Forward Together

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This issue of *RLI* brings together some of the core concepts to engage within the broad digital community in radical collaboration, especially for managing research outcomes now and for the benefit of future researchers. This issue also shares some examples of collaborations that might reflect or even benefit from radical collaboration. This concluding section raises some possibilities and suggestions for exploration and discussion locally and within the broader digital community.

Navigating Our Shared Space(s)

To learn more about who you are working with, ask questions about what they do, how they identify professionally, what's important to them, how they arrived at this point in their careers and development, and what they would like to be able to do. We may think we already know and we will very likely be surprised by the answers if we take the time to ask. When someone asks me what I do. I often respond that:
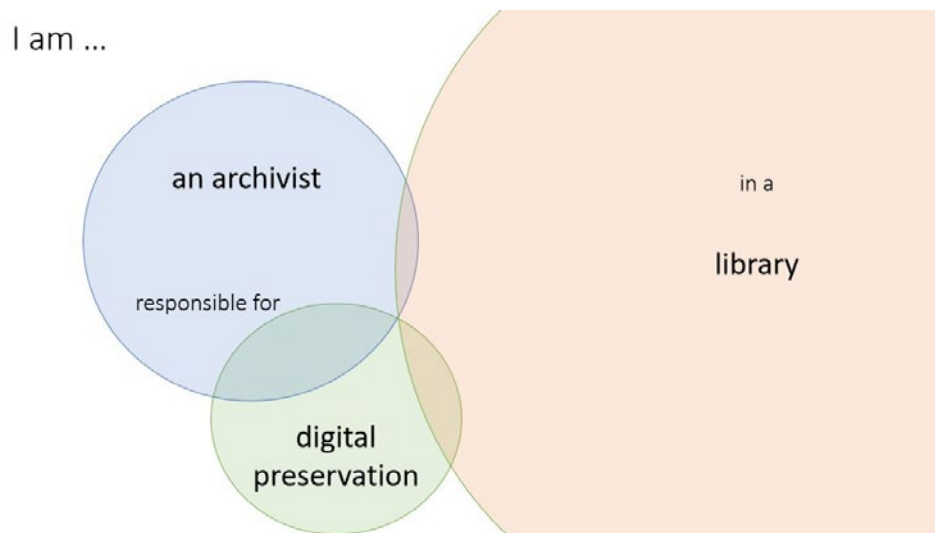

Figure 1. What do you do?

The sizes of the circles suggest the relative sizes of the domains, but the overlapping of the circles are not intended to depict the ways in which these domains do, should, or could interact.

What would your response be?

What Could Radical Collaboration Look Like?

The examples shared by contributors to this issue of *RLI* reflect current and recent efforts to collaborate in and around research data management within the digital community. Characteristics of radical collaboration abound in these examples. The following questions are considerations for new or reinvigorated efforts to achieve radical collaboration:

- Did you include a representative group that reflects the inclusion framework in defining the problem statement at the start of the effort?
- Is there room at the roundtable for more contributors as needed?
- Is it possible to incorporate ideas from the whole roundtable or compromise on reflecting the cumulative members all along the process (for example, engaging in a project, developing a programmatic effort, envisioning new services, seeking solutions)?
- Is it possible for anyone who should know or wants to know about what is happening with the effort to find out through transparent communication, accessible documentation, an openness to feedback, and holistic outreach at venues across the breadth of the roundtable?

These are examples—there are many more possible characteristics of radical collaboration to try out. More specific examples of structures and themes that would adapt well to radical collaboration are below.

Example 1. Constructive Research Methodology Overview

Constructive research methodology originated in computer science. A number of applied domains have adapted it for their use and it is a great fit for distributed digital practice and radical collaboration. The possible outcomes from constructive research methodology include conceptual constructs, models, methods, and implementation. Constructive research methodology is one example of an exploratory research methodology. Conclusive research as depicted in Figure 2 is much more common and familiar, but exploratory research is a necessary part of what we do in developing generations of digital practice in response to ongoing technological change.
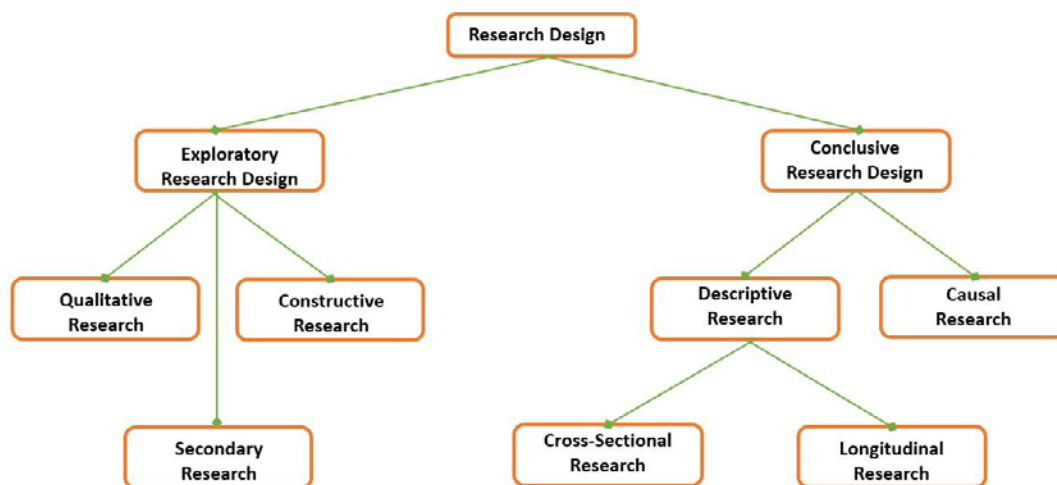
Figure 2. Context for exploratory research in research methodology[1]

A look at the steps of the methodology illustrate how this approach to exploratory research-based practice and practice-based research aligns with digital practice:

1. Find a **relevant practical problem** with research potential.
2. Obtain a **general and comprehensive understanding** of the topic.
3. Build an **innovative solution** (or construct).

4. **Demonstrate** that the solution works.

5. Show the **theoretical connections and research contributions** of the solution.

6. Examine the **scope of applicability** of the solution.

Constructive research methodology is collaborative, iterative, and exploratory by design. The steps could be a recipe for engaging in radical collaboration for research data management problems and challenges.

Example 2. Storytelling as a Digital Preservation Strategy

The second example is storytelling for digital preservation, an emerging area that I am working to initiate and collaborate on across domains.[2] With colleagues from oral history, audio-visual preservation, and software preservation, we made a start on a community discussion of storytelling for digital preservation at the iPRES 2018 conference.[3] Persistent challenges in each generation of technology are scalability and complexity. Storytelling would help address both challenges for the long-term preservation of complex digital content by providing and supporting layers of information about the content, the creators, the users, the curators, and the iterative and cumulative relationships among all of them with sufficient context for current and future users and other stakeholders to navigate as they choose. It would be possible to convey the significance of complex digital content, in whatever state the content itself makes its way into the future. Storytelling as a digital preservation strategy would enable non-linear, interactive, and story-driven approaches to the content. The same technologies that make machine learning, artificial intelligence, computational practice, and related hot topics in current community discussions possible, in part, enable storytelling digital preservation strategy. Storytelling as a digital preservation strategy would be best achieved through radical collaboration at the roundtable for digital practice.

How Can We Achieve Radical Collaboration?

As we move towards realizing good practice for distributed digital practice, radical collaboration is both necessary and mutually beneficial. These are some considerations for successfully engaging in radical collaboration:

- Be sure everyone who should be or wants to be at the table is, allowing room for more seats as our awareness grows and to accommodate the unexpected guest.

- If it is not possible to have everyone who might need or want to sit at the table, ensure holistic communication to maximize their ability to contribute and follow along the whole of the process.

- Come to the table with questions not answers, the best way to build understanding and avoid bringing in our own biases and (mis)perceptions.

- If you haven't learned something in coming to the table, sit longer, ask more questions, and continue to listen.

- Be sure to reset the table as needed to adapt to the different perspectives that might contribute to collaborations to address our new and changing challenges and priorities.

- Remember to never assume you're chairing even if you sent out the invite to join the table—an innate strength of the roundtable for radical collaboration is by definition there is no head.

- Remember to value your knowledge and that of others; bring your whole self and be courageous—you may be the only one with your perspective and it needs to be heard.

- Prioritize the common goal over any single "right" approach—radical collaboration allows for the greatest cumulative impact with an awareness of the needs and contributions of the whole table.

What would you add?

Radical collaboration takes effort and practice and time, and the outcomes we will be able to achieve together will be worth it. Let's get going!

Endnotes

1. This research design classification diagram was adapted from a version that was developed by the Research Design Method company with examples of exploratory research expanded.

2. Informed and inspired by the 2017 "Update or Die" conference that was hosted by the Phi Centre and the MIT Open Documentary Lab in Montréal, Québec, Canada, https://phi-centre.com/en/event/update-or-die/.

3. Jessica Meyerson (moderator), Nancy McGovern, Jimmy Fournier, and Darold Cuba, "Storytelling and Digital Preservation: Creators and Curators" (iPRES 2018, 15th International Conference on Digital Preservation, Boston, Massachusetts, September 27, 2018), https://osf.io/u5w3q/wiki/home/.

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