in service delivery' (Missingham, 2006). By 2004 the consortium had begun to explore the development of new service models for

document delivery in order to achieve the best utilisation of both extensive print legacy collections as well as growing digital resources held in member libraries. With the implementation and 'bedding down' of the CLIC system, members have begun to consider broader issues such as cooperative arrangements between members, quality issues relating to web delivery, workflow and turnaround time improvements, service and cost issues, and more equitable sharing of the supplier role.

Consortium Management

CAVAL manages the administrative aspects of running the consortium as well as management and support of the system. Each CLIC member has a formal contract with CAVAL for the provision of VDX Managed services. These services encompass software configuration, operational support and system management. Other services such as the development of specialised reports, documentation, web customisation and training are provided on an ad-hoc basis.

CAVAL operates a Helpdesk for CLIC members that provides practical advice and guidance to staff on skills and work practices, assistance with the troubleshooting and resolution of problems, and liaison with the vendor on software problems and bug fixes. Calls range from operational issues to requests for additional or expanded configuration. Regular reports are sent to members showing the status, priority and progress of their calls. Sites are also supplied with a set of statistical

reports each month showing interlibrary loan and document delivery activity.

The VDX software uses the ISO ILL protocol, which is important because it enables interoperability with a range of internal and external systems (Moreno & Walls, 2002).

Regular consortium teleconferences are held. These generally focus on operational issues and are attended by a range of staff from each member library. Formal business meetings which focus on policy issues are also held two to three times a year. These are governed by the CLIC *Terms of Reference* and chaired by an elected Chairperson. Both teleconferences and formal meetings have proved to be essential components of the consortium's success.

Whilst CLIC was in the development phase a number of seminars, group training sessions and informal workshops took place and a culture of sharing and learning together evolved. In December 2004 a group of operational staff organised the first CLIC Practitioners Workshop at CAVAL in Melbourne which focused on practical issues relating to the use of VDX by inter-lending and document delivery staff. It was a great success, largely due to the willingness of all attendees to share their VDX work practices and other information. A second workshop was held at Macquarie University in Sydney a year later and built on the undoubted success of the first workshop. It is expected that these workshops will now become an annual event.

CLIC	Outgoing Requests	Outgoing Requests supplied	Incoming Requests	Incoming requests supplied electronically
2003	27,622	23,210	18,745	8,838
2004	58,482	50,003	38,161	19,990
2005	74,320	60,965	45,772	14,790

Table 1: Numbers of incoming and outgoing requests for 2003 - 2005.

Disadvantages of the Consortia approach

Any decision has advantages and disadvantages. In making decisions, a good decision-maker balances the advantages against the disadvantages in order to make an informed choice. Hawkins and Oblinger point out that 'collaboration can reduce costs, leverage expertise, and provide a broader perspective' (Hawkins & Oblinger, 2005). The decision to create the CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium was made for exactly these reasons. Member libraries wanted to provide 'a much better service to their customers', but most found that the appropriate expertise did not exist within their institution (Pearson, 2000). Furthermore, developing in-house expertise was likely to be expensive, difficult and take time. Now, looking back, CLIC members know that their VDX implementations would not have been as successful had each of them gone it alone. However, it is worth discussing the disadvantages of the Consortium, because there have most certainly been some.

Some decisions inevitably have had to involve compromises, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, some decisions needed to be agreed upon by all, as a change

affects the system consortia-wide. For example, Macquarie University had hoped to grey out the Create Request Button on ZPortal (the VDX Web user interface) because users were using it instead of doing a bibliographic search, but this would have meant that the button was greyed out across the consortium and this was unacceptable to other members. Macquarie was therefore unable to implement this change. Secondly, agreements had to be reached over priorities. Various configuration options were important to some sites, but not others. Consortium members have spent quite a bit of time via email and in teleconference meetings negotiating priorities. Thirdly, members have different degrees of financial flexibility, which affects their decision-making. For example, system upgrades out-of-hours involve an additional cost. On a number of occasions not all sites have been able to commit additional funds, so the upgrade has had to be done during business hours which has affected service availability to all users of the system.

There are also risks involved in consortium membership, and it is important to recognise these. For example, if one member of the

consortium were to withdraw, it would have a significant effect on the services available to remaining members as less shared capital would mean less development. There is potentially a significant disadvantage in having the configuration knowledge held centrally at CAVAL. If a member needed to withdraw, there would be a huge learning curve for staff at that site and if the consortium were to be disbanded for any reason, all members would face significant difficulties. CAVAL recognises this and ensures that VDX support staff follow good system practices, including the creation and maintenance of appropriate documentation. Flowcharts and workflows have been developed for each site, and these are shared as appropriate. In addition there is a considerable store of documentation available to all members, including project plans, training workbooks, configuration notes and minutes of meetings.

Factors Influencing the Success of the Consortium

The CLIC Consortium has achieved many successes in its five years of operation. At the broadest level the successful implementation of the VDX software at all member libraries and the achievement of measurable service improvements is proof of the success of the consortium. However, there have been additional, and perhaps unexpected, outcomes achieved along the way. For example, a significant component of CLIC's value and benefits to members has come from the expertise developed and shared and the relationships that have been fostered between libraries at all levels; managerial, library and technical staff.

Implementation also required considerable shared effort in planning, configuration and training. The CLIC Consortium was the first ISO ILL system to interoperate with the National Library system, Kinetica Document Delivery (now Libraries Australia Document Delivery), exchanging requests with other Australian libraries and utilising the payments gateway.

The customers of CLIC member libraries have already benefited from service improvements. Turnaround times have been reduced dramatically. RMIT's results from the 2001 benchmarking study indicate an eight day turnaround for copy and loan; while post-VDX implementation statistics for 2004 show a 4.5 day turnaround (National Resource Sharing Group, 2001). Rush and Express requests from customers have virtually disappeared across the CLIC libraries because of the speed at which items are being delivered. CLIC member libraries have also extended services to offshore and remote students and there has been integration of cross-campus services by several libraries including service to Open Universities Australia students. These services have been offered without any extra resourcing commitment by member libraries.

The Practitioners Workshops, attended by interlibrary loan staff from member institutions, have fostered a great sharing of knowledge and procedures at the coal-face level. It has also fostered collegiality, which has had a flow-on effect of assisting with change management within member libraries.

Future developments such as directory based authentication, such as (e.g.

LDAP) and auto-mediation are expected to bring further improvements in services and reduction in staff processing times. LDAP will provide a single log-on for all customers to the library's services and resources. Auto-mediation has already been implemented by several CLIC libraries and has improved turnaround times and reduced staff processing times.

Application Hosted Service and Technical Support

The CLIC model, with the system being located at a central site and managed as a Hosted Service with CAVAL managing and configuring the software, provides a seamless service to the members. The model varies from the WAGUL (Western Australian Group of University Librarians) setup where each library configures and manages the VDX system to meet the requirements of their specific institution (Burrows, McDonald & Archibald, 2004). The CLIC model has enabled the creation of a team of experienced technical staff at CAVAL who provide an efficient help desk. The system is complex and the external management of configuration and the facility to draw on expertise and advice when required (rather than developing this capacity in-house at each library), has proved a valuable factor in CLIC's success. The sharing of expertise amongst technical staff and libraries has been an effective problem solver. The CAVAL staff have led the way in many aspects of VDX implementation in Australia. Relationships with the vendor OCLC-Pica (formerly FDI) have also been positive and issues have been resolved with a minimum of fuss. Certainly the relationship with CAVAL has assisted in the more technical areas of

communication required with the vendor.

Size and composition

The CLIC Consortium is relatively small in size, with six institutional members. These university libraries all have a common purpose and understanding of the interlibrary loan business involved. Decisions have been reached collegially and with relative ease. At the policy level the staff representing each member library at CLIC business meetings have also been closely involved in Document Delivery/ILL work at their institutions, thus providing real understanding of the impact decisions will have on institutional work practice.

Consortium Management

The expertise provided by CAVAL in managing administrative matters of the Consortium has ensured that the formal processes of meetings, minutes and teleconference scheduling has been well organised. Consortium members receive regular reports on outstanding configuration and help-desk calls. Additional configuration is planned and prioritised well in advance. Upgrades are also discussed and timetabled at periods agreed to by all members.

Decision Making

The CAVAL LIDDAS Consortium has shared not only costs, but also decision-making. Sometimes it has been difficult to come to a consensus about how to proceed, however good will has prevailed and there have always been opportunities to consider other options. Members have access to the large body of knowledge that is being built up over time. This compares to non-consortia libraries, where changes may be

frequently delayed due to lack of expertise.

Formal and Informal Communication Methods

Communication has been excellent amongst consortium members and this has been a major factor in our success. The consortium has held regular teleconferences and these have proved invaluable for sharing information and facilitating informed decision-making. Although the original intention was to discontinue these following implementation, they have continued to be of value as an avenue for discussion of work practice and the resolution of common problems. Policy issues are formally dealt with at CLIC face-to-face meetings which are held at least twice a year. There is also an email discussion list, where members post questions and comments, and where CAVAL staff provide information and request feedback. There are also strong informal contacts between all members and the maintenance of good communication channels has been a vital factor in the success of the Consortium. Telephone and email contact have been constant between members, particularly at upgrade and other implementation times and all members have learnt the value of their 'shared experience'.

In-Kind Support

A combined commitment to share has benefited all members. Sharing of documentation, promotional materials, user guides and documented procedures has meant that each institution has not had to create individual sets of the same material. Each institution has been an equal

partner in the process and contributed in some form or other. For example:

- La Trobe University created an innovative set of self-directed online user guides using the Camtasia Studio software. This has formed the basis for the development of similar guides by other member institutions
- University of Newcastle created the help text for the customer's web interface which has also been adapted by all members
- Macquarie University has shared a vast number of saved searches.

Document Delivery/ILL staff involvement

The success of the Consortium must also be attributed to the Document Delivery and ILL staff who use the system and who have daily dealings with customers. Although geographical location has not allowed all staff to attend events such as the Practitioners Workshops there is an ongoing interchange of ideas about work practice and those who have had the opportunity to meet staff from other institutions have found it invaluable. It is rewarding to hear the enthusiasm with which staff members talk to colleagues from non-VDX institutions about VDX processes. These interchanges are important indicators of the success of the venture for libraries, customers and the consortium.

Conclusion

There certainly are some disadvantages and there are also some risks involved in going down the consortium pathway. Nonetheless CLIC members are clear that the benefits have far outweighed

the risks. At Macquarie University the implementation of VDX for both Document Supply and Distance Education has been highly successful and it is unlikely that this could have been achieved without the consortium approach. The success of the CLIC consortium can be attributed to a range of factors. These factors are very similar to those identified by other successful consortia as described in the literature review.

This paper has explored the complex relationships between the consortium and member institutions, and the impact of those relationships upon service

provision and development within the member institutions. It is apparent that the mix of formal processes such as configuration, training and helpdesk support, meetings, teleconferences and workshops; as well as informal factors such as a combined commitment to share, the maintenance of good communication channels, effective problem solving and minimal bureaucratic barriers, have enabled democratic compromises to be achieved. CLIC members continue to work together to improve software implementation and therefore excellent service delivery to clients.

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