Swallowing an elephant

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Swallowing an elephant: the experience of college libraries and the Cape Technikon

Abstract
Predating the major higher education mergers, the Cape Technikon Library Service was faced with the incorporation of the Mowbray College of Education and Boland College of Education libraries in 2000. The actual stock of these two libraries was larger than that of the Technikon, and in addition, an institution that had a monolithic library structure was suddenly faced with coping with a more dispersed structure. Both Mowbray and Boland College (which was at Wellington, some 65 km away) were functioning libraries and the challenges were therefore to maintain functionality while changing and to keep the best from each library while creating a single library service. This presentation discusses the lessons learned from both the perspective of the college libraries, as well as the Cape Technikon libraries, in handling both the human component of the merger, as well as the unique challenges of the collections and of service alignment.

1. Introduction
Predating the highly publicised Higher Education Mergers of which we are now in the throes there was the decision that all colleges of education had to be removed from control of the Provincial Departments of Education and, ultimately, either cease to exist as pre-service training institutions, or become part of an existing Higher Education Institution (HEI). This led to many such mergers, phrased rather undiplomatically as ‘incorporations’, which leads us to firstly look at the essential differences between these incorporations and the mergers now facing us as far as conditions for success are concerned and then, using the MJL Olivier Library of the Boland College of Education as a case study, identify how these conditions were handled, and what lessons we can learn from this in the fields of the collection, services and the human component.

2. Factors for success in mergers and incorporations

2.1 Mergers and incorporations
As pointed out by Reddy (2002) and Swanepoel (2003), even the term “merger” has various interpretations. It is significant that in their report on mergers of British colleges,
a wide range of examples are used with only 8 of the 19 mergers being seen as “a true partnership of equals” (Centre for Education, 2003:13).

In the South African documentation regarding the case of the colleges of education and the HEI, various terms were used. This is exemplified by Jansen (2002: v) where he refers to “the merger and incorporation processes” in the sense of incorporation of colleges of education into HEI, and the merger of the two technikons in KwaZulu Natal, and then typifies them all as “merger cases” (Jansen, 2002: vi). In this paper the term “incorporation” will be used, as it was the term used by the Department of Education for the entire process of having colleges of education move into the Higher Education sector (South Africa, 2001 109).

Despite these several interpretations, and despite distinguishing different type of mergers, as in Reddy (2002: p92) in discussion of the mergers of colleges of education the emphasis for the library should be placed on the understanding of the circumstances of the merger.

In mergers involving institutions it is seldom that the library is a key mover, rather as a result of the merger the libraries will have to find how they fit into the new overall broader pattern. This leads us to conclude that it is not really the type of merger that is in itself important for the library, but rather how the conditions for success in a merger have been identified and handled within the context of this particular action.

2.2 Factors for success

In much of the literature different factors for success have been identified, but with Swanepoel (2003) a “number of success factors” are selected that are seen by authors as “the most important or critical”. For the purposes of this paper, these have even been reduced from Swanepoel’s list but still provide a useful categorization of the factors:

1. Leadership: Identified by most authors as one of the key factors. The crucial element in the college incorporation should be seen as not the leadership of the HEI, but that of the college. “It is very clear from the evidence that weak leadership at the time of a
merger would invariably damn the lesser institution going into the merger”. (Jansen, 2002: 174)

2. Planning: The level of planning was seen as being crucial. “In the lists of do’s and dont’s...three issues or themes were stressed. The first is to plan the merger thoroughly.” (Swanepoel, 2003). This level of thorough planning was also envisaged as being the equivalent of a business plan (Centre for Education, 2003: 29)

3. Perception of participants: Positive perceptions can occur when “Merger is seen as essential for the survival of one of the partners”; and negative perceptions when “merger is simply seen as an ‘empire building’ exercise” (Centre for Education, 2003:29), Included in the perception is the importance of communication, for this often helps dispel or create the perceptions and a well-developed system for communication is considered essential for all change management. (O’Connor, 1993:69)

4. Time management: There has to cognizance of the amount of work demanded by the managers of areas most closely concerned with the merger. “Prepare for the massive demands that will be made on management time, before, during and after the merger” (Fielden & Markham, 1997: 8). In addition to what can be seen as the normal integration problems of staff, facilities, budgets and collections, it has been pointed out that often other changes result with activities that would normally only be handled one at a time all being undertaken simultaneously (Swanepoel, 2005: 91).

Within each of these main categories of success factors we can identify many others, and, as with any other process, the factors are interdependent. It is also true that some of the factors could be seen as preconditions, whereas others, often not foreseen or prepared for, arise during the process. (Centre for Education, 2003: 30). In the following case study the four categories as outlined above will be concentrated on, but other factors may also be deduced from the example.

3. The case of OKB and the MJL Olivier Library

Although the situation of the MJL Olivier Library is unique to Wellington, there are many facets of the incorporation which were shared by the library in the previous Cape Town
College of Education (Mowbray) which was simultaneously incorporated into the Cape Technikon. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the two situations were exactly the same, and this must be borne in mind.

3.1 OKB

Although this paper deals with the incorporation of the libraries, a brief review of the college incorporation process is necessary as a background. Colleges of Education have existed at Wellington since 1897. The present college library was built in 1964 as part of the Wellington Teachers College (WOK). In 1990 the Wellington College and the Paarl Teachers College (OKP) were amalgamated by the Cape Education Department into the Boland College of Education (OKB) which continued in the buildings of the Wellington Teachers College, and with most of its staff. Other colleges were incorporated into OKB: Denneoord (from Stellenbosch) in 1992, Athlone (from Paarl) and Graaff-Reinet (both in 1991). All these colleges had one thing in common: they were dedicated to the training of teachers for primary education. However, Graaff-Reinet and Paarl had incorporated the training of Wood and Metalwork teachers for high schools: a course that was moved to Wellington with these students actually being registered students of the University of Stellenbosch (Moll, 2001).

In the 1994 constitution, all tertiary training was declared a national affair, and thus the colleges of education (at that stage 111 in number) had to be moved from provincial control to national control. After various recommendations and models had been studied it was declared that, based on the Higher Education Act of 1997 and subsequent mid 1998 recommendations in a “Framework for Incorporation of Colleges of education into the Higher education sector” that all colleges would have to form part of a merged institution or become autonomous. The choice of autonomy was soon seen to be unworkable (Reddy, 2002: 101) and colleges were told that “they could no longer investigate the route of autonomy.” (Soobrayan, 2002: 27) The decision as to which institution was to be left to the colleges and institutions themselves, in other words, the colleges had to find an institution willing to take them over.

In the case of OKB the Cape Technikon approached the college with the offer of negotiating a take-over and incorporation into the Cape Technikon. This incorporation
was initially envisaged to be a take-over as a running concern, i.e. with no changes to staff. However, due to a change in the approach by the National Department of Education, the incorporation became changed into a two-phased approach. Firstly all the physical assets of the college, as well as students and courses, would be transferred to the Technikon, and then the Technikon would be responsible for staffing, with the proviso that existing staff would have priority. (Faculty of Education, 2000)

As is understandable, the change from a situation where staff were initially promised by the Technikon that no staff member would be without employment, and would in fact be better off, to a situation where existing staff were merely on secondment and had to apply for positions (with numbers, levels and salaries still uncertain) caused considerable frustration, as well as a reluctance/inability to be wholeheartedly committed to the Technikon cause.

The physical handover took place on 1 February 2001 with the staff appointments still unmade. However, various directives had been issued from the Technikon indicating changes on which they had decided: not all of these were practical, resulting in some major frustrations on the part of both staff and students. Initially the only physical difference felt by the students was the issuing of student cards (a novelty for college of education students) and a major IT change: the connection of two existing laboratories to the network and the change of the library connection from the University of Stellenbosch to the Cape Technikon network, with a switchover to Cape Technikon IT student systems. Staff had a similar change, although initially not all were connected, and not all had computers and network points (Moll, 2001).

3.2 MJL Olivier Library

Although there were library facilities from the very beginning of teacher education (albeit the first being only a cupboard), it was from the building of the MJL Olivier Library and appointment of first full-time librarian in 1964 that one could objectively state that the college (at that stage still WOK) had a library. It is named after the then rector who was instrumental in having the library built and the library therefore functioned as an independent library, performing all the functions of a tertiary library, for 35 years. In that time it built up three things that impacted on the incorporation of the library into the Cape
Technikon main library: a collection; a service ethic and expectations of users, and a unique place in the community, both local and of past students.

The underpinning of these arises largely from the unusual place of the library in the training of students: the main librarian was always an academic position, responsible for lecturing to all students not only on library use, but also the didactic use of library and information sources.

This situation arose as Library Instruction was a compulsory period a week for all primary school classes, and teachers therefore had to be trained in the presentation of that course. Furthermore, use of the school library was encouraged in various primary subjects, and students had to be trained how to use the library for instruction in these classes as well.

Even in Curriculum 2005 this situation persisted, as one of the specific outcomes of the Language, Literacy and Communication Learning Areas was the use of information, as outlined in the guideline syllabus for Information Skills issued by the Department of Education. It is significant that the Western Cape Education Department still has subject advisers for this particular role.

As can be seen, then, the library is not merely an information provider as in many of the other courses but is also in the nature of a laboratory for teacher trainees.

3.3 The collection

This duality underlies the unique nature of the collection. On the one hand, there is the academic collection, comparable to that of any tertiary institution, and on the other the materials collection, which are provided for the users’ practical use. These latter comprise not only non-print materials such as posters, sound recordings, transparencies, slides and videos, but also many print materials such as school textbooks, primary level subject literature, children’s literature and even coloring-in and activity books.
When one therefore looks at collection development in the context of this library, the dynamics are very different. The academic development is one with which tertiary institutions are familiar and can make generic assumptions, but the materials development is a different matter.

3.4 The service ethic and expectations of users

Flowing from this it can be discerned that user services fall into two distinct patterns: the normal library trained user service to the client based on information needed for completion of an academic task, and the more complicated services to users based on their didactic materials needs. It is in this second category of use that one can see the rationale behind the Education Department’s insistence that all staff providing user services to students (both Librarians and Library Assistants) be qualified teachers. In essence, they were expected to have experience of the work which the student would be doing, gained from own teaching experience. The equivalent would be doing all Subject Librarian recruitment from industry, or from the workplace of the particular field.

The effect of this insistence was that the staff of college libraries always felt a dual responsibility. On the one hand, they had their responsibility as librarians to users, providing the kinds of input and support necessary and normal in a well-functioning library environment. On the other, they also had a responsibility based on their teaching experience to assist users to being able to cope with the information demands and needs of practicing teachers.

These roles became part of the job description and ethic in the college libraries and also part of what was expected by the users, in particular the academic staff, who also came to rely on this specific didactic expertise of the library.

User services in the MJL Olivier Library therefore had, and still have, added dimensions not always apparent in other fields. The level of actual usage of the library is probably a good indicator of this: as a measure, although the full-time student numbers in 2000 were only 400, loans averaged 100 a day, and up to 80 students could be found in the library at a given time. [Extrapolated to the Cape Technikon Cape Town library, this would be the equivalent of 2500 loans on a day, and 2000 students in the library!]
3.5 Community role

The community role of the library lay partly in the history of the users: the students graduating from the colleges were used to not only having their academic needs met by the library, but also their didactic needs. As the only large and education library in the area, and as students go to the workplaces for practice teaching, and also gain appointments on the staffs of various schools, the reputation for assistance in these fields grew.

The community therefore came to rely on the library, and in many ways, the library served as an advertisement to the community of the campus and the potential it holds. Users who came to use the library facilities were liable to become students when the campus offered courses for teachers.

As the emphasis by many of these outside users was on didactic needs it can be seen that once again the duality of the role of the collection and staff played an important role in the satisfaction of these user needs.

4. Time of incorporation

The library’s initial role in incorporation was spelt out in a document issued by the Cape Technikon, but drawn up in consultation with OKB. In particular the library portion of this document, “Faculty of Education Business plan” (2000), had input from the Cape Technikon Library,

This plan had the following library components:

1. Staffing
2. Management structure

The staffing envisaged was initially that of 1 Professional person, 2 Admin staff and 2 student assistants. This staff would fall under the campus manager as a line function. (Faculty of Education, 2000: 7, 15.). In addition a Laboratory technician responsible for audio-visual equipment would also fall under the librarian.
Reaction to this plan was contained in a submission by the librarian to the Cape Technikon librarian services and the rector of the College. (Moll, nd). This document suggested 2 professional posts, 2 library assistant posts, 1 library laboratory assistant and 1 general worker. In addition to the staffing this document also calls for the upgrading of facilities to include a computer centre, book theft detection system and computerisation of the stock. (These last three had already been under discussion in the college before the announcement of the impending incorporations).

A meeting was also held at the Cape Technikon with representatives of the Cape Technikon Library services, both college libraries as well as both rectors and Mr W Smith, Acting Director of the Cape Technikon School of Teacher education and the Technikon’s incorporation manager. At this meeting it was agreed that minimum staffing would be 1 full-time professional post, 1 part-time professional post, 2 full-time library assistants, 2 part-time library assistants and 1 full-time library worker. The reporting line of the library would also be to Library services in Cape Town, and not to the Campus manager. It was also agreed that an additional academic post would cover the teaching load then covered by the library (Busby, 2000).

Aspects of this were accepted, but the final staffing complement was determined by the Cape Technikon in their document from Human Resources outlining posts available. (Cape Technikon, 2000). No mention was made of the lecturer’s post, and the library staff were not specified as to number, but were listed as Librarian, Administrative assistant and General Worker. In the final interviews this amounted to 1 full-time Librarian, 1 part-time librarian (5/8 post), 2 full-time Library Assistants and 1 library worker. Despite the closing date of applications of 31 October 2000, the interviews for these posts were only held in May 2001. The reason for the delay lay in the changes made to the financing that was envisaged by the Cape Technikon, but not yet received by October.

As outlined above the staffing was thus a matter of uncertainty at the college and particularly in the library. Conflicting communications form different sources had different structures, and different time scales of implementation. The final implementation date for transfer of the library to Cape Technikon control was February 2001, but the staff were
only functional from January 2002, with the college/Cape Technikon Wellington campus having the college staff seconded for 2001. For the library (unlike most of the college), this actually meant an increase of staff in 2002.

5. The role of the success factors in the incorporation.

5.1 Leadership

The library incorporation was led at Wellington by the librarian, Mike Moll, and at the Cape Technikon by the director Adriaan Coetzee and the senior librarian – initially Pat Busby and then Matilda Pieterse. Both parties were involved only in the libraries’ area and it was mainly due to their handling of the merger situation that led to the library merger being seen as possibly the most successful part of the overall merger.

Two statements make this leadership clear. The first from Adriaan Coetzee who “especially welcomed staff from the Wellington and Mowbray campuses” to the Library management team meeting on 8 May 2001 – this while the staff were only on secondment and not yet part of the Technikon Staff, and in fact prior to their interviews for appointment to the Cape Technikon staff. (Proske, 2001). The second statement from Matilda Pieterse was in an e-mail reply to Mike Moll : “baie dankie vir julle samewerking en bereidwilligheid om die beste te maak van ’n saak waarin geeneen van ons ’n keuse gehad het nie!” (thank you very much for your cooperation and preparedness to make the best of a matter in which neither of us had a choice”) (Pieterse, 2001).

A further advantage in leadership was the continuity, with Adriaan Coetzee having been director for some time before the incorporation and, in 2006, still the director of library services and, from the college, Mike Moll having been the librarian at OKB since 1995, and in 2006 still the Library manager at Wellington. This type of continuity including the staying on for at least five years has often been identified as being one of the key elements in successful integrations (Walker & Price, 2000: 3).

5.2 Planning
Planning for the incorporation of the library was first spelled out in the Faculty of Education Business Plan (2000). This document was only concerned with the staffing complement and little was said about the collection, facilities and services. These were spelled out in more detail in planning from the Library services, firstly in Coetzee’s document (2001) and then in Moll’s reply (2001).

In looking at strategic planning for the library system as a whole, Coetzee (2001) saw the challenge as being the integration of the college libraries, without negatively affecting the services and dynamics present in these libraries. Recognition was also given to the extra managerial time that would be needed. An emphasis was placed on planning that would enable a change from the view of the library as a main library, to one of four libraries. Unfortunately the proposal as far as the college libraries were concerned was limited to looking at the management structure and not at the problems in services, collection and facilities.

In an answer to this plan several key points were raised which showed what planning parameters could also be considered. These included:

- Optimising the use of the new resources and of the new staff’s skills within the wider setting of the Cape Technikon Library system.
- The delegation of authority and responsibility to a more local level, enabling planning to be done at that level (Moll, 2001).

By raising these concerns and having them largely accepted, planning for the expansion of facilities and services at a local level could be made by the staff of the former colleges, giving them the sense of responsibility, but also enabling the planning of these expansions to be done in detail and tailored to local circumstances without rushing over-hastily into major changes. From the Library Services as a whole, support could be given at institutional level, as well as technical input and other support where necessary.

The time spent in planning the changes, without an imposition of immediate changes from the dominant partner, enabled the college libraries’ incorporation to be successful and, in particular, to show that time spent in planning enables one to do it right the first time, one of the important lessons learned from library mergers (Swanepoel, 2005: 91).
5.3 Perception of participants and communication

The perception of the participants, as shown above in the quote by Pieterse, was the one aspect of the incorporation in which there was a definitely negative influence. The perception of the staff at Wellington was obviously informed firstly by the process leading up to the incorporation in which communication was mainly received from the Departments of Education (National and Western Cape), and conveyed by the college rector. Further, in the early stages, communication from the Cape Technikon was from various role-players, some of whose statements are still a cause of dispute in 2006!

The main problem in this stage was the lack of consistency of message regarding the future of the staff – initially the message was that all would continue as before, and this changed to one in which application would have to be made to the HEI.

On a more professional level, there was also communication from the library services of the Cape Technikon in which visits were made and the future discussed. It was in this facet, too, that a negativity arose with professional aspects of the way college libraries functioned being questioned and very much of an attitude of “You’ll have to do it our way” proposed. Strangely enough, this was countered by statements by Adriaan Coetzee in which he clearly warned against" the danger of seeing both Mowbray and Wellington as simply branches of a central library. There was a difference in management styles and both branches should be allowed as much autonomy as possible" (Proske, 2001).

Nonetheless a common element of all reports on the functioning of the MJL Olivier Library since incorporation, and still present in January 2004, has been that one of the weaknesses of the MJL Olivier Library is the “Lack of understanding by some Main Campus Library Staff of functioning and circumstances at branch” (Moll, 2004).

In the long term, however, certain decisions have been made which has enabled the MJL Olivier Library to retain its own culture – retention of the name is one example. This fits in well with the idea that the “traditions and heritage” of an organization taken over by a larger one should be honoured (Brown, 1995:179). Ironically, too, certain practices which the MJL Olivier Library had and which were inveighed against as being not
correct, have actually become standard practice throughout the Cape Technikon Library System – whether this was due to historical imperative or the influence of the MJL Olivier Library is difficult to say!

5.4 Time management

As shown earlier, under the incorporation process the strange situation arose of the library actually gaining in staff. In particular the professional staff were strengthened (with the original 5/8 position becoming full-time after 8 months), and the circulation staff more than doubled (again, an additional 5/8 assistant was appointed after 8 months; this was made full-time after 18 months and an additional full-time assistant appointed).

The net result of this, and of the initial removal of the teaching load from the librarian, was to free up the time available to the full-time librarian (later known as the Branch Library Manager), to handle aspects of the incorporation. The main aspect was obviously that of staff although the library was in the fortunate position that both librarians and assistants were of existing staff and little training on internal systems were required.

The collection and services were, however, a larger problem and required much more planning and management. Collection building continued on approximately the same lines as previously as far as education was concerned, but the incorporation also involved new directions coming to Wellington, and these also had to be serviced by the library. Agriculture, IT, Office Management and Technology and Accountancy courses were now also being offered, with the agriculture in particular a major change. Initial assistance was given by the movement of some stock from Cape Town, but more than the stock, the way services were offered as well as liaison with the staff had to be cultivated so that it could reach the level enjoyed by the education staff.

Further the collection had to be computerised so as to enable an inter-branch functionality. The management of this has taken up a large amount of time and, again, with the assistance of the Cape Technikon library services, a project was done to finalise the loading onto computer of all the stock, as well as full cataloguing. In this regard it
must be mentioned that Mowbray followed a different route, and at this time are still loading collection onto the common calico platform.

The major planning, however, involved physical changes to the library to enable the delivery of services which had been only planned in college days, but could now be implemented. A few highlights: the building of two computer laboratories within the library; provision of seminar rooms; securing the staff wing and the installation of a book theft detection unit.

6. Conclusion

The Cape Technikon Library Services, with a staff complement of some 50 persons, a collection of 90,000 items and a unified single building structure with a small satellite of 3 staff and 8,000 volumes at Granger Bay, was forced by the merger of the colleges of education into accepting two functioning, albeit old-fashioned, libraries, each with an existing staff complement (some 11 persons) and stock of over 60,000 volumes each. The distance from the new libraries was only some 5 kilometers in the case of Mowbray, but some 65 to Wellington.

The lessons learned from the incorporation of the staff, collections and, in essence, a new library culture, could prove to be invaluable in the merger taking place between the Cape Technikon Library services and the Peninsula Technikon Library Services. In particular the lessons learned in providing sustained and positive leadership, in appropriate and responsive planning, in positivising staff perceptions, and realizing and allowing the amount of time needed for effective management of the merger can be used in other similar mergers.

References


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