

**RESOURCE SHARING : NEED FOR BRIDGING GAP BETWEEN
IDEALISTIC THEORETICAL SLOGANS
AND PRACTITIONERS' LAX***

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Abstract: It is everybody's knowledge that resource sharing is most talked and least acted area in librarianship. Several idealistic theoretical slogans have been repeated again and again and many master plans have remained on paper in the custody of planners. These grand ideas and plans are threatening individual libraries that if they do not act they are going to starve and die in the information drought. Even after hearing about the benefits of cooperation and resource sharing egoistic, suspicious and lax attitude on the part of people at helm of affairs have not yet been overcome. No body is worried about this widening gap between plans and practice of resource sharing. There are clear reasons for the gap between what has been said about resource sharing and what has been achieved so far. This paper while examining both the high sounding theoretical plans of resource sharing and the practical barriers to resource sharing, explore the inherent limitations of resource sharing philosophy, presents the important factors which militate against resource sharing and how to face and overcome them in a working environment with anecdotes and case studies. What matters much in the game is gracefully accepting the limitations, using appropriate mode of management with least external interference, underscoring

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the cost saving objective, avoiding buck passing, 'something for nothing syndrome' and empty promises of only bibliographic access without physical access to text and understanding that communication and networks are only means and not ends.

Keywords: Library cooperation; networking; resource sharing; barriers to sharing; limitations of cooperation

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of hue and cry of theoreticians about library networking and resource sharing. Resource sharing is less practiced than said. In other words, it is most talked and least acted area in librarianship. Like weather, we all talk about it, but none of us is able to control or rectify it. Even non-librarians have found it very convenient and fancy to talk (or preach?) about resource sharing among libraries and the resultant economies. One often wonders why resource sharing is talked only in libraries when other sectors like Education, Environment, Health and larger parent systems have much more potential for practicing resource sharing than libraries. Even within librarianship there is a lopsided emphasis on information resources in general and journals in particular than other physical, intellectual and conceptual resources.

2. SOME IDEALISTIC THEORETICAL SLOGANS

- (i) Library without walls
- (ii) Library as a window of access than a fortress
- (iii) Access to information than ownership; Temporary ownership; Shift emphasis from acquisition to access
- (iv) Grand idea of 'paperless libraries', scholar's workstations & 'press the button and get the information'

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- (v) Learning to pay for use of information or service;
"No marketing, we are librarians"
- (vi) Collective ownership of resources
- (vii) Starve and die individually in the information drought (or hang together in the network!)

3. SOME IMPORTANT ASSUMPTIONS OF RESOURCE SHARING

3.1 Sharing of resources assumes that there is 'idle or spare capacity' of the resource i.e., availability of excess than required. Shift systems followed in case of colleges, plants, capital intensive equipment and library reading room are some examples. Maintaining an army for 100 days to be used for an hour is a typical case where enormous spare capacity exists for resource sharing.

3.2 Resource sharing assumes that resources are not uniformly distributed and there is wide disparity between resources available to individuals by reasons of geographic location or socio-economic position. Resource sharing stresses on equality and caring for under privileged and under served users who often suffer from resource constraints. As regards intellectual resource is concerned, it is divide up work and share results is the motto. Resource constraints include in them inflation, budgetary cuts and reduction in buying power (cost saving appears to be the main factor).

3.3 Resource sharing assumes underutilisation of resources and intends to maximise use of scarce resources. It looks for possibilities of stretching limited resources to achieve judicious utilisation of available resources to optimise cost to benefit ratio. It is widely known from 80/20 Rule that a small segment of resources meet a large part of requirements. As a corollary, resource sharing assumes the

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knowledge of cost and use of resources in question.

4.4 Resource sharing assumes that needs of users is increasingly diverse, interdisciplinary and ever expanding and hence improved or enhanced access to needed information and to greater range of materials and/or better depth in a subject area (not necessarily mean faster service) is a necessity.

3.5 Need for avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources and difficulty in achieving self sufficiency by any library in the era of information explosion/ exponential growth of literature is yet another assumption of resource sharing.

3.6 Resource sharing also assumes that there is economy in cooperative common operations and procedures and there is a need to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. Proposing cooperative system as an alternative to centralised system, expects improvement in working relations between cooperating libraries and enable library to have better knowledge of its collection.

3.7 It is also assumed by resource sharing philosophy that new technologies open up new avenues for cooperation and resource sharing and offer greater staff specialisation, better overall performance, better or additional service and greater user satisfaction.

3.8 Resource sharing assumes that accurate, exhaustive and up-to-date bibliographical information about holdings of member libraries as well as who has what in terms of specific subject fields are known. It also assumes that tools like 'RLG Conspectus' help making more informed decisions regarding acquisitions, collection development, fund allocations, budget requests, grants and preservation.

A systematic 'conspectus' provides many indirect benefits like

- i) Filling-in gaps in the collection
- ii) Justifying use of approval plans; identifying subject areas where curricular changes dictate that the library starts or stops buying materials;
- iii) Justifying a grant application or budget increase for training, preservation or collection development
- iv) Defining possibilities for increased cooperative acquisitions among local or regional libraries in subject areas of mutual interest
- v) Fulfilling institutional or state mandated assessment programs
- vi) Providing 'objective evidence' for accreditation and professional association reports
- vii) Defining collection development objectives, policies, procedures and short and long range goals

3.9 Resource sharing assumes consideration and measurement of use and identification of less used materials in all the participating libraries. Utility may have to be judged at the time of acquiring an item and a decision may have to be taken to throw open the item for sharing with others.

4 BARRIERS TO COOPERATION AND RESOURCE SHARING

4.1 Local self-sufficiency goals and 'ownership paradigma': It is believed that 'ownership' continued to be the most effective means of accomplishing the job of bringing the patron and information together. Two corollaries of this paradigm are: (i) 'more is better' i.e., "the more information owned, the better the chance a library has of

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bringing the user and the information together" and (ii) "the less important a subject is to a library's own patrons, the more likely it will agree to rely upon others to collect in their areas". Technological advancements provide opportunities to pursue local self-sufficiency goals and centralisation.

4.2 Competitiveness of Institutions and covert move for centralisation:

4.3 Autonomy of actions desired by librarians: Such desire may be due to (i) distrusting others, (ii) uncertainty of fiscal features, (iii) lack of knowledge of needs of users, (iv) librarians doubt their own ability to keep agreements, and they expect the same behaviour of their resource sharing partners.

4.4 Size and status consciousness of established libraries

4.5 Difficulties in arriving at mutually agreeable collecting responsibilities without adversely affecting the growth rate of participating libraries

4.6 Urgency of user requirements: Both real and artificial urgency ie., Mc Donald's mentality of wanting material fast and immediately have to be understood and distinguished.

4.7 Psychological and egoistic barriers from users, librarians and staff: Psychological and egoistic barriers are covert in nature and they may arise due to inertia, indifference or unwillingness to change or by viewing resource sharing as a threat to status and job security or personal needs taking priority over system needs or personality differences or strong and dominant personalities and their strong authority drive in the group.

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interestingly, passive resistance is more difficult to overcome than active opposition and more the number of people involved in decision making, the more difficult it becomes to achieve agreement.

As a case study, reproduced below is an extract of a letter received from a librarian of an esteemed library in response to an invitation for a meeting to discuss resource sharing among special libraries in Bangalore:

"Right now the information centre is concentrating on a vital project of networking of Bangalore-based libraries with the ICA as a nodal point". Since we are busy in this new direction, our concentration has been more on matter connected with the activities. We are alive to the need for resource sharing among the S&T libraries. We are already discharging our obligation. "These activities necessarily take our time and attention, and as a result, we are unable to participate in your proposed inter library cooperation meeting. Kindly ... forgive us".

4.8 Discouragement from past experiences: Such discouragement could be due to changing interests of members, lack of adequate communication of modifications to members, lack of adequate data and costing of the system, etc. Farmington plan is often cited as an example. One of the libraries while responding to an invitation to form Bangalore Special Libraries Group (BSLG) has said that similar exercise has already been done by them and issues concerning resource sharing have been analysed thread bare.

4.9 Traditional / Institutional barriers: These barriers include idiosyncratic rules, procedures, regulations and decisions of institutions, inability to satisfy local needs, special rules, institutional competitions, funding problems, etc.

4.10 Physical and geographical barriers:

- (i) Inadequate space, physical distance, etc.
- (ii) Procedure may not allow reciprocal borrowing rights (eg. defense establishments)
- (iii) Telephone, local transport, courier, etc. cost time and money
- (iv) Lack of up-to-date union catalogues and other access tools
- (v) Non-print materials are not allowed outside one's library

4.11 Legal, political and administrative barriers: including copyright, jurisdictions, and initial dual operations, and resultant economic burden, etc.

5 INHERENT LIMITATIONS OF RESOURCE SHARING PHILOSOPHY

Resource sharing should take into account why and how users seek, collect and use information and tolerable delay in supplying information. In other words, one has to understand that the process and success of matching a need with a source of information is subjected to cost-efficiency, errors of matching, ignorance of user about a source, strength, urgency, clarity and certainty of need, initiative, drive, self-motivation, objectivity, habits, styles, idiosyncrasies, past experience, cultural and social settings and user expertise, alternatives like relying on memory, skirting around the issue, accepting incomplete, vague or relatively unsatisfactory information, abandoning the need / search, availability and knowledge of existence of a source, physical proximity, accessibility, ease of use, and perceived utility of the source.

5.1 Loss of Browsability: 'Current approach' (Voigt) or keeping abreast with latest developments or staying competent and up-to-date in the profession is the most predominant purpose of using information sources which in turn emphasises extensive 'browsability' of information sources and CAS for both accidental acquisition of information as well as for deliberate hunt. As such maximum time is spent by end user in browsing information resources. Resource sharing affects 'current approach' and loss of browsability is a serious drawback of resource sharing. Union lists are not substitutes for browsing the material.

Further, users depend more on recommendations of colleagues and experts, citations in current reading materials, chance acquisition, browsing and searching on library shelves than searching surrogates like library catalogues, secondary journals and other access tools. The accidental acquisition of information (i.e., coming to know of a source of information or information itself by chance in an unplanned and unintentional way in unfocused browsing and scanning of literature) which is highly valued by scientists and engineers can be increased by increased browsing activity.

5.2 Inevitable Delay in Supply of Information

Generally, engineers and technologists have tended to ignore information found late i.e., after their designs were 'frozen'. Delay in supply of information for 'everyday approach' and 'current approach' is not tolerable whereas for information for 'exhaustive approach' has flexible and liberal time frame.

Average delivery time for material obtained from elsewhere is always more than that needed for delivery of item from ones own library. Inter Library Loan delays are inevitable and more the standardisation prescribed in the network more

time and efforts are required in following the protocols or filling the forms.

5.3 Resource Sharing through Network is not always Cost Efficient

Inter library loan costs should be less than the cost of the material. Moreover, users tend to select from what is available on the shelf and most of them do not really need or want the material enough to pay the price libraries place on its delivery. In other words, the process of matching a need for information with a source of information will not be meeting the conditions of cost-efficiency in many cases due to cost involved in terms of subscription to networks, development of tools, movement of materials, etc.

5.4 Duplication of resources is inevitable:

Duplication of resources is very much necessary and it is a direct implication of duplication or overlapping interests, activities, work and efforts between institutions. If there are three research institutions in a city with the same area of interest subscribing to three copies of a journal in that discipline is obvious. Any amount of crying about rationalisation of periodical acquisition with statements like 'there is 30% duplicate among libraries of close clusters' and accusing by theoreticians by saying that 'institutions which don't have a problem of funds, don't also bother to find out what their neighbors have been acquiring; they are also less keen to make their massive holdings available for outside users' will not solve the problems. The ivory tower suggestions like exchange of notes among institutions with major holdings need to be compared with RLG Conspectus and collection assessment process to know how theoretical these suggestions are.

It is interesting to note that the amount of duplication of

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efforts in terms of user meets, seminars and workshops on networking as well as a software like CDS/ISIS is stupendous. Surprisingly, in a recent issue of Nature (1 July 93) some body wishfully states that no two libraries in India will import the same periodical and all journals will be pooled.

5.5 'Resource Rape': Differences in collection size, patron needs and patron population among member libraries of a group combine to create a complex situation. Resource sharing places substantial burdens on larger libraries whereas the resources of smaller libraries will not be adequately utilized. Even duplicate copies of popular/ news oriented weeklies may be necessary for libraries serving large number of homogeneous customers. There is a limit or break even point for number of users who can share an item as explained under idle or spare capacity concept.

5.6 Non-availability of Up-to-date Access Tools: Accurate, exhaustive and up-to-date bibliographical information about holdings of member libraries is not so easy to create and maintain; who has what in terms of specific subject fields is also not known.

5.7 Local Non-availability of an Item being Shared: Any item shared with a cooperative library will normally be not available for its primary members for the period of loan including renewal period and either way transit time. As such no library should try to get benefit of resource sharing at the cost of the other.

5.8 Difficulties in Measurement of Use and Identification of Less Used Materials: It is difficult to judge the utility of an item being acquired at the time of acquiring and to identify all less used material in the collection for

resource sharing.

5.9 Lending Material Shortens its Life through the Physical Wear on the Material: Even though materials worth preserving lose much of their value to scholarship if they are not shared wear and tear on frequent movement of material as well as transit damages could be fatal to material.

5.10 Social Loafing: The social loafing is based on the phenomenon that the whole is often less than the sum of its individual parts. It is well known that the combined efficiency of libraries A and B has to be equal or less than that of either of them. Pulling rope in a tug-of-war is often cited as an illustration to cite the social loafing phenomenon. In such a situation sharing the load or the social facilitation depends on (i) presence of observer (ii) identifiably (iii) approval or acknowledgement of job well done (iv) responsibility (sharing) (v) criteria for membership in the group and (vi) nature and reliability of the group.

Interestingly, even in interpersonal information sharing, semantic, physical and personal barriers exist and information sharing depends on content, context and persons.

5.11 Something for Nothing Syndrome: A corollary of social loafing is the something for nothing syndrome which means each participant covertly assumes that they will have some benefit of the cooperative system without sacrificing anything. Placing emphasis on ease of access and speed of delivery participants ignore costs of such systems. As mentioned earlier, ILL services have to be charged to know their costs. These are trade offs. One gets nothing for nothing. Good service costs time and money and there are no magic formulae for gaining extra time or services.

6 OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND FACING INHERENT LIMITATIONS

6.1 Gracefully Accept the Limitations and Militating Factors of Resource Sharing

6.2 Use Appropriate Mode/ Style of Management

Using benevolent autocratic mode of management if participants come under one department, otherwise democratic and participative mode of management is essential for cooperative efforts with no imposing of decisions.

Laissez-faire or anarchy would lead to frequent turmoil, confusion, lack of group cohesion and unity and lack of achievement. In benevolent autocratic leadership the leader takes paternalistic attitude towards group members and members work cautiously under the leader with constant gratitude. Participatory system emphasises on power equalisation so that each member has a say in the making of decisions and is characterised by free and frank discussions, sharing of ideas and information, right to participate and speak and reaching consensus decisions.

Democratic leadership has the advantages of encouraging the group to act as a social unit, promoting the full use of the talents and abilities of the group, consistent availability of best information, ideas, suggestions and talents from the members of group, giving a feeling of belongingness, recognition, individual dignity, etc., to the members, better decisions through shared information and ideas, increased morale and support for the final decision, etc. Further a group can make a better decision than an individual due to availability of more information, brains and skills than a single individual. People work hard to implement something they have collectively designed

or decided.

Participative mode is specially relevant and useful where decisions are complex and have multiple angles to them and also where collective motivation and commitment are important for implementing decisions. It works when taking significant policy decisions in complex environment or when seeking changes and innovations in apathetic systems. It also works well in organisations of equals like cooperative societies, professional associations, etc.

6.3 Accept the Fact that ILL is still a Marginal Activity/ Service

The percentage of ILL borrowing is often not more than 5 in many libraries and it should be given deserving importance only.

6.4 Do not Overemphasise Cost Saving Objective

Let the main objective of the network or consortium be clearly spelled out. It is important answer the question "Is resource sharing a cost saving device?". It is important to note that many systems not only mislead members by ignoring the cost of studies, surveys, pilot projects and creation and maintenance of access tools and experiments as well as other invisible costs but also undermine importance of end-user need for information. Technological advancements might bring dramatic change in cost. Yet it is difficult to demonstrate cost-efficiency of ILL transactions as revealed in some cost study estimates. While ARL/RLG ILL cost study estimated cost of ILL borrowing / lending at \$ 40 to 45, OCLC study found \$ 55 (range is \$ 20 to over \$100) as cost to acquire and catalogue a book (excluding price).

Processing information and transmitting it from person to

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person cost money and time. Because information is not always where it should be, organisations incur cost. Computer based communication can decrease the costs because technology is fast, asynchronous and makes one-to-many communication as easy as one-to-one communication.

Faster and easier communication is not always better communication. Injudicious communication due to temptation to speak before thinking. More information is not always better (more valuable) than less information. Enormous waste in one-to-many communication. This is what happens when some libraries frantically search for documents simultaneously with number of cooperating libraries. By reproducing huge lists of end-users and circulating to other libraries these libraries essentially do buck passing in Resource sharing.

6.5 Resource Sharing is Communication Intensive Process but Communication and Networks are only Means

Computer mediated communication dominates any network system and network technologies have made people, database and process as resources (network itself is a resource). New technologies bring second level social system effect along with first level efficiency effects. Electronic communication can increase the informational and emotional connections but is not a substitute for face to face relationships (i.e., the means by which message is conveyed could affect the meaning of the message). Communication technology can change the whole group's dynamics. Communication cannot be separated from who is in charge of the giving, receiving, content and use of what is communicated. Those who control information derive power and influence over others from their position of control and bypass intermediaries. Abuse of potential for access cannot

be ruled out.

Surprisingly ILL in Canada has become more complex as a result of the proliferation of telecommunication options, ILL systems and the unique ILL message formats produced by such systems. While automation has resulted in many improvements and efficiencies to ILL operations, it has also created a number of barriers (Turner, 1990).

6.6 Automation first or Network first?

There is lot of discussion on issues like whether the library network being formed should include or exclude automation of member libraries. The advantages and charm of electronic communication and remote searching of another library's database is lost if OPAC or union catalogue is not available for searching through computer. It is aptly summarised that if automation is the soil in which effective resource acquisition and sharing grows, then cooperation is surely the water that nurtures the plant (Hoffman, 1989).

6.7 Least External Interference

Effective resource sharing among libraries requires least external imposition of decision and least interference. Grand ideas like issue of common borrower cards and consultative committees (for rationalisation of journal subscription) unilaterally appointed by central agencies do not meet with success for the same reason. Adding salt on the wound, such agencies have often taken sarcastic and strong objection for local libraries to form resource sharing groups. Libraries have to come closer for resource sharing on the basis of cooperation, dependency and reciprocity than compulsion of external inducement.

The reaction of NISSAT Newsletter (No.4, 1991, p14) immediately after the first meeting of Bangalore Special

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Libraries Group (BSLG) during November 1990 is worth noting as a case study:

"In a parallel action, ... a similar exercise in exploring the possibilities of inter library cooperation and resource sharing is done by forming [BSLG] ...". "It is not clear as to what led to the parallel action which tended to create more confusion than help in solving problems. Noting that another group is interested in the subject, the NISSAT sponsored activity is likely/ proposed to be withdrawn from Bangalore."

Interestingly the rationalisation of periodical acquisitions through Local Consultative Committee mentioned in the newsletter appears to be continuing even in 1994 (NISSAT Newsletter, No.1, 1994, p20) and the programmes or the achievements of the activity are not known to the libraries concerned. Unfortunately neither the author nor the editor responded to the protest of BSLG for above derogatory remarks.

6.8 Promote and Identify Strong and Genuine Need for Resource Sharing

Need to cooperate should become a necessity than a professional ethic. Need for honest and mutual trust than inter library threat coupled with onsite access to library and reciprocal borrowing are very important to foster cooperation as the success of resource sharing depends on willingness to work together and cooperate. In one of the recent surveys it is reported that the main reason for non-participation in resource sharing networks is lack of demand +r need, mentioned by over half of the non-network members (Ladner,1992).

6.9 Covert Move for Centralisation should be Avoided by both Libraries and Network Managers

As an example you may examine the following extract from a report of one of the national information centres.

"Cost effective resource-sharing strategy is to develop one or more libraries or central pools of resources on the lines of the [BLLD]... An alternative [is] division of acquisition responsibilities among existing libraries by designated subject fields... However, this method of decentralised responsibilities may be more costly, less tenable, less comprehensive and slower than a centralised approach" (Seetharaman and Sakri, 1980, p 2-3).

6.10 Need for Information Access Budget and Flexibility in Inter-Institutional Transfer of Budget

6.11 Attitudes Should Keep in Pace with the Technology
Participants need to be flexible in responding to changed personnel, external factors and environment. There is a need to overcome fear of new technology and fear of change.

Collection development, non-traditional document delivery sources and methods as well as new technologies have to be well integrated into ILL process.

6.12 Prepare to bear Increased Work Load in Retrospective Conversion, Creation of Access Tools and Document Delivery Services of Larger Libraries

6.13 Buck Passing (Let Someone Else do one's Work) Should be Avoided

Members should avoid sending big list of unchecked items requested by users to all the cooperating libraries as their ILL requests.

6.14 Make Urgency and Need of End-user-need as Clear as Possible

End users, library committees and user departments often do not agree for cutting acquisition and depending on other libraries. Further, as mentioned earlier, some users may make their requests unnecessarily urgent and any urgency will cost time and efforts of another system.

6.15 Do not make an Empty Promise of Bibliographic Access without Physical Access

Many resource sharing efforts stop at creation and use of bibliographic access tools and all concerned including end users should be aware of this limitation of resource sharing. Document delivery speed should be increased to an acceptable level by the concerned library.

6.16 Others

Scale of beginning of resource sharing ranges from informal understanding among few similar libraries to formal multi-faceted cooperatives, consortia or networks that operate over large region depending on prime objective.

Homogeneity of members of group needs to be ascertained to ensure critical interdependence of libraries and heterogeneity, if any, needs to be taken note of if deliberately allowed in the group.

There are obviously overlapping networks and cooperation and coordination among networks with least repetition of efforts for a given library for having had membership in multiple networks should be ensured.

7 Tips for Effective Resource Sharing and Library Cooperation

(1) Make adequate preparatory study and analysis with clear objectives.

(2) Good planning, a continuing education programme for staff and a well conceived organisational structure should be provided.

(3) Ensure technical compatibility between participating institutions.

(4) Adequate arrangements for monitoring services and for responding to the feedback information thus received need to be made.

(5) Ensure good transport and communication facilities.

(6) Resource sharing cost money and does not bring benefit immediately. Benefits are likely to accrue on the medium or long range.

(7) Involve those who have high needs and significant resources compared to the other libraries in the consortium. This will reduce the distance between need and resources, as well as the problem associated with the need for autonomy of action.

(8) Those most capable of keeping agreements should be involved so that 'reliance' on other libraries acceptable both conceptually and actually acceptable.

(9) Representatives of management, libraries and document selection officers should meet together to divide up the work in a manner that allows them to individually continue to collect that which is most critical but collectively broadens the intake of materials.

(10) Improve the document delivery to an 'acceptable speed'.

8. Conclusion

This presentation is based on the belief that 'healthy skepticism is better than cheap cynicism'. Theoreticians

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and experts who talk much about need for resource sharing and library networks should understand and appreciate the limitations of resource sharing and genuine problems in implementation of their arm chair, wishful and idealistic plans. One should note that resource sharing does exist in most of the systems and it is not some thing new as explained in theoretical plans. At the same time, practitioners need not be complacent about resource sharing with occasional inter library loan activity. They must strive hard to break self created barriers and look for furthering the resource sharing objectives to optimise benefit to all participants.

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