Aurora Leadership Institutes: Assisting Future Leaders to Maximise Their Leadership Skills and Potential

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Introduction

This paper provides background information on the Aurora Leadership Institutes and the Aurora Foundation. The latter part of the paper focuses on the looming leadership crisis in the profession in New Zealand and overseas and identifies several strategies that require implementation to ensure that the crisis is averted.

Aurora Leadership Institutes

Aurora Leadership Institutes were first introduced in 1995 by AIMA (Australasian Information Management Institute) in association with the National Library of Australia. Institutes were held biennially until 2001 when AIMA was dissolved. Since 2002 the Institutes have been held annually and are now organised by the Aurora Foundation.

All six institutes to date have been held in Australia, with the first five being held in Thredbo, NSW and the sixth in Canberra, when Thredbo was closed due to bushfires.

The Aurora Leadership Institute concept is based on the Snowbird Leadership Institutes that have been held in Utah in the United States of America since 1990.

The Aurora Foundation[i] views the Institutes as being the principal opportunity for those in the Australian and New Zealand library profession, and others from associated information industries, to explore leadership concepts and their own potential. The Foundation also seeks to position leaders as dynamic and effective voices in the sophisticated information environment.

The mission of each Institute is to assist future leaders to recognise and develop their leadership abilities.

One of the key principles of the Institutes is to ensure that there is a mix of participants and mentors from Australia and New Zealand.

Mentors are selected from senior professionals in Australia and New Zealand, participating on a voluntary basis. The mentors are a key part of the Institutes. In his letter of invitation to mentors at the inaugural Institute, Warren Horton [ii] described their role as being "responsible for sharing with participants experience, successes, failures,

joys, frustrations, wisdom, perspective and advice". Mentors are also expected to "host a personal session which allows participants to learn from their leadership experience, and which is seen as an opportunity for the mentor to share what is important to them, what shaped their career choices and what and who influences their success". Mentors have an opportunity to do this by presenting a session to all participants and other mentors entitled *My Passion, My Practice.*

Participants are selected from the nominations that are received. Nominees are required to have leadership potential, and the ability to share their vision and enthusiasm with others. In their applications nominees must include examples of their leadership successes and accomplishments. Nominees will normally have been employed for a minimum of 3-5 years and a maximum of 7-10 years following qualification, although this is not applied strictly if there are potential applicants outside this criterion who feel the Institute would be of potential benefit to them and they have something to contribute.

Becky Schreiber and John Shannon of Shannon Schreiber Associates have facilitated all Aurora and Snowbird Institutes. Their aim is to "create an environment in which to nourish leaders"[iii] They also create space for reflection on issues such as the " current environment, on our current response to our customers in that environment, on the roles we want libraries to have, and on our own capacity to have an impact within and beyond the profession"[iv]. There is also a focus on values and a range of activities that are designed to break down intellectual, emotional and physical barriers to personal effectiveness.

The institutes run over six days and most participants in the past have commented that the sessions and days are very intense, although there is normally a chance for relaxation after the day's activities are completed. The activities vary from seminar/workshop style with all participants and mentors involved to group work normally involving eight participants and two mentors working together through exercises.

The Aurora Community

Since 1995 more than 190 participants and 36 mentors have been involved in the six institutes. There are about 40 New Zealanders that have attended Aurora as a mentor or a participant. The bulk of these have come from large academic or public libraries, with only a few coming from outside these sectors.

Support for Aurorans in the post-Aurora environment is maintained through a listserv, individual contacts between mentors and participants, social gatherings at ALIA and LIANZA conferences and the friendships developed while at Aurora.

In February 2003 the Aurora Foundation held its first Aurora Recall at Waiheke Island and this was attended by 30 members of the Aurora Community. The Recall was seen to have a two-fold purpose, "to re-ignite the passion and the interest at Thredbo, to enable the participants to further explore the application of leadership issues and to progress the Aurora Foundation and participant networking"[v]. It was also an opportunity for Aurorans

to "be re-energised to use their talents and skills in the interests of the profession, organisations and themselves"[vi] and to identify "longer term needs and to develop appropriate strategies to supplement the role of the leadership institutes".

Future of Aurora

Leadership Institutes are set to continue on an annual basis with the possibility of an institute being held in New Zealand in the future. It is also likely that as the Aurora Community grows that there will be a need for further Recalls in the future. The formalisation of the Aurora Foundation will probably also lead to other leadership events being organised in the future.

Why do we need Aurora?

The library and information profession in Australia and New Zealand is rapidly aging.

In New Zealand, statistics provided by the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings [vii] reveal that there is a disproportionate number of librarians in the 45-49 and over age group. In 1991 this was at least one-third of the total number of librarians as opposed to a national average of 29 percent for all employed people. The percentage of librarians over the age of 45 in the 1996 statistics shifted to 42 % of the total librarian population. The work statistical figures from the 2001 census[viii] place the figure at just under 40%. However that figure is possibly skewed by the fact that the statistics also includes people employed in Museums and the Arts.

A statistical snapshot and forecasts by the Statistics New Zealand[ix] however point to the rapidly ageing population within New Zealand. The number of people that are aged 65 years and over at the 2001 Census was double the number at the time of the 1951 census. It is projected that between now and the 2051 census will more than double again, (1951, 177,459; 2001, 450,426; 2051, 1,181,000). At the same time there will be smaller percentages of those in the younger categories to support those of us still lucky enough to be alive.

In Australia the latest statistics show that 56% of their librarians and 52% of their library technicians are over the age of 45. Phil Teece[x] sums up the situation on both sides of the Tasman quite well when he says that "separation rates must soon increase rapidly as retirement beckons, and while this should open up opportunities for many younger professionals to find work and for others to gain promotion, it also threatens a disturbing loss of knowledge, skill and experience. Put simply there will be insufficient younger workers to meet a mass exodus".

Similar trends are evident overseas in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America.

In North America it has been estimated that by 2010, 83,866 professional librarians will have reached the age of 65 and will be taking or are planning to take, retirement[xi]. In

Canada alone it has been estimated that over the next 15 years, 50 percent of professional librarians in Canada's Association of Research Libraries will be retiring.[xii]

Documents prepared by Corrall[xiii] and Usherwood[xiv] show that similar problems are being faced in the United Kingdom.

Current Strategies

In Australia and New Zealand the most prominent leadership development programme for our profession is Aurora. ALIA has had a formal mentoring programme in place for a number of years and this has been particularly prominent in areas such as Victoria and Western Australia. An article by Ann Ritchie and others[xv] discuss the development of the mentoring networks. In New Zealand some sectors of the profession and regional groupings of LIANZA have initiated mentoring programmes but these have not yet been taken up nationally.

Libraries such as Christchurch City Libraries[xvi] have initiated formal leadership development programmes. Others have used their own in-house training services and facilities or programmes from institutions such as AIMA or the New Zealand Institute of Management.

The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA)[xvii] in 2002 empowered a taskforce based in the Aoraki Region to look at the future profile of the profession in New Zealand and this will include investigating issues associated with recruitment, retention and leadership development.

By awarding the Edith Jesse Carnell Travelling Scholarship to Debbie Dawson in 2002 to travel to the United Kingdom, LIANZA has also been able to gain firsthand knowledge of the work being undertaken by Professor Bob Usherwood at the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society at the University of Sheffield. Debbie's findings should assist the Aoraki Taskforce to focus its activities.

Recommended strategies

To make sure that we have the leaders we require in the future, it is essential that a number of strategies are developed to ensure our success. Discussion of those strategies follows.

Retention

Due to the restricted numbers that can attend any one institute it is recognised that Aurora in its current format cannot totally fulfil the needs of the profession on both sides of the Tasman. It is extremely important however that a concerted effort is made to retain Aurora graduates within the profession. This might require some creative thinking and co-operation at either regional or national level to provide opportunities and challenges

that will use their existing talents and give them the necessary experience to develop further skills for their leadership advancement.

It is also essential that firm strategies are developed to retain staff, particularly those of a high quality, to ensure that the development of the profession continues to be successful.

Succession Planning

There is also a serious need for there to be a greater emphasis on succession planning in our institutions. Bridgland[xviii], outlines the components of an effective succession planning programme and outlines the benefits of succession planning as being "assured continuity of prepared leaders for key executive positions, a disciplined process of reviewing leadership talent, increased opportunities for high potential workers, increased talent pool of promotable employees, contribution to the organisation's business plans, assisting individuals to realise their own career plans within the organisation and developing strong leadership teams for strategic tasks"[xix]

In her conclusion Bridgland states "succession planning should encompass replacement and leadership development at all levels, not just at the top, identify and foster intellectual capital, encourage talent pools, and align with strategic priorities and outcomes. This succession philosophy focuses on developing the creativity and flexibility of library employees, and this allows libraries to respond more rapidly to the ever present pressures of change". [xx]

Mentoring

The development of stronger mentoring programmes nationwide is vital to the longer-term professional development and the enhanced movement of an individual through the profession. There is considerable scope for LIANZA to develop programmes or to enlist the support of existing training agencies to deliver programmes that enhance the skills of potential mentors to successfully fulfil such a role.

 Byrne[xxi] makes a number of practical suggestions for the development and launch of a successful mentoring programme in an organisation or within a professional grouping. These include:

- Keeping it simple
- Exploit available technology to overcome barriers of time and geography
- Identify co-ordinators to provide the mentoring framework as well as continuity and momentum
- Careful planning and training before implementing a mentoring system
- Guard against favourtism
- Secure the full agreement of both parties (mentor and mentoree)

It is also essential to the success of the mentoring process that mentorees know what is expected of them in the relationship they develop with their mentor.

Research

There is a need for in-depth research on recruitment, retention and leadership to ensure that in the future we have a professional workforce that is appropriate to current and future needs of our profession and the clients we serve.

It is hoped that the Aoraki Taskforce will be a catalyst for this research and there exists major opportunities for co-operation between the profession and the library and information education providers for advancing this as a collaborative research project.

So who is responsible for the next generation of library leaders?

Donald Riggs[xxii] believes that the responsibility for "developing library leaders should begin with the local library; the head librarian must create a work environment that recognizes potential leaders and provides the resources for their leadership development". However, according to Corrall[xxiii], there is a responsibility for all of our profession to contribute to the process, by:

- Allocating time and money to (training) and development
- Ensuring that managers know their roles
- Identifying and acting on development needs
- Contributing to sectoral leadership initiatives
- Forming partnerships with educators and others
- Encouraging people to raise their aspirations
- Promoting a diverse and inclusive profession
- Creating real learning opportunities

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the role that the Aurora Foundation and the Aurora Leadership Institutes are having in the development of the next generation of leaders in the profession in Australia and New Zealand. It has also identified that there is a need for libraries and the profession as a whole to be more proactive in the development of strategies to recruit individuals to library and information work and provide opportunities that will lead to their retention. Several strategies have been identified that will assist in this process.

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