Introduction

Drawing Insight is a visual journey through some of the key observations, insights and ideas generated during the scoping, exploration and reflection phases of Proboscis' research on groups and group behaviours in the context of the University of Cambridge and its institutional I.T. systems. The project has been a collaboration between Proboscis, the Centre for Applied Research in Education Technologies (CARET) and Crucible. It is one of four books by Proboscis outlining the methods (*Method Sheets*), approach (*Project Account*), observations and insights (*Drawing Insight*) and suggestions for new engagement methods that can inform co-design and user-centred design practices in software development for collaboration tools and services (*Catalysing Agency*).

The first part of this book is a series of illustrations of nine key observations and seven insights generated during our research. They lead on to three further illustrations of principles derived from the 'disruptive hypotheses' which Proboscis developed and tested during the project. These in turn are followed by illustrations of a proposal for a *Catalyst* to work alongside CARET in brokering new kinds of ways of engaging with groups and individuals across the university — more fully explored in the companion publication, *Catalysing Agency*.

Throughout this project we have employed visual notation, drawing and mark-making as a central processes in engaging with people, recording ideas, interactions and behaviours, as well as to analyse the results. Mandy Tang has been the project artist, acting as both an illustrator of concepts back at the studio and doing live visual notation during brainstorming meetings and workshops. Mandy's work has given us a rich seam of drawings to help make sense of the complexities of engaging both with individuals and groups in a context such as a university. Her sketches have helped us to reconstruct connections and make sense of ideas that are born and become entangled in the fluid space of brainstorming, workshopping and group discussions. In an iterative process of reflection and analysis they have been crucial for honing in on the essential.

The book is intended as a guide for others interested in engaging with their own communities — indicating some of the common factors, needs and issues they may encounter. By flowing together observations, insights, principles and suggestions in this way, we aim to demonstrate the value of engagement as a dynamic process itself.
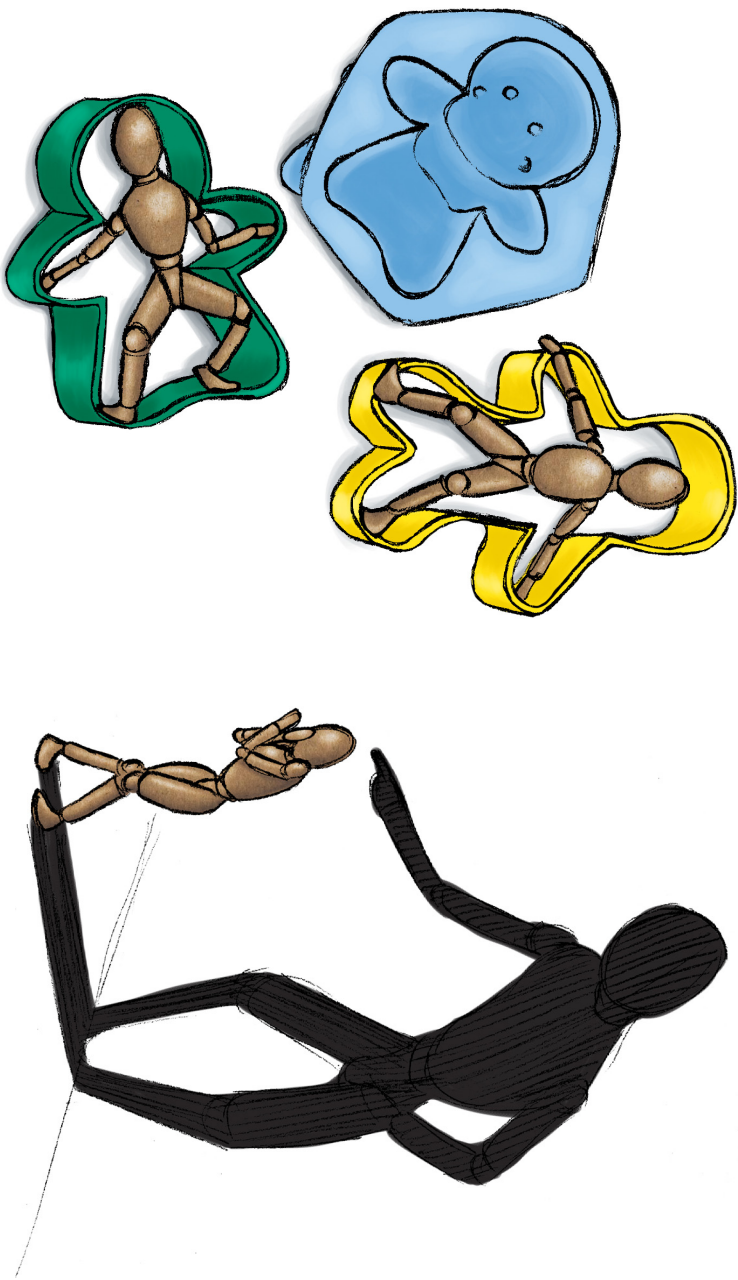
Giles Lane, Hazem Tagiuri & Mandy Tang

Responsibility and Expectation

The overlapping nature of roles, responsibilities and obligations felt by individuals within organisations and groups often leads to a kind of personal triage method being applied to manage competing directions of impetus. This could become a productive process when undertaken collaboratively rather than just on an individual basis.

Operating under the Radar
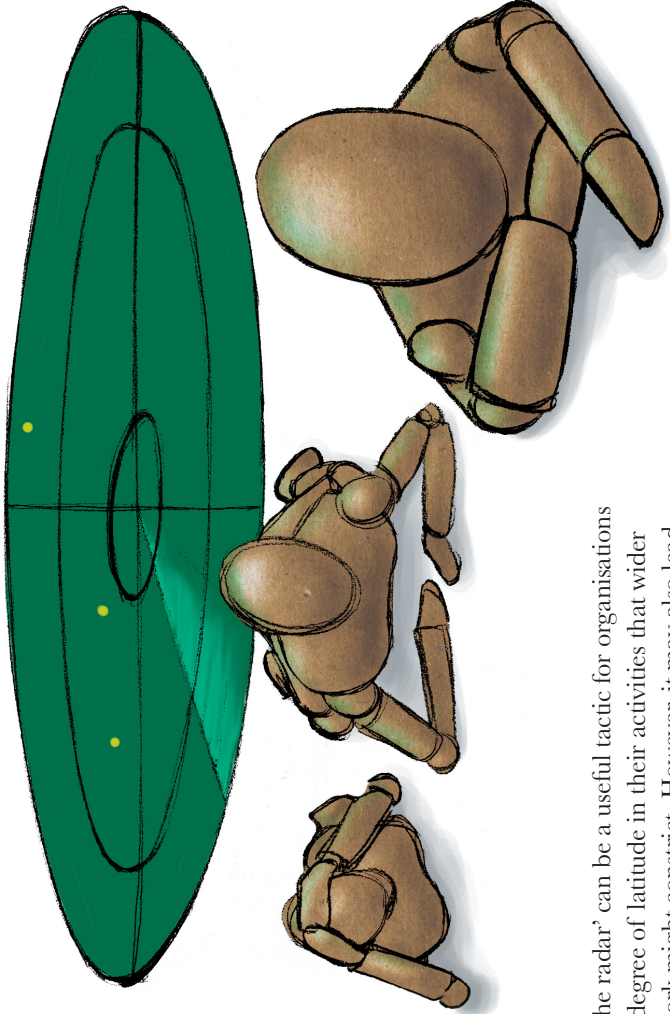
'Operating under the radar' can be a useful tactic for organisations seeking to retain a degree of latitude in their activities that wider attention to their work might constrict. However, it may also lead to a degree of insularity through reduced opportunities for wider affiliation and the cosiness of working within trusted domains and comfort zones.

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proboscis · caret · Agencies of Engagement

Drawing Insight

Giles Lane, Hazem Tagiuri and Mandy Tang

Our everyday lives are now deeply saturated with a diverse array of analogue and digital tools. Many of these tools blur the distinctions between work, home, professional and private interests. There is a growing spectrum of options for communication and connecting with others, sharing and making, archiving and analysing, discovering and learning. People now join communities with a rich personal media ecology that may extend beyond the kinds of tools and services offered by their institutions.
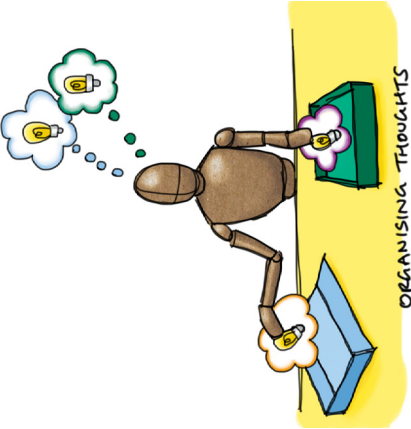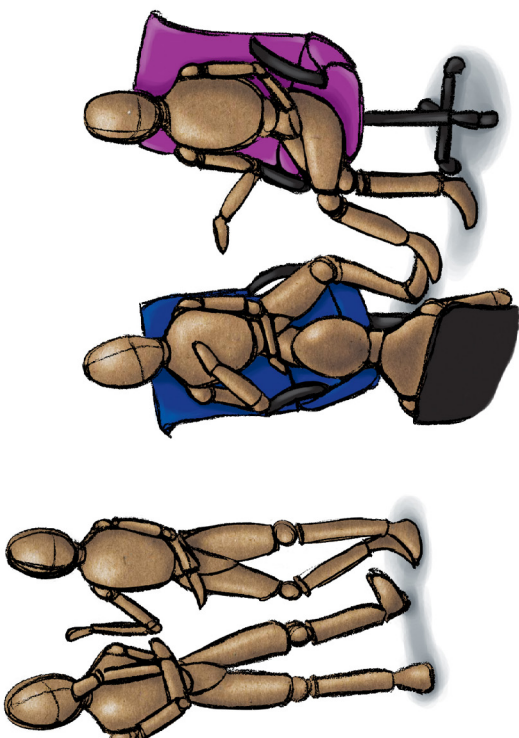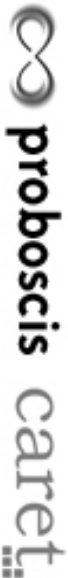
The great variety of individual working and learning practices becomes immediately apparent when engaging with any group of people. This underlines the difficulty and need for sensitivity to different contexts when designing systems or processes for collaboration.

DRAWING INSIGHT
ORGANISING THOUGHTS

The Catalyst should not act purely as a detached envoy but would need to encourage their host organisation and their collaborators to explore unfamiliar and potentially uncomfortable ways of working. The Catalyst should be able to gather people together and broker relationships, to create new spaces for dialogue and co-discovery that generate insight and opportunity. The role would be to precipitate active, positive change.

2,4,6,8,10,12

Communication methods are also impacting on people's behaviours and patterns. Context, mood and other factors feed into choices of whether to use synchronous or asynchronous methods, as well as communicating directly (person to person) or using methods more like broadcasting

Despite people's rich media ecologies beginning to bleed across different facets of life, people still feel the need to compartmentalise. Along with the traditional work / personal life balance, there are new formulations of contexts, layers and the different modes, times and means in which they wish to engage with them.
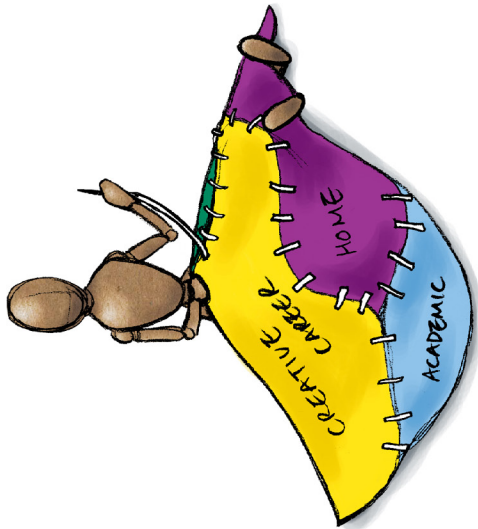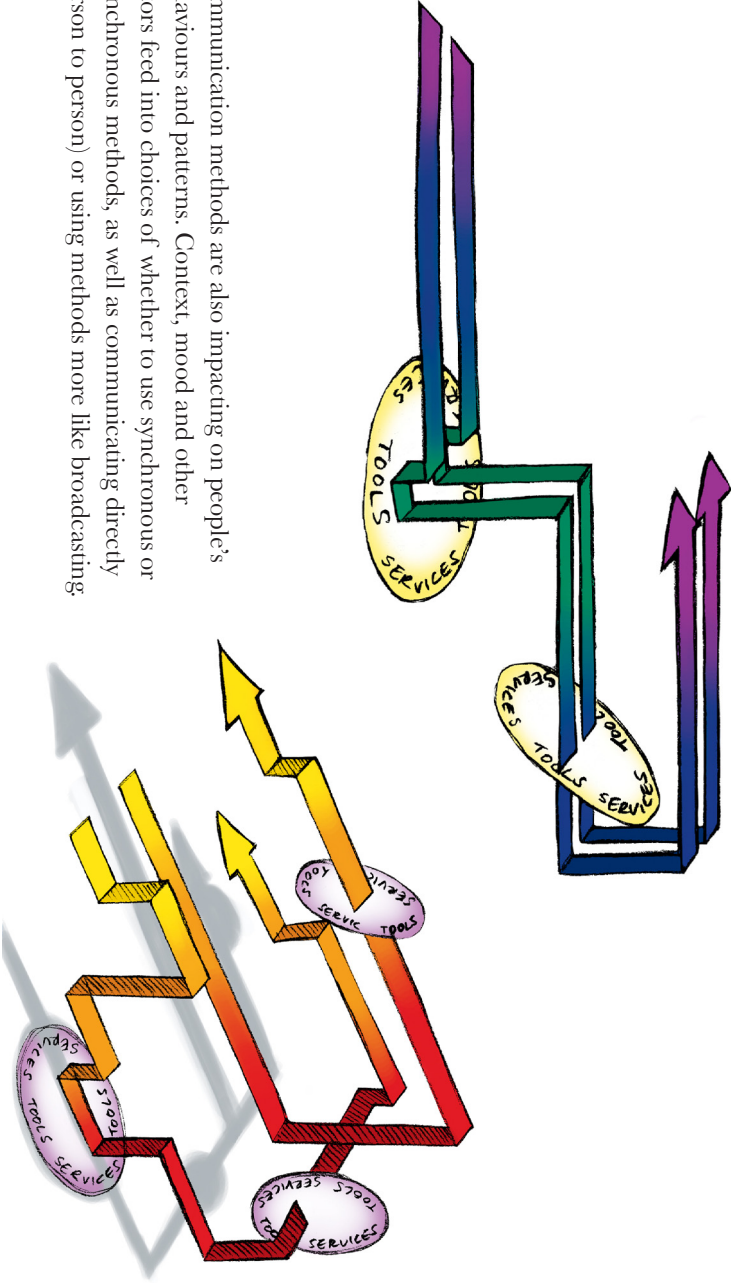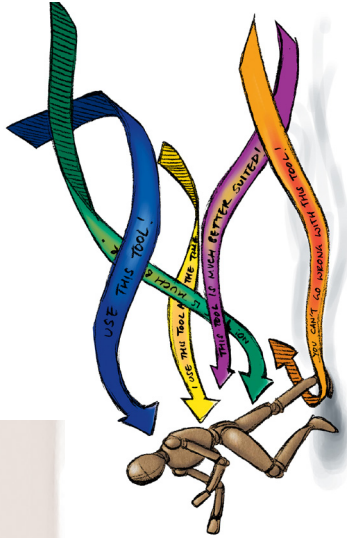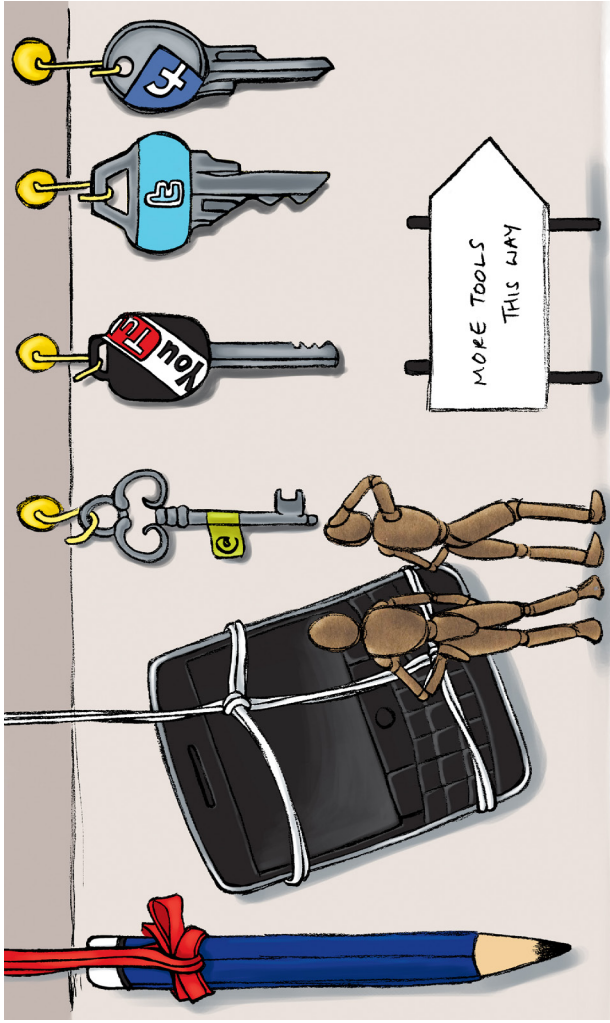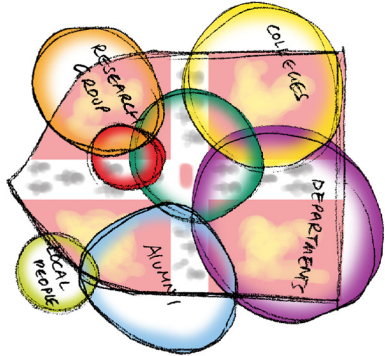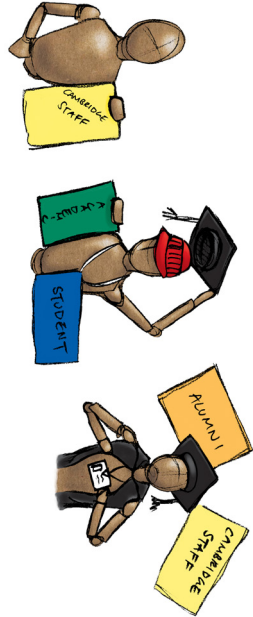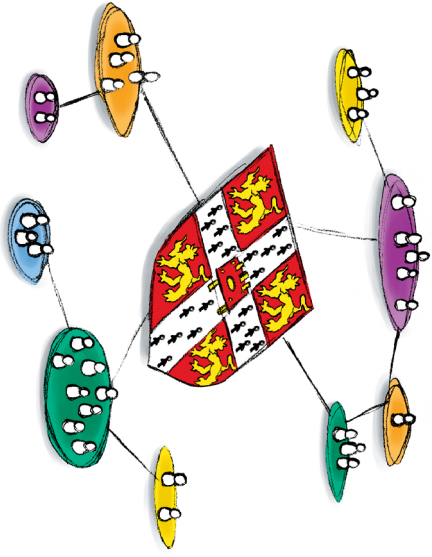
collaboration tools require a different development model placing greater emphasis on co-creative community facilitation during the process. This could help site them within the wider context of personal online ecologies to hopefully streamline traditional user support requirements

For co-design to work within a complex and fragmented structure such as a university, new engagement methods may need to be identified and developed. An intermediary agent, or *Catalyst*, located on the periphery of an organisation's core activity could act on its behalf, travelling between different groups, partners and disciplines to discover new opportunities and establish new links. This agent could additionally provide an objective, contextual standpoint from which to review existing methods and practices to guard against stagnation.

Communities and institutions like Cambridge are complex with overlapping and nested relationships, in which individuals themselves have complex relationships, interests and feelings of attachment that form part of an intricate and tangled structure. This presents considerable problems when trying to engage broadly or design systems to engage whole communities.
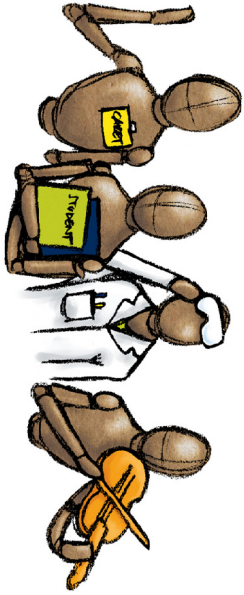
Dictating which tools and services are appropriate for work and for the task at hand, impedes on individual needs and preferences, and may lead to unfamiliarity and unsuitability. The issue of avoiding top-down imposition in favour of a more collaborative approach to choosing appropriate tools and services is frequently heard when engaging people. Developing processes of negotiation and selection can be empowering and cohesive, both in engaging teams and more dispersed groups.
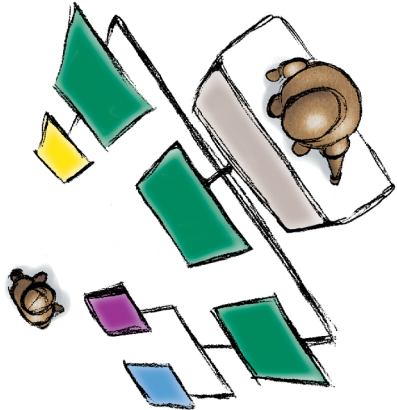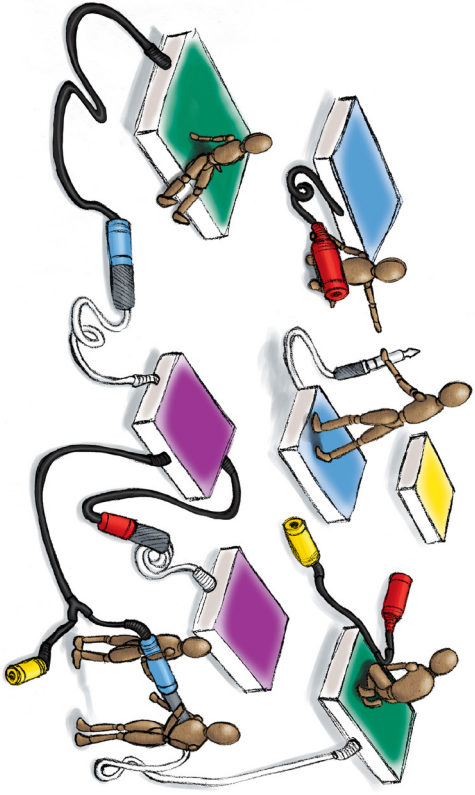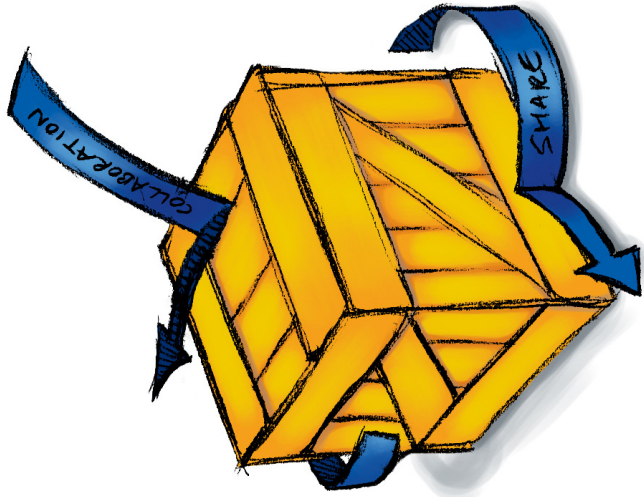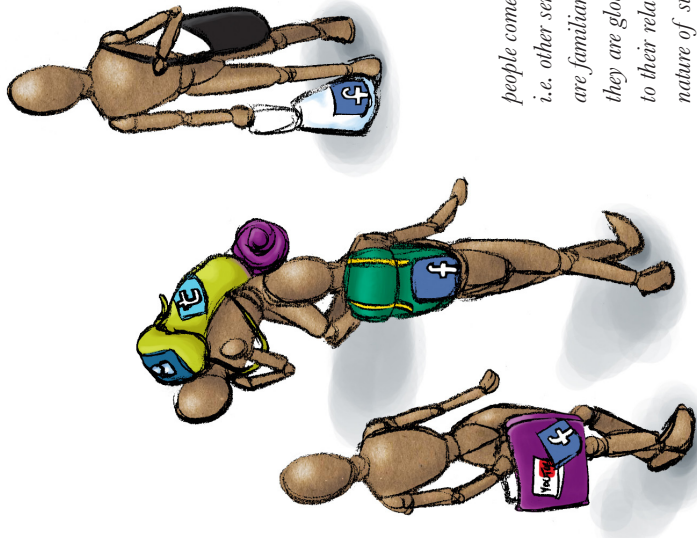
consensual models of behaviour driven access to collaboration platforms (like, for instance CARET's CamTools service) might better reflect the needs and practices of collaboration than the existing top down, hierarchical system of permissions.

people come with digital media 'baggage', i.e. other services and tools with which they are familiar and comfortable, especially where they are global or universal systems (i.e. not limited to their relationship to Cambridge). The 'enclosed' nature of standalone collaboration tools isn't reflective of the free floating nature of how people now share and collaborate online.

Reputation management is an important factor not just in assessing what risks to undertake, but more generally across all aspects of how an organisation operates; who they choose to work with, what kinds of new ventures they participate in, the degree of perceived innovation or established excellence they offer are all key considerations in negotiating institutional standing and public perception.
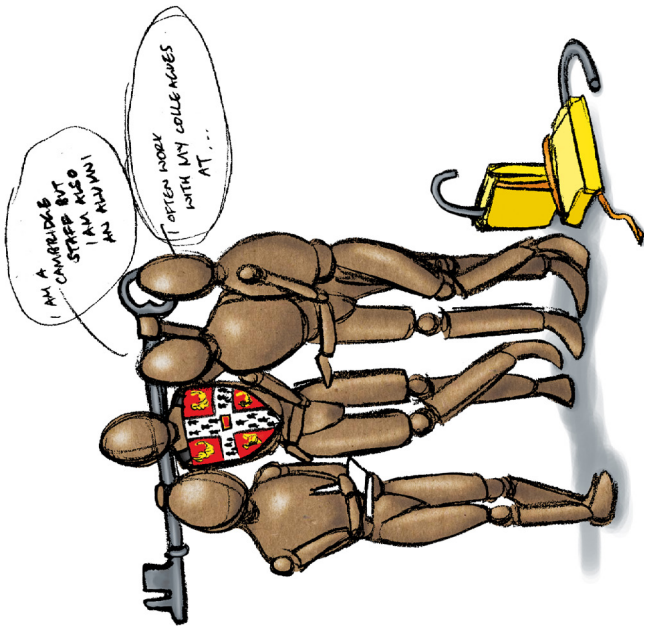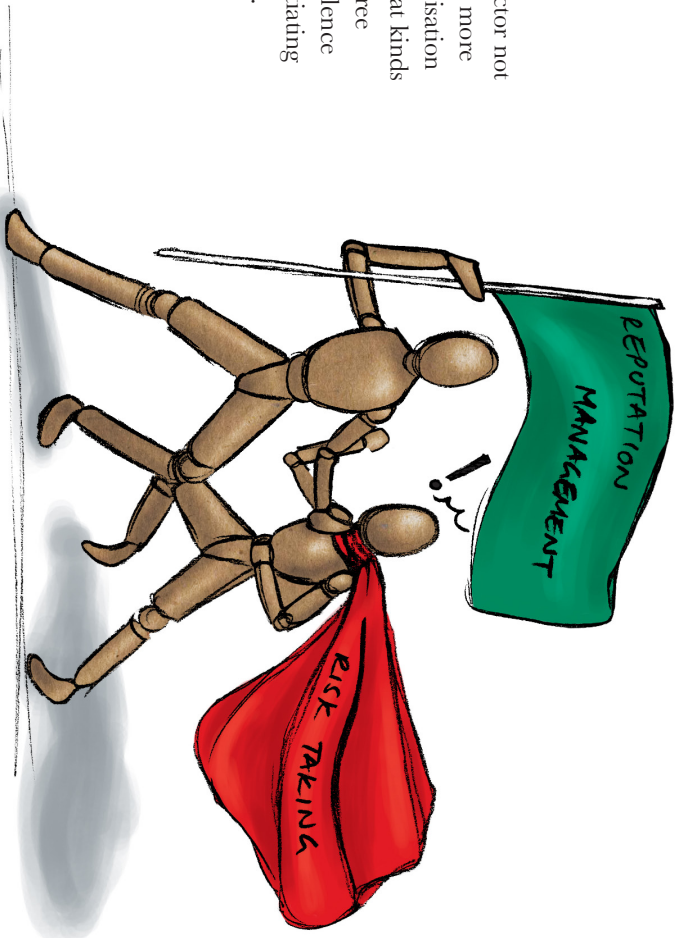
The project highlighted the importance of the roles of both gatekeepers and champions in successful engagement: often multiples of both might be needed to access broad communities. Lack of certain gatekeepers and champions can stymie the breadth of engagement and lead to a lack of balance.
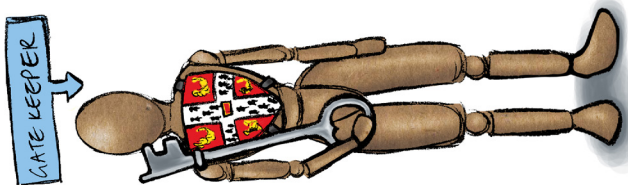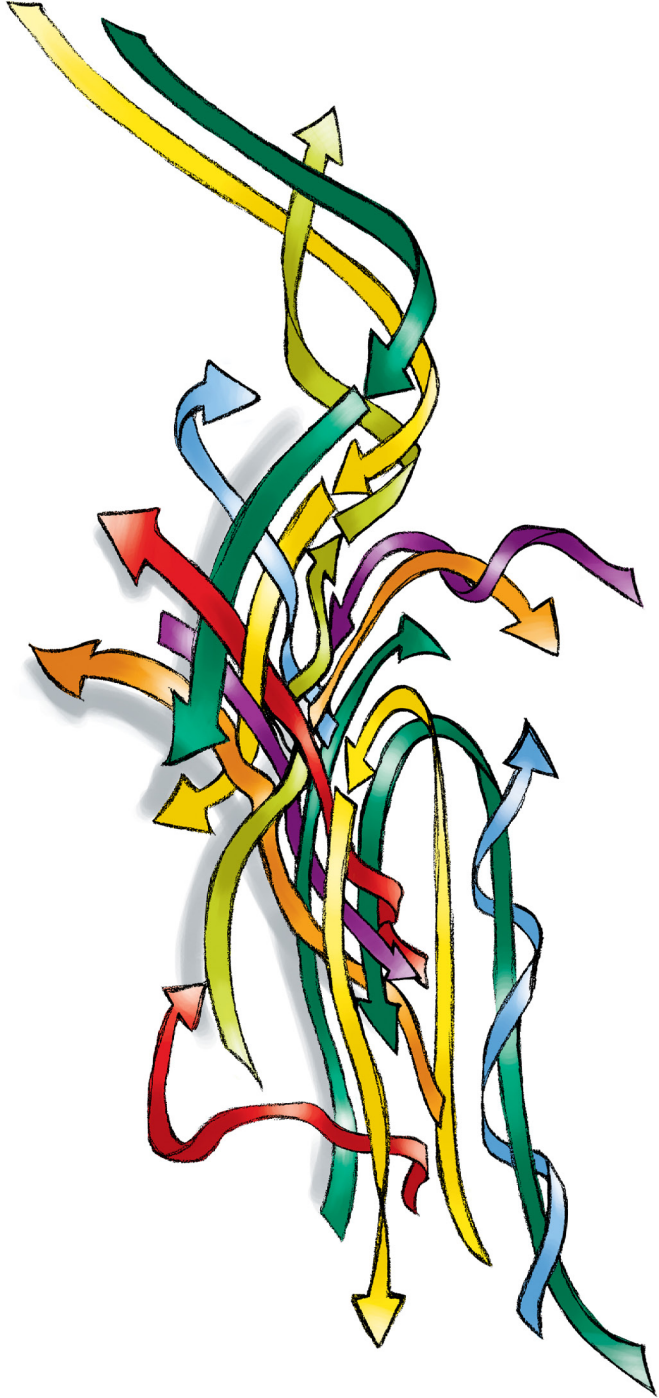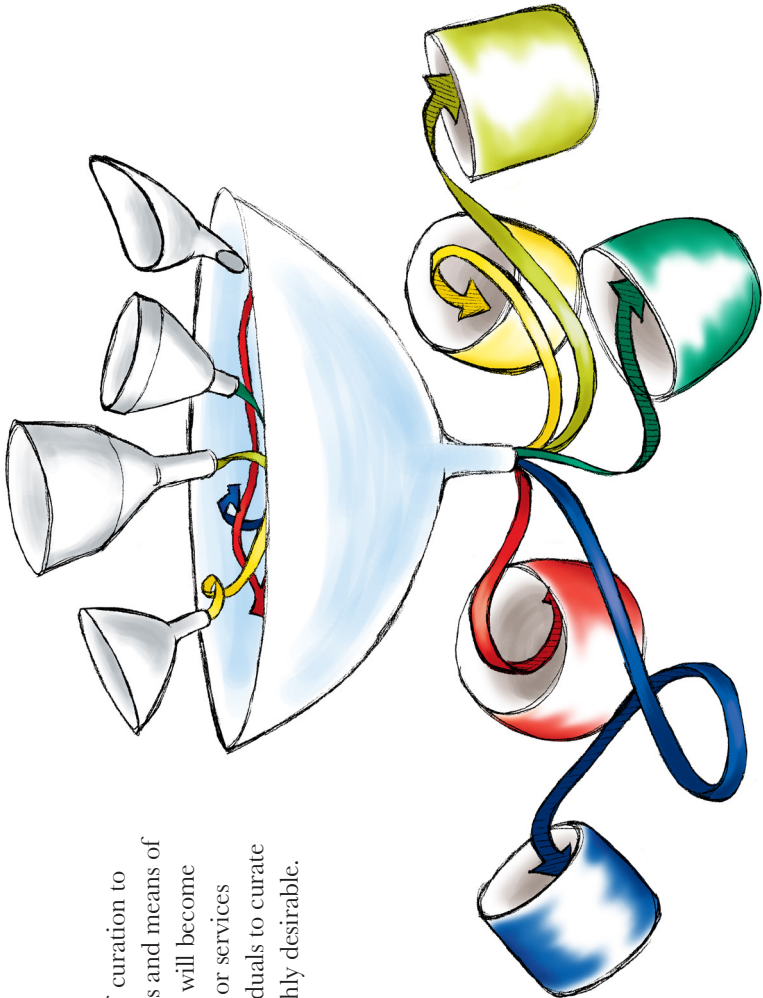
The evolving and increasing ecology of tools and services available presents opportunities for systems that can aggregate across them. These could help align people, content and institutions.

communication methods in temporary or dynamic formulations that interface between the different choices of individuals, groups or institutions.
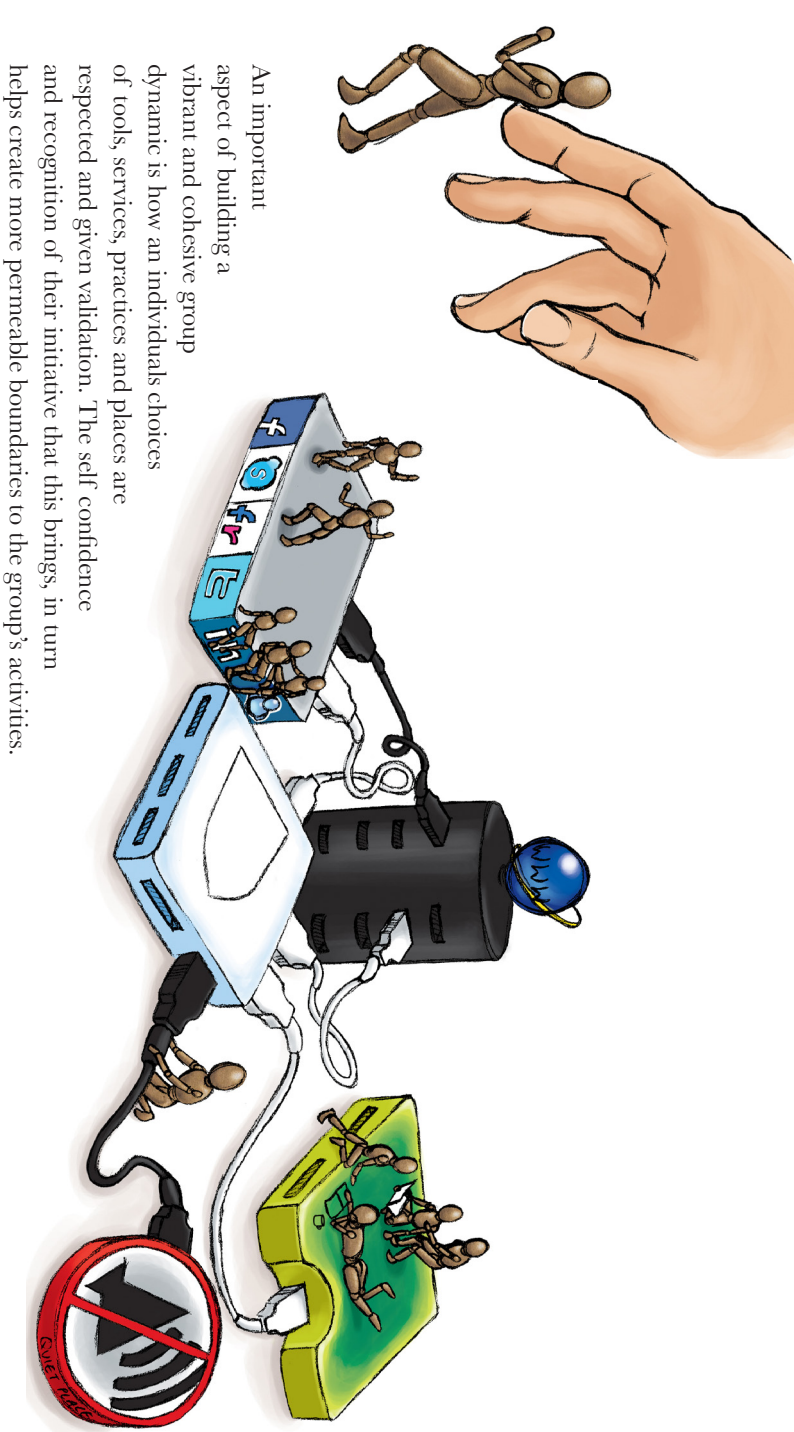
The ability to apply forms of curation to the multivalent sources, filters and means of working and communicating will become increasingly necessary. Tools or services which assist in helping individuals to curate these 'channels' could be highly desirable.
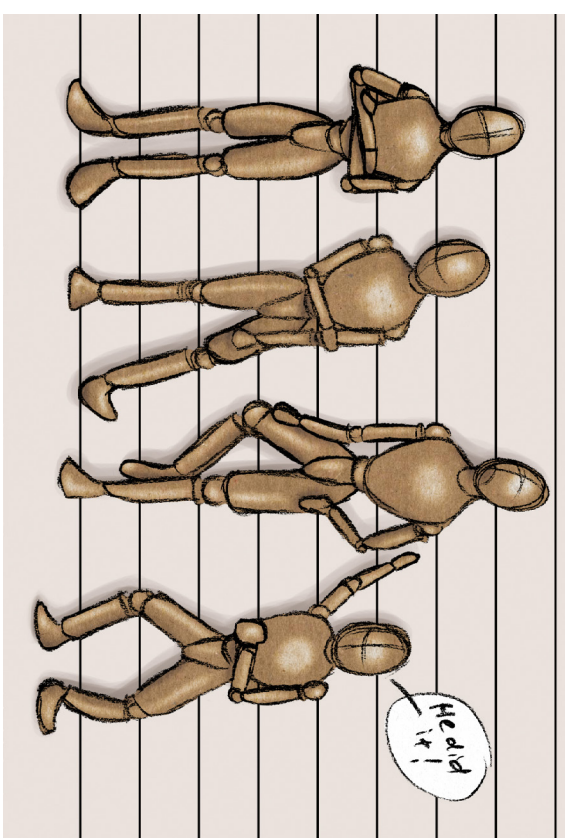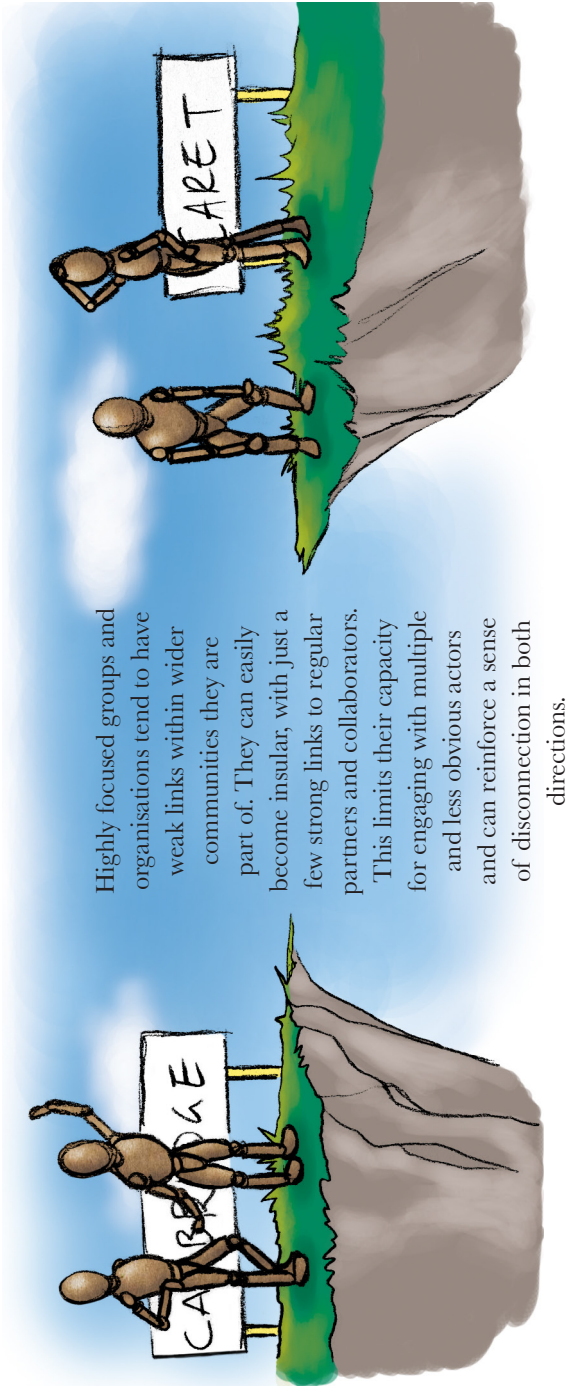
An important aspect of building a vibrant and cohesive group dynamic is how an individuals choices of tools, services, practices and places are respected and given validation. The self confidence and recognition of their initiative that this brings, in turn helps create more permeable boundaries to the group's activities.

Highly focused groups and organisations tend to have weak links within wider communities they are part of. They can easily become insular, with just a few strong links to regular partners and collaborators. This limits their capacity for engaging with multiple and less obvious actors and can reinforce a sense of disconnection in both directions.

Recognising when your engagement with people outside of your own group or sphere of activity has become overly narrow and relies on 'usual suspects' is vital to avoiding unrepresentative samples and instrumentalised results.
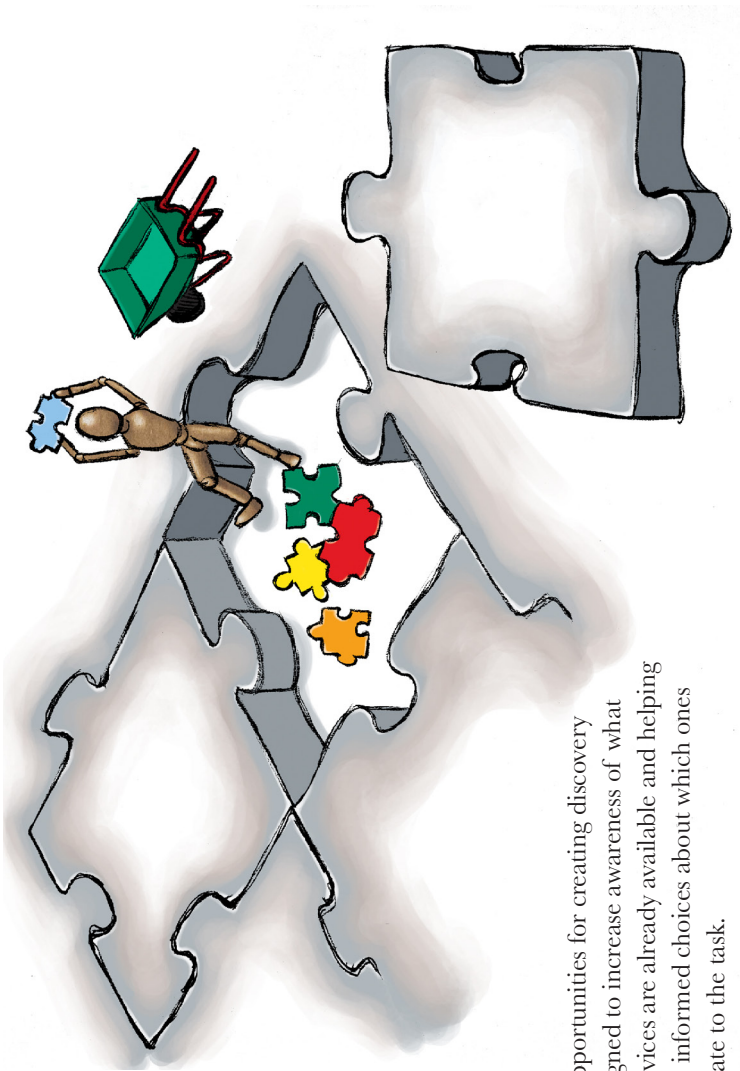
There are opportunities for creating discovery services designed to increase awareness of what tools and services are already available and helping people make informed choices about which ones are appropriate to the task.