

Collection cohesiveness or collection chaos: the effects of merger on library collections
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1. Introduction

The South African library landscape is changing. This change is brought about in part, by municipal boundary changes (affecting public library service delivery) and in higher education by the National Plan for Higher Education and its emphasis on changing the breadth and depth of higher education, using mergers and amalgamations as one mechanism to achieve this. Change of this magnitude plays itself out in numerous areas in libraries; this paper will consider specifically the effect on collection development and management in merging institutions. The background will be the merger of the former ML Sultan (MLSTL) and Technikon Natal (TNL) libraries into the Durban Institute of Technology Library (DITL). The paper will address some of the key philosophical concerns in collection development, and will consider how merger can affect collection management and core collections and the impact that this has on library users.

Some of the decisions that libraries that merge will have to make regarding their collections include the following:

- will libraries of merged institutions continue to operate as separate entities, with their own discrete collections?
 - will there be rationalisation of certain activities and functions (such as acquisitions, cataloguing, ILL, serials management)?
 - will part of collections move from one library to another? How will this move occur?
- will library codes change (such as JC codes which affect login access to some databases etc.)

2. Collection management

Law, in Jenkins and Morley (2002), states the terms 'collection development' and 'collection management' are used as loose synonyms. He argues, however, that the former term is subsumed by the latter, as it relates predominantly to the selection and acquisition of material for expanding a collection. Collection management includes these activities but also relates to planning, fund management, decisions about stock location (open access or closed access, and branch locations), decisions relating to ownership or access (related both to print, non-print and electronic resources) and the marketing, monitoring and evaluation of collection use (Jenkins and Morley 2002:15). This paper will refer to collection management rather than the narrower focus of collection development.

Collection management is influenced by a number of factors. Government policies influence collection development in libraries through various policies, including the financing of research and development, the regulation of information technology, Higher Education funding policies and the requirement for increased resource sharing (White Paper and NPHE). Another factor is the changes in the size and composition of the student body at many institutions involved in transformation, and the changes in teaching methods. These have required more and different library materials. Users' library habits and information seeking patterns have changed as well (Magrill and Corbin 1989), with the cell phone generation being accustomed to immediate access and usually online full-text access - "I want it all, I want it NOW". Public libraries, in particular, have faced decreasing financial support.

Buckland (1988) states that the process of assembling a library collection can be regarded as “the first stage of the process of retrieving material for use” (Buckland 1988:68) and in trying to rationalise this argument he characterises the use of library materials by three patterns, namely scatter, decay and inertia. Scatter is where the use of materials is unevenly dispersed across titles, with some being used more than others, decay relates to his argument that use of materials tends to diminish with their age, and finally inertia relates to usage varying with convenience of access. These three patterns will be discussed in some measure later in the paper. Buckland indicates that these three aspects of collection use “reflect and define ... the profile of demand in any given library context. The challenge for the librarian is to develop a collection of materials appropriate to that situation, given the inevitable constraints on space, labor, and funds” (Buckland 1988:69).

Buckland (1988) states that the development of collections is “essentially a compromise between the physical convenience that can be achieved and the resources allocated for this purpose. The choices of outcomes include the completeness and appropriateness of the range of materials relative to the demand, the standard of availability of the materials in relation to the pattern of demand, and the physical accessibility of the collection. Specific decisions include: whether to create another collection; where to locate it; relationships with other collections, coordination with other collections within the same system, and cooperation with collections outside the system ...” (Buckland 1988:69). This is no more relevant than with merged library collections.

3. MLST/TN environment

3.1 Pre-merger

The Technikon Natal/ M L Sultan Technikon merger was the first higher education merger in South Africa. In part a voluntary merger in that talks about merger had preceded by some years the National Plan for Higher Education, political will and promulgation were necessary to make the merger happen. At the time of merger in April 2002, the two institutions had a similar sized student body of approximately 9 500 students each. ML Sultan Technikon (MLST) had a main campus with one small satellite campus at Brickfield Road in Durban. Technikon Natal (TN) had a main campus in Durban, a branch in each of Durban and Pietermaritzburg and a satellite campus in Richards Bay. In addition, at the beginning of 2001, two Colleges of Education were incorporated into TN, being Indumiso in Pietermaritzburg and Gamalakhe on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast which had considerable implications for that institution and its libraries immediately prior to merger. There was a library presence at each of these teaching points, of varying size and scope. Technikon Natal was thus a multi-site institution as opposed to a single site at M L Sultan.

An audit of the two library services (October 2001 unpublished report) showed that both libraries were under-resourced in terms of space, staff, collections and computers for users. In terms of collections, TNL had the larger collection (70 578 monograph volumes representing 62 217 titles, MLST 59 510 volumes representing 48 000 titles) and a larger slice of the library budget was allocated to library materials. At MLST, which had a similar sized library budget, the largest slice went to staff salaries. The MLST collection was also an ageing collection (Buckland’s decay factor).

Differences in library policy relating to collection development and management were also evident. While the one library favoured a breadth of titles over multiple copies, the other library was intent on ensuring sufficient number of copies for a more limited number of titles (Buckland’s scatter factor). This possibly also reflected differences in institutional teaching methods.

The library model which was developed for the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) was affected largely by the multi-campus nature of the institution. At the outset of planning for the merger, there was a lack of clarity as to how the institution at large would be organised across campuses. The library thus planned on a flexible model with a number of sites of delivery. The number of sites of delivery was not defined other than to indicate that at each teaching site there would be library delivery; this would be dependent on the academic structures and how programmes were rationalised. It was also accepted that the size and scope of services at sites of delivery could be different. It was agreed that rationalisation would occur in the centralised activities of all acquiring, recording and preparing functions such as acquisitions, cataloguing, classification, and processing. Financial administration was also centralised, as were the main library IT (information technology) and systems tasks.

The model essentially was as follows:

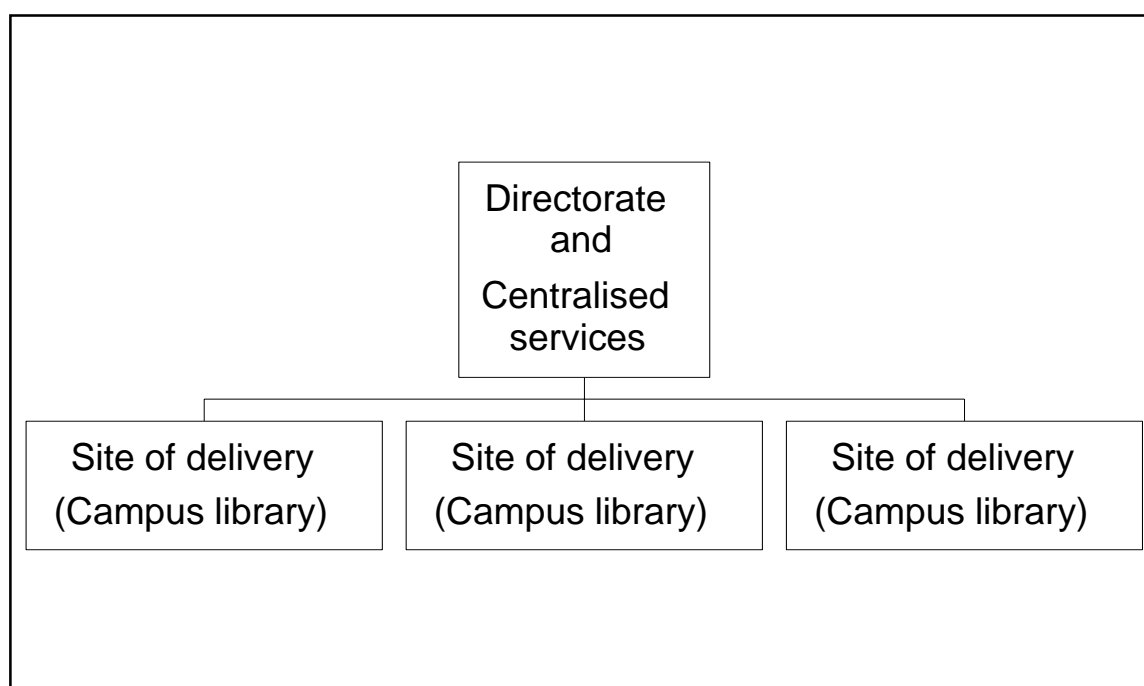


Figure 1: Proposed DIT model

This proposed model was also seen as fitting in with the proposed multi-campus concept of the new institution, as well as being flexible enough to attend to the requirements of the faculty rationalisation across campuses (which in the end saw the rationalisation of programmes at physical entities) and the possible inclusion of Mangosuthu Technikon in the future.

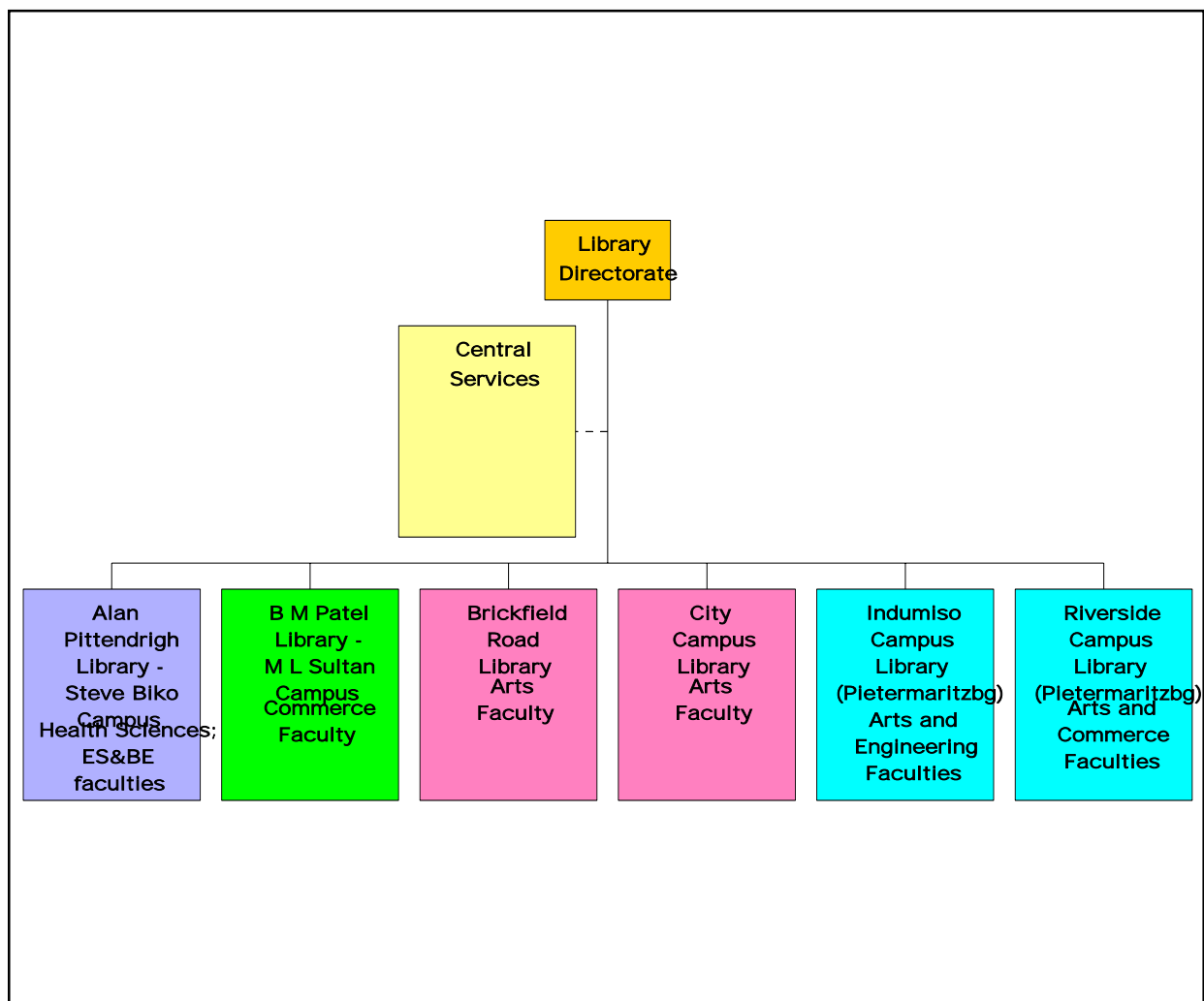
3.2 Post merger

The plan for the new institution finally took shape along faculty lines, where faculties were geographically located and programmes were physically relocated. This meant, for example, that the former Berea Campus of Technikon Natal (now the Steve Biko Campus) became the campus housing the Faculty of Engineering, Science and the Built Environment (ESBE) and the Faculty of Health Sciences. The M L Sultan Technikon campus (now the M L Sultan Campus) housed the Faculty of Commerce. The Faculty of Arts was split across two smaller campuses, namely the City and Brickfield Road Campuses. In Pietermaritzburg, programmes were left

largely untouched at the Riverside and Indumiso campuses where Arts, Commerce and Engineering programmes continued to be offered.

3.3 Implications for the library

This geographical clustering of programmes within faculties meant that library collections as they had existed pre-merger, were no longer necessarily applicable to the users at that particular campus (It is important to note that not all institutions will necessarily face this kind of disruption if there is not the geographical rationalisation of academic departments and activities within institutions). The library thus relocated parts of the existing collections along the lines of the faculty geographical structures, as follows:



4. Merger impact

4.1 Institutional planning

'No business as usual' was enforced in a very deliberate manner institutionally in December 2002 when academic departments were told to pack up their departments and prepare for relocations to their new sites of teaching. This meant that when the new year started in 2003, there was a visible change in where departments and staff were located and where the locus of teaching for certain programmes occurred. While this led to considerable disruption in certain

areas, the message was clear: there is no business as usual, and the rationalisation of many programmes to a common teaching site meant that academic staff could no longer continue in their particular way. The library attempted to keep abreast of institutional plans regarding departmental moves, but often the departments themselves did not know of their move until the movers arrived! Institutional planning was, to say the least, haphazard and unsynchronised, resulting in disruption to academic delivery severely in some instances.

4.2 The process: quick and ugly

In the context of the TNL/MLSTL merger, a number of the basic principles underpinning collection development and management were foregone in an attempt to move a critical mass of the collection to new locations as quickly as possible to ensure as minimal disruption as possible to library users. This movement was necessitated by the relocation and rationalisation of academic departments. With an estimated 60 000 monograph volumes and an unestimated number of periodicals volumes to be relocated between at least five site libraries, a turnaround time of 24 hours was aimed for in the larger collections. This was not always achieved, yielding some degree of frustration to users and library staff alike.

Tweedie (1981:163) discusses the cost of stock movement between two converging libraries, and states that the cost of selecting and identifying the material to be relocated is usually ignored although it is a time consuming process requiring the input of highly skilled staff. Ideally, a skilled team of individuals should be tasked with this process, to consult widely with library colleagues and academics about the movement of materials. Detailed comparison of the various collections should be made. Academic programmes do not correlate with the subject division in the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme and given the multi-disciplinary nature of many of these programmes it is not simply a matter of relocating "all the Engineering books to x campus, and all the Computer books to y campus". As Tweedie says, "the wholesale transfer of blocks of material is scarcely feasible. Moreover, teaching staff are unlikely to be happy to see whole subject classes disappear completely from one campus, even if they are of marginal relevance to remaining courses." (Tweedie 1981:163). The requirement for balanced collections as well as ease of access to the users for their requirements make this an intricate task.

4.3 What to move? What to keep?

The physical relocation of academic departments required complete library collections to be torn apart. Many difficult decisions had to be made with regard to which books should remain and which should be sent to the other campus. It was decided, for example, to leave computer books at their respective sites. As an interim measure, this is acceptable, but the whole collection has still to be checked by librarians and lecturing staff to ensure that material is in its correct place, where it will be used.

The multi disciplinary nature of the subjects makes it difficult to divide library material into meaningful segments. The big decision to make is "what can be regarded as core?" Though there are sometimes clear divisions, the supporting material for subjects that are interrelated like Architecture/ Fine Art/ Interior Design is very difficult to subdivide, ensuring that every element is covered. Another question is what to do with all the general subjects: management, entrepreneurship, research... that are applicable to all fields of study? Once all the subjects are divided into their disciplines and separated, this creates gaps in the collection at a particular library site. The remaining stock is fragmented and inadequate and will not fully meet the needs of the users.

Tweedie comes close to identifying some of these concerns by stating that "the transfer of library stock ... is far from being a minor and incidental aspect of the operation. ... even with the

most careful management, it may emerge as a most disruptive and expensive exercise.” (Tweedie 1981:162). She continues to say that “... the committees charged with planning the relocation of courses in multi campus institutions should from the outset take library considerations into account as a major factor in these decisions.”

It has already been stated that the cost of selecting and identifying material to be relocated is usually ignored although it is a time consuming process requiring the input of highly skilled staff (Tweedie 1981). The need to consult widely about the movement of materials and to undertake a detailed comparison of the various collections is absolutely necessary and critical. The wholesale transfer of blocks of material is not always feasible. Moreover, academics are unlikely to be happy to see whole subject classes disappear completely from one campus, even if they are of marginal relevance to remaining courses. The requirement for balanced collections as well as ease of access to the users for their requirements make this an intricate and complicated task.

4.4 Staff resources

In Tweedie’s (1981) experience, additional staff had to be employed to attend to the stock transfer requirements. In the local example this also became necessary. Two library staff members were tasked with overall coordinating responsibilities, and each site involved in either receiving or sending stock had a particular site coordinator. Due to a particularly depleted library materials budget, which meant minimal acquisitions activity, staff from the Acquisitions department were redeployed on a temporary basis to assist with the stock relocation and in particular the amendment of records on the library database. Part-time casual staff were employed to assist with the heavier manual tasks of packing material into crates, shelving received material and making space on the shelves. This assistance, though welcome, was considerably less than required and library staff had to bear the brunt of the project. It is a daunting task to embark on a project of this size and scope, with minimal additional assistance.

4.5 Stock location/shelf location

Moving stock also requires that decisions have to be made about changing or adopting classification numbers (shelf location numbers) on the physical items. Another significant effect of the merger on collections is that, while both institutions were using the Dewey Decimal Classification system, they used different editions, and often chose different numbers for books and subjects. During the stock relocation process, the decision made (in the light of the quick and dirty strategy) was to change identical copies to the shelf number of the library that the items were going to. This is all very well, but the many other books that are not identical copies but deal with the same subject can often be found at a significantly different number. One envisages that this will take many years to rectify. It has had an effect on the browsability and coherence of the collection. Subject Librarians have taken to making subject guides which list the various numbers at which books on the same subject can be found!

Logistically this was a sound decision to allow the stock relocation to move as quickly as possible but the implications of this decision are considerable: what happens then to coordinated stock organisation and cohesive collections, and the philosophical framework within which a collection is built and organised? Essentially what has happened is the breaking up of collections which have been built in a very deliberate manner and organised according to the particular library’s interpretations and collection management philosophy. For all that libraries are organised in standardised fashions, one has only to look at the SACat to see how many different interpretations there are in classifying the same item.

4.6 Library users

Library users, accustomed to continuous provision of services and access to information at their home campus, expected the same at their new location. Library services have to continue, and staff and students who were disaffected with the institutional environment and non-delivery become particularly aggressive and assertive when faced with reduced service levels in the library. An attempt was made to ringfence the move of the collections with particular staff being allocated to this activity, but the normal requirements of the library operations often meant that these individuals had to be called upon to ensure that the library service to patrons remained as constant as possible.

Lecturing staff were often unhappy about the movement of their books. The Environment and Recreation Technology department, for example, had their books moved to the Commerce library because the department fell into that Faculty. But in practice, their students will now have to use both libraries as their studies require them to use books from "Engineering" areas. Architecture students have had the landscape design books and periodicals removed from under their noses. There is quite a significant amount of resistance to having to use the other libraries in the system, because the closest one involves a 10 - 15 minute walk. The system whereby students can request items from another library also needs to be further streamlined. At first, students could only return a book at the library where they took it out. This was changed to allow students to return an item at any of the libraries. It is essential that items find their way back to their home library as soon as possible

Library staff members were sometimes not fully informed or aware of the moves of particular areas of the collection; as a result they in turn caused more confusion.

4.7 Information seeking patterns

A side effect of splitting of the collections is that it is even more essential for all users to be proficient in using the OPAC: the OPAC is the only way of telling where an item is to be found. Most users who are familiar with the library normally browse and find what they are looking for in the shelves without using the library catalogue. Since they are used to finding material at a particular area in the shelves, once the stock moves and that information is not communicated properly through signage, this creates a lot of unhappiness. Furthermore, the inconsistent use of Dewey numbers for shelf location means that similar material is not always housed together, thus affecting browsability of the collections.

4.8 Policy development

Differing policies with regard to multiple copies has also affected the collection: MLSTL regularly bought many copies of a title, whereas TN library's policy was to rather buy different titles (Buckland's scatter factor). The merger has brought these two policies into conflict, and has resulted in an unbalanced collection in some areas, where multiple copies predominate.

Working groups were formed to develop policy and make recommendations for various facets of operation. Development of policy was undertaken in a democratic, consultative manner with all drafts available for comment by library staff and then by the interim Library Committee which comprised student, academic and administration representation. Implementation of approved policy, however, has often been problematic with some staff still working 'in the way I've always done it' and this was evident in the Collection Management policy implementation.

4.9 Hidden costs

Some of the hidden costs include the following:

a) Duplication of material across sites

Because there will be demand for supporting material, more material will have to be purchased in an effort to close the gaps. This may result in duplications, one of the anticipated outcomes of merger being to minimise duplication! There will have to be an acknowledgement that because of the decentralised nature of the library system, there will have to be an element of duplication for core reference and other works.

b) Human resources costs

This cost is unestimatable, except where specific contract or casual appointments are made. The time in planning, make decisions, dealing with immediate troubleshooting all involves staff time. At DIT, the stock relocation committee met weekly to plan and assess progress. This was in addition to normal duties. The database had to be constantly updated as stock was relocated to reflect the new locations.

c) Stock analysis

This is yet to be undertaken at DIT, but a process of analysing the collections at the various sites and determining their currency, cohesiveness and identifying particular strengths and shortfalls, needs to be established. Magrill and Corbin (1989:22) state that how much the present collections will influence future development depends on variables such as the purposes of the particular library and the ways it is used, as well as the additional variables of size of the collection and its age. In the analysis that will be undertaken, amongst other things the weaknesses will be determined, rated as to their importance for users, and accepted or alleviated.

d) Processing materials

New date sheets, barcode labels, ownership stamps: these are not necessarily hidden, but are additional costs and require appropriate labour intervention. Furthermore, over 200 lidded crates were hired for the physical movement of materials, as cardboard boxes would not have sufficed for the volume of materials being moved.

4.10 Guidelines

- ensure that the library is involved in institutional planning and that the effects of such plans for the library are clearly understood and articulated
- involve academics across disciplines when decisions are to be made about stock relocation
- communicate, communicate, communicate! DIT library attempted to keep all stakeholders informed about moves, but even library staff were not always certain what was happening. The library's image can suffer significantly when confusion is shown.
- have a clear plan of action and ensure that you have the necessary resources to fulfil the plan

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