



Case study.

Planned merger;
integration work
started; merger
discontinued

Managing two NHS library and knowledge services: a case study from 2015-16.

Trust A: an urban acute Trust on multiple sites with approx. 4500 staff. The library has service points on two sites and the manager has been in post thirteen years. The Trust Chief Executive has a national profile.

Trust B: a large city-based teaching Trust on a single site with x,xxx staff. The library service is also on a single site and the Library Manager had been in post for over 15 years. In the autumn of 2015 the Library Manager announced their intention to retire in spring 2016. The Trust Chief Executive also has a national profile.

In 2015 the Trusts were working together on a project to investigate closer shared working practices. The proposal included an intention to establish an executive-level joint board comprised of members from both Trusts who would oversee the development and sign-off of shared programmes of work. The Trusts expected funding to be made available nationally for the partnership projects. .

What was the idea?

The initial proposal was for the two Trusts to review a number of “back office functions” and explore the potential to improve shared working practices. Human Resources, IT and Communications amongst other functions were considered. The Library Service at Trust B sat within the HR Directorate and given the Library Manager’s intention to retire it was agreed by the HR Directors at each Trust to explore the opportunities for shared working that this presented. The two library services therefore became early adopters in the programme.

What happened?

The agreement made between the two HR Directors was verbal and no formal proposal that gave an outline of the expectations of either Trust was generated. Despite this the Library Managers at each Trust were asked to begin work on creating a shared service where the Trust A Library Manager would take managerial responsibility for both Trust library services.

The Library Manager’s line managers at both sites were enthusiastic about the shared service.

There were three members of the Executive team at Trust A who were appointed to lead on the partnership project on behalf of the Trust – Director of Finance, Director of HR and Medical Director. The Director of HR was responsible for the project at Trust B.

The two library managers, with support from HCLU North, worked closely together to ensure that the process was well managed. Meetings were scheduled to allow all the staff members of the two library services to meet. One meeting was held at the site of Trust A and one was held at the site of Trust B. The

meetings were suggested by a member of the HCLU North team and both meetings were facilitated by a member by HCLU North. The meetings were designed to allow the library teams to raise concerns and ask questions in a safe and unchallenged way. The Library Managers were present for the start and end of the meetings but were away from the room whilst the discussions were being held.

Any questions that arose from the meetings were captured and presented to the Library Managers by the facilitator. If the Library Managers were not able to answer the questions, they were recorded by the Manager of Trust A who then took responsibility of obtaining the answers from Executives appointed to lead on the project.

Whilst trying to obtain the answers to the questions, it became clear to the Library Manager at Trust A that the project was not progressing as initially envisaged and the joint board with representation from both trusts would not be established. In addition it became clear that the national funding to support the partnership scheme was not available. In essence the landscape had shifted significantly and the partnership project was no longer being actively pursued by either Trust.

Despite this, the Managers from both Trusts were encouraged by their respective home trusts to continue to investigate the shared working opportunities for the Library Services. The proposal changed however from the possibility of merging the services to Trust A managing the service at Trust B under the terms of a Service Level Agreement. The Library Manager at Trust A drafted a service level agreement and sought sign-off from her home Trust.

Concerns over the quality and robustness of the SLA were raised by the Director of Strategy at Trust A. The Director agreed to sign off the SLA for the initial 6 month period but advised the Library Manager to improve the terms going forward.

The SLA was not fully signed off by either Trust before the proposed start date of the agreement, however the Library Manager from Trust A proceeded with the shared role assuming the sign off would be achieved.

The Library Manager from Trust A requested support from the Director of Strategy to make the necessary improvements to the SLA. The Director agreed to the support and appointed a member of his team to provide advice and assistance.

The SLA was signed off by all the required signatories at Trust A and was sent to Trust B.

Prior to the retirement of the Library Manager at Trust B, the Library Manager from Trust A spent a week at Trust B for the purposes of handover. The Library Manager from Trust A then spent a further week at Trust B library immediately following the date of retirement. Over the following weeks, Library Manager A spent approximately 50% of their time at Trust B.

There was no backfill for the Library Manager's role at either Trust. Each trust was therefore approximately 50% down on Library Manager time. It became apparent that there were a number of complex issues at Trust B which the Library Manager from Trust A found themselves responsible for.

The Library at Trust B was moved into a new Directorate and was given a new line manager who requested a position statement on the project. Without a clear plan and/or information on the expectations of each Trust with regards to their goals and expectations it was difficult for the Library Manager to effectively communicate the purpose or progress of the project. In addition the lack of clarity over the role, working patterns, time commitments and objectives created tensions and the potential for conflict.

The lack of clear direction or project plan also hindered the manager's ability to answer questions that were arising from the Library staff in both trusts which led to speculative answers being provided.

As a result of the contact that had been made in improving the SLA, the Director of Strategy agreed to act as the Exec lead on the partnership arrangements for Trust A. The Director of HR continued to act as the exec lead at Trust B.

The management of the issues at Trust B, coupled with the lack of back-fill put a great deal of pressure on the delivery of the services at Trust A. Six to eight weeks into the project the Library Manager raised their concerns about the sustainability of the arrangement with the Director of Strategy. The Director of Strategy was concerned that Trust A had been drawn in to running the Trust B library service without the right resources and without any real formal agreement being in place. Trust B were requested to refrain from signing the existing SLA and were informed that a new agreement would be sent to them.

Trust A asked their Library Manager to write a business case, outlining what the aims of the shared service were, what the issues were and what resources were required. HCLU North provided access to an external consultant to assist the Library Manager with the development of the business plan. The plan was written, approved by Trust A and sent to Trust B.

The business case outlined what Trust A would and would not be able to do and made the case for additional staffing at the Trust B library and the partial backfill of the Library Managers post at Trust A.

During this period Trust B began to work more closely with another very large acute Trust in the region.

Trust B responded to the business case to say that it was not affording them the cost savings that they were aspiring to and therefore they did not wish to proceed further with the partnership.

Both Trust A and Trust B decided at executive level to end the partnership for the Library Services and the Library Manager ceased to have involvement at Trust B at an agreed date.

Trust B has since started discussions with the other large acute Trust to take forward library issues.

What is the Learning?

- Before embarking on a partnership agreement, each Trust should, at the exec level, be clear about their expectations and what they hope to achieve from the process. This should be documented and include detailed agreement on aims, objectives, timescales and resources.
- Executive-level champions and a sign-off process are required.
- Holding 'private' meetings for the teams (i.e. no manager present) allows them the opportunity to raise concerns and ask questions in a safe way. Having a trusted external facilitator was a great help in the meetings.
- Consider only sharing information with the teams once there is clarity and certainty. Sharing speculative thoughts and ideas can cause unnecessary upset and fear. Provide reassurance that the information will be made available once it has been confirmed and be sure to stick to that promise. If you need to discuss ideas, off-load stress, brain dump, etc, find a critical friend who is external to the process.
- The involvement of the Regional LKS Lead and team is extremely valuable in terms of advice, support and guidance for the Library Managers. There were a number of instances where the professional perspective from someone external to the Trust was required and HCLU North were able to effectively provide this.
- Tapping into the experiences of other managers in the regional network was also very valuable. HCLU North were able to signpost the Library Manager towards other managers with experiences or expertise that they felt would be beneficial.
- Think about the political backdrop and how stable or otherwise it is.