Professional Associations as Catalysts for Change Through Leadership and Consolidation

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ABSTRACT

Predictions of the emergence of a ‘human age’ where human potential is the driving force behind business success and economic progress, presents our professional associations with an opportunity to become catalysts for change for the future development and sustainability of our profession. Successfully leveraging the potential of our profession through leadership and consolidation will potentially forge a redefined role for professional associations, and influence the development of a strong and clear identity for the profession.

If professional associations supporting the library and information profession are to survive they must understand what difference they make to the members of the profession, to the employers of those members and to the profession. The research discussed in this paper aims to contribute to that understanding. Based on a current and ongoing doctoral research study of the impact of national library associations, this paper presents the preliminary findings in one category of the study, that of the impact on the profession. It then considers the preliminary findings of the study in line with the concepts underpinning the human age prediction where human potential is the global driving force, and explores emerging roles for professional associations.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the ‘human age’ predicted by Manpower Group (Manpower Group 2011), this paper provides the preliminary findings of a research study of the impact of the national professional associations supporting librarians. The study, being undertaken to fulfill the requirements of a PhD (Business Information Systems), explores the perceptions of association members in terms of the impact the association has had, or is having, on themselves, their employing organization and on the profession of librarianship. It uses the impact assessment framework provided by ISO 16439:2014 Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries (2014) to provide a structure for the study and to facilitate comparison and replication through the use of consistent terminology, definitions and descriptions.

As Jeffrey A. Joerres introduces Manpower Group’s report ‘Entering the Human Age: Through leadership insights’ he emphasizes the importance of human potential as the major agent of economic growth in years to come (Manpower Group 2011). If we are to optimize the potential of our workforces, the professions must
reclaim their territories, consolidate and unify as well as educate, support and lead their members. This provides an opportunity to clarify the roles and territories of the professions in the new world order and for our associations to redefine themselves in terms of how they support and lead the profession.

If the librarianship and information management profession is to reclaim and retain its role as the profession with the requisite skills, expertise and knowledge in the ‘human age’ we must look to our professional associations to provide leadership and consolidation. That is, leadership in terms of:

- informing and shaping formal education;
- ensuring the provision of continuing professional development and training that enables organizations to skill, upskill and reskill to match business need;
- defining the professional territory;
- advocating to ensure that employers and user communities are aware of the scope of knowledge, expertise and skill contained within the profession;
- disseminating knowledge through activities such as conferences and publications; and
- ensuring the development of a professional identity amongst members that reflects the human potential beyond skills, expertise and knowledge to focus on motivations and preferences, behaviours and ways of operating both within and outside the workplace.

And consolidation in terms of:

- eliminating the barriers between sectors;
- embracing the small regional and subject specialist groups under the national association umbrella;
- developing internationally recognized standards to facilitate the mobility and consistency of the profession; and
- redefining the scope of the profession to incorporate emerged and converged fields.

**BACKGROUND**

If we were to scan the library and information environment in the time period from the early 1980s through to today we would see a period of dramatic change that has impacted on most aspects of the profession. These changes could be categorized as technological developments, demographics, and value perceptions.

Most of the changes to the library and information management environment have come about as a result of new technologies. These include changes to processes, perceptions and to the profession itself (Abram 2006). While many would argue that the professional body of knowledge remains the same, new disciplines, or fields if you like, such as knowledge management have emerged while others have disappeared or converged with others such as information technology and information systems (Wilson and Halpin 2006). The convergence of disciplines has blurred the boundaries of the professional territory. The shift from manual to automated processes, the increased digitization of information, the broadening of sources and complexities of access have impacted on the core skills required to undertake the professional work (Broady-Preston 2010).
The library and information profession is an ageing one, with many members facing retirement in coming years (Lenzini 2002). While this provides opportunities for renewal and revitalization of the profession, it also creates challenges in terms of knowledge transfer, lethargy and intergenerational tension. The Manpower Group report discusses the value of the older worker to a profession in terms of their professional knowledge, expertise and leadership (Manpower Group 2011). If we are to effectively harness the knowledge and expertise of the older members we cannot ignore the need for formal and informal knowledge transfer processes, programs and opportunities both within the workplace and within the profession. We have the opportunity to engage older professionals beyond retirement through coaching and mentoring programs. To address the generational tension within our profession we need integration programs to meld the generations and leverage the strengths of each.

As value perceptions regarding libraries and librarians within organizations have evolved we have experienced declining budgets, library closures, and the decentralized redeployment of LIS expertise throughout organizations (Financial Times Corporate). Terminology used within the profession has evolved in line with the changes in value perceptions. We have seen the convergence of the terms librarianship and information management in our library schools and workplaces, and the emergence of job titles that attempt to reconcile new and old but are often seen as awkward and/or meaningless in professional terms (Davis 2008). These changes influence how the profession is viewed by those outside of it, including our employers and user communities and also may change the perceptions of those within the profession.

While our profession struggles with technological change, demographics and value perceptions, our professional associations are facing their own challenges. As the primary associations for the profession are increasingly perceived as irrelevant, professionals seek out, or form, smaller groups that are either more specialized and therefore more relevant to their work, more geographically or generationally suited, or less expensive (Davis, Diakonova et al. 2003). This increases fragmentation, complexity and the need for collaboration, while decreasing the ability to advocate and lobby with a single voice. The national associations have shifted from being a primary ‘umbrella’ association supporting a profession in a specific country or region to being just one of many that members can choose to join. Some have retained their professional association focus, others have become membership organizations and some have claimed elements of both to become hybrid associations (Coerver and Byers 2011).

Globalization has reduced the focus on national boundaries and encourages members to join associations beyond their borders (Barry and Garcia-Febo 2012). The need for professional mobility increases the need for globally consistent standards including terminology and qualifications (Broady-Preston 2010). While ‘association’ is still important to individuals, new ways of communicating, including social media, enables members to associate without the need for formal associations.

If professional associations supporting the library and information profession are to survive they must understand what difference they make to the members of the profession, to the employers of those members and to the profession and adapt.
THE RESEARCH

The research presented here is an impact assessment study that aims to determine the impact of national library associations on the individual members, the employers of those members, and on the profession of librarianship and information management. The rationale supporting the research is that for professional associations to be sustainable they must be able to articulate their impact, that is, the difference they make to the profession/s they support. This research has gathered evidence that can be used to help determine core services and develop relevant strategies for sustainability and growth into the future.

Using the impact assessment framework provided by ISO16439:2014 Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries, the study takes a qualitative approach to explore perceptions of impact. This framework has been chosen as it formally defines and describes the terminology around impact and impact evaluation and provides a framework for impact assessment within a library and information environment. The standard provides categorized impact factors that align with the design of the research in terms of focus on the individual, organization and profession.

Participants for the research were selected from members of four (4) national library associations – the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), the American Library Association (ALA) and the UK’s Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). The range of participants included members from all library sectors and from all career stages based on Levinson’s life stage development model (early 20-30 years, mid 31-50 years, late 51-65 years) (Levinson 1990). An additional category was included for retired members.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews by telephone, Skype and face-to-face. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The use of Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software assisted the analysis of the data by facilitating the coding and categorization of the data, using the ISO impact factors as the framework for the codes and categories.

The preliminary findings presented here reflect the perceptions of the participants in relation to the impact of the national professional association on the profession of librarianship. They are based on the codes and categories identified and applied in the preliminary stages of analysis. The quotations in italics are direct quotations made by study participants. Further analysis will see the development of network diagrams to identify relationships between categories, and the development of themes based on variables such as career stage, library sector or geographic location.
Preliminary findings

Stage 1 findings provide insights into perceptions about the impact of national association membership. The research was conducted in three parts – (1) perceived impact on the individual, (2) perceived impact on the employer and (3) perceived impact on the profession. This paper focuses on the preliminary findings of (3) perceived impact on the profession.

Participants were asked about how they perceive the impact of the professional association on the profession of librarianship. Their responses were coded and aligned with the following categories provided by ISO 16439. These categories have been ‘gently modified’ (as defined below) for the purposes of the research:

1. Social inclusion, social cohesion and community development
2. Communication within the profession
3. Participation in information and education
4. Promotion of the culture and identity of the profession
5. Individual wellbeing
6. Preservation of the cultural heritage

Within the responses there are many themes that cross over multiple categories.

Social Inclusion, Social Cohesion and Community Development

Social inclusion is defined here as embracing groups or persons with specialized professional needs and supporting them in developing a sense of equity and access within the profession. Participants saw social inclusion as a key impact on the profession in supporting those individuals and groups that need specialised support. The types of impact mentioned included the difference the association support made to students and new graduates, members moving across sectors, members in non-traditional roles, those living in rural or geographically isolated areas and those nearing retirement. Many spoke about the impact of ‘association’ rather than ‘the association’ and the importance they placed on professional connection and personal friendships in terms of their motivation, confidence, knowledge, and their connection to the profession.

Although participants acknowledged impact in this area, they felt that the national associations were missing out on a number of opportunities to maximize their impact. They mentioned the perception that the national associations favour public libraries to the detriment of those in other sectors who then see the association as less relevant to them. They also mentioned the perception that many professionals are excluded from accessing association products and services because of geographic location, the lack of technology and the affordability of membership.

Many participants expressed their concern about the members who choose not to join the national association and felt that in order to be sustainable and to maintain our status as a profession the products and services of the associations, as well as their professional information and support must be accessible to both members and non-members.
Social cohesion is defined here as strengthening connections between people and groups and supporting intercultural and intergenerational understanding. Participants saw social cohesion as a key impact of the activities of the national association in the development of a professional community that incorporates connecting people, collaboration and sharing.

A number of the participants felt that the development of a professional community facilitated the development of a broader and keener understanding of the issues within the profession and the ability to see future trends. Members valued the feeling of ‘not being alone’ which they saw as underpinning the development of not only self-confidence but also higher levels of self-assurance and a sense of empowerment. They felt that this led to pride in their profession, feelings of respectability, a need to maintain integrity, and a higher level of professional focus.

“I’m not doing this alone so I think that that is a real impact that it’s had on my work life.”

“I believe that without a professional association, you are very much limited in your growth and understanding of your profession. We are asked to cope with some reasonably difficult situations in our profession – so being able to think ‘how would ... cope’ has always been very useful to me.”

Many of the participants were managers who reported that they saw evidence of positive changes in terms of motivation, confidence and decision-making in their staff when they participated in association activities. They also felt reassured that their staff were better positioned to move onto other jobs, particularly when faced with amalgamations and closures. This is related to confidence in self-promotion/profiling and also decision-making in selecting appropriate jobs. Some managers talked about their staff having the confidence to put themselves forward for promotions and other jobs both within and outside their employing organizations, and having confidence to ‘own their job’ and knowing that they have the expertise needed to do it well.

“My association membership has influenced the way I approach my job. It has given me good role models to follow and build upon. I am motivated to behave as they do and to have a positive attitude which gets things done and makes a difference. I am encouraged to read widely and to keep up with trends and information and to keep growing and learning.”

Despite the proliferation of new ways of connecting people, meeting other members, collaborating, and sharing were seen to be key impacts of associations on the profession. The networking opportunities provided by the associations through their events and programs were considered to have a major impact on the profession, and also on individuals and employers. Many cited the ability to meet and connect with other members face-to-face to be the key benefit of association membership and one that facilitates social cohesion through connection, collaboration and sharing of knowledge, experience and resources.
“Meeting association members throughout the country over the years, has strengthened values and attitudes towards library service and access to information that were not sufficiently solidified in library school.”

Although participants acknowledged impact in this area, they felt that the national associations were missing out on a number of opportunities to maximize their impact. These included the integration of older and younger workers both within the profession and within workplaces, the disconnect between library sectors and sometimes within the sectors, and the reduction of personal contact caused by an increase in online/virtual activities.

Many participants were concerned about intergenerational tension within the profession and their workplaces. Many participants felt that many older workers are defensive and ‘wanting to sit comfortably until they retire’. Many workplaces are committed to diversifying their workforce in terms of age and career stage, however it is felt that there is a disconnect between old and new employees. People want to work longer but in many cases are bored, and despite them having valuable expertise, the younger people feel that some are not keeping up with new ways or open to new ideas. It is perceived that very few workplaces take proactive steps to integrate younger and older workers, causing a disconnect that prevents effective knowledge transfer and the ability to fully leverage the skills and expertise of the older workers.

“I make a huge effort to get along with young librarians ... but they complain to me that a lot of our peers tell them how not to do things instead of coaching them. We need to teach them how to become coaches.”

Fragmentation of the profession into sectors and geographic regions was seen as an issue that could potentially cause the demise of the profession. This included the fragmentation caused by small groups being formed independently of the national association and operating in isolation of the national agendas. They felt that this diluted the impact of the association at a national and international level, and also prevented the national association from reaching many who require support either through geographic isolation or through their convergence into other disciplines or non-traditional roles.

Community development is defined here as the provision of a focal point for a wide range of professional activities and programs which support the development of the profession, the professional community and/or of the position of the profession within society in general. Participants saw community development as a key impact on the profession. As well as creating the professional community discussed above, participants spoke about the development of groups within the profession - special interest groups, regional groups based on geographic location – as being a key impact of the associations. Although participants acknowledged impact in this area, they felt that the national associations were missing out on a number of opportunities to maximize their impact. It was strongly felt that the association must bring all aspects of the profession together under its umbrella – educators, all library sectors and disciplines, vendors, publishers and researchers.
“One of the things I think is incredibly important from the association is to draw people together and create communities that will ... particularly for people who are relatively new to the profession ... create long term connections and relationships.”

Participants regarded the profession as a community with many sub-communities, one being those who choose to become members of the national association. Because association membership numbers indicate that our national associations are much less than representative of our profession nationally, members felt that a key impact on the profession is the need to encourage not only association membership but also participation. They felt that to increase membership and participation our associations must focus on relevance, cost and competition. That is, assure their relevance to job roles including non-traditional, converging and emerging roles, ensure that membership is affordable and address the issue of the bringing together of the smaller and more specialised or geographically focussed groups that are providing competition for the national associations.

**Communication Within the Profession**

Communication within the profession is defined here as the dissemination of information about the profession and provision of communication channels for members of the profession. Participants saw communication within the profession as a key impact on the profession. This included the sharing of information regarding initiatives, trends, issues, events and programs and acting as a clearinghouse for information about the profession. Many mentioned the importance of the association magazine, e-lists and the websites to disseminate information about the profession. Many considered that the communication within the profession was more than the products and services of the association, but also the communication that occurs between members. They felt that the opportunities to meet other members, and to share experiences and knowledge were what has the greatest impact on the profession.

Although participants acknowledged that there is impact in this area, they felt that the national associations were missing out on a number of opportunities to maximize their impact. Some felt that the associations do not always communicate equitably or effectively and others felt that there was disconnect between association staff and members in terms of communication.

“I’m not sure that the association reaches all of its members in the same way.”

“The people who work at the association tend to be remote from the membership.”

Participants also expressed their concern that the communications that take place are often restricted to members of the association and not to the entire profession. They felt that this devalues the association in terms of its potential impact on the profession.
Participation in Information and Education

Participation in information and education is defined here as having access to, and sharing of information, education and resources and the provision of continuing professional development. Participants saw participation in information and education as a key impact on the profession. This included the formal education for the profession and the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for members.

Participants expressed their concerns about inconsistencies in content and focus of the formal education within their countries and internationally as well as the accreditation processes currently in place. They considered this to be a significant issue in terms of employment mobility. They specifically mentioned the lack of globally consistent qualification levels and the lack of consistency in applying qualification levels to job roles. While most members agreed that the association has a key role to play in accrediting the LIS education in their respective countries, many expressed their concern about the actual accreditation processes employed.

“It isn’t clear to me that the accreditation process is used to help guide where library education needs to go.”

Some participants felt that chartership and registration programs provided by the associations have an impact on the profession by ensuring that members update their skills and knowledge and are able to reskill. Many felt that some form of chartership or registration should be mandatory to ensure the future of the profession; some felt that the lack of mandatory certification negatively influences the perceptions of those outside the profession.

It was strongly felt that a key impact of national associations is the provision of continuing professional development opportunities, including conferences and training courses. It was felt, however, that these must be connected somehow to workplace requirements to ensure organizational support, or aligned with the requirements for career development. Opportunities must be both formal and informal, including learning from others, and formal training programs, seminars, conferences, etc.

A key impact of national associations is the provision of access to information including information about education, trends, issues, news, policies, etc. that impact on the profession. Multiple channels were considered important and included journals, e-lists, social media, resources on websites, association publications, access to research and collaborative sharing of resources.

Promotion of the Culture and Identity of the Profession

Promotion of the culture and identity of the profession is defined here as promotion of the culture and identity of the profession to foster pride and professional/community identity. Participant responses indicated two main elements of impact related to the culture and identity of the profession. These were the status of
the profession and deprofessionalization. Participants agreed that the potential for impact in these areas is not maximized by the associations.

The status of the profession is defined as how the profession is perceived by those within it, and by those outside it, including user communities, funding bodies and decision makers, and other professions. Participants felt that a key impact of the professional association was the provision of products, services and dialogues that reflect the identity of the profession to members, and to society at large. They felt that the profession was better at communicating amongst its members through publications, programs, conferences and other meetings, than it was at communicating to those outside the profession.

Discussions about the status of the profession raised a number of issues, including the lack of cohesion (discussed above), and the fact that the service element of what we do is what is most visible. They felt that the latter influences how our profession is seen by the users of our services, funders and high level decision-makers, and it contributes to the confusion between good customer service and professionalism in the workplace.

“It's that service perspective that is forming people's perceptions of what librarianship is. They see the service desk, and they see the books being checked out and other things. That's what they understand librarianship to be, which is why there's such a misunderstanding of the need for professional qualification for librarianship, because they don't see anything else that goes on behind the scenes.”

Deprofessionalism is defined as the use of unqualified or lesser-qualified workers to engage in tasks usually performed by those with qualifications or higher qualifications. Participants were concerned about deprofessionalism and expressed very strongly that an impact of the association on the profession is in monitoring and maintaining the ‘professionalism’ of the profession. Their comments were particularly related to recruitment practices for both library staff and library managers. They acknowledged that reduced budgets encouraged the recruitment of lower paid workers in place of professionals. It was mentioned that recruitment options are slimmer in rural areas, which often leads to the promotion of workers to higher positions than they are qualified for, and that workers are often promoted according to longevity in the job rather than their qualifications.

“The lines between the professionals and the nonprofessionals seem to get blurred. We're seeing people with qualifications doing the same work as people without qualifications.”

Many participants expressed their concern about the ways in which library managers are being recruited which they feel impacts on both how the profession is perceived from those outside it, and on the members within it. Some mentioned the appointment of managers with extensive technical expertise but limited management skill, and others mentioned the appointment of experienced managers without any understanding of libraries.

“We're seeing situations where the people doing the actual library and information work are being managed by people who have really no idea about the details of that
type of work. Yet it's often those people calling the shots about levels of funding and staffing structures and how things get done, processes, and that sort of thing. That then leads to resentment from the people who are underneath, because they don't like being told, "This is what we do," when they know very well that that's not what we do, and it's not going to work."

**Individual wellbeing**

Individual wellbeing is defined here as the influence on the personal wellbeing of the members of the profession. Participants felt that a key impact of a professional association is maintaining the wellbeing of the members of the profession it was established to support. This included economic wellbeing in terms of salary equity and fairness, industrial wellbeing in terms of workplace health and safety, and professional wellbeing in terms of career development.

They also mentioned personal wellbeing in terms of friendships made through association connections. The impact of the personal connections made through the association was seen as the key impact in individual wellbeing and pivotal to professional consolidation.

"Every time we meet there are things that we have in common that we're working on. The daily challenges that are really happening all over. Being able to bounce things off of each other enables us to maintain a sense of who you are and why you're doing what you're doing as a librarian."

"It was a real friendship thing and a support thing that brought a richness to work."

"It has a lot to do with my willingness to stay in the profession. There have been times when I have considered moving out of the profession and it would have been difficult to leave all that behind. My connections are more than professional colleagues."

**Preservation of the Cultural Heritage**

Preservation of the cultural heritage is defined here as the preservation of the cultural heritage of the profession for future generations. Discussion of the impact that an association has on the preservation of the heritage of a profession resulted in a number of elements. These included advocacy and lobbying, recruitment to the profession, standards and guidelines, vision and unification, leadership and managing and articulating the scope of the profession.

Participants agreed that a key impact of the national association on the profession is the advocacy and lobbying work they do. Much has been achieved in terms of changed legislation to support the role of libraries in our communities, and through intervention when library closures and amalgamations were announced.
Participants saw the major impact in advocacy and lobbying regarding the profession as informing. From a funding perspective, informing to ensure that all levels of government understand the role of the professionals within our libraries. From a business perspective, informing to ensure that employers understand the role of the librarian in enterprise information management. From an education perspective, informing to ensure that those leading our educational institutions understand the role of the professional librarian in education regardless of whether they are employed within a formal library setting.

Participants felt that to maximize the impact of advocacy and lobbying on the profession it is important to have a single, united and strong voice that is truly representative of the profession. Participants did express concern that much of the advocacy and lobbying activity relates to libraries rather than the profession.

“It is important that we have a peak body to support the professionals to governments, funders, employers and leaders. Librarians are in a fraught situation - often saddled by stereotypes and the fact that very few people know what librarians do and the role of libraries today. Like doctors and accountants, people think they have a good idea of what they do, but it is important that the peak body is able to take the true understanding of what librarians are and do to the wider public and the government.”

Participants agreed that a key impact on the profession of librarianship was the association support of recruitment to the profession. Many felt that the associations were not active enough in this area and that the impact was not maximized. They mentioned the disconnect between the associations and the library schools in presenting a united approach to librarianship as an attractive career option. Many felt that the terminology being used was partially to blame and that the elimination of the word ‘librarian’ in favour of ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ titles has caused confusion.

“What we're seeing in the universities and I think it might be influencing the recruitment of people to the profession is that the L word has largely been dropped and we're seeing courses with all sorts of strange and awkward titles that don't include the word librarianship, and the people are quite surprised when they actually sign up for the courses, that what they're doing is effectively librarianship.”

Participants mentioned the standards and guidelines produced by the national associations as having a major impact on the profession. Many specifically mentioned the importance of standards for education and ethics, while others mentioned those related to quality, measurement, evaluation and assessment as being important. Many expressed their concern that there is not an internationally recognised professional body of knowledge attributable to librarianship which they see as key to the sustainability of the profession.

When commenting on the role of the associations with regard to standards and guidelines, many felt that there were two imperatives. Firstly that the profession needs standards and guidelines that are globally relevant and consistent, and secondly that standards and guidelines must translate into workplaces, i.e. align with rather than conflict with workplace requirements. Some saw the development of standards and guidelines as an opportunity to reduce the inconsistencies across sectors which would
ease the way for members of the profession to move more easily from one sector to another.

“The professional body should set standards for all aspects of the work of any profession. So our association should be setting, publicising, and enforcing standards for knowledge and skills, ethics, professional behaviour and so on. This should be both official, i.e. having the power to sanction those who fall short, and accrediting those who meet the standards, but also be demonstrated through the way the organization itself conducts its business.”

The standards produced by professional associations, particularly those that related to behaviour, were seen to be pivotal to the development and maintenance of attitudes and behaviours in the workplace and within the profession. The ethics documents developed by the associations were seen to be providing a framework for the development of attitudes and behaviours related to professionalism and for shaping professional identity. Factors mentioned included inclusivity, democracy, fairness, equity and diversity.

“The association has a key role in setting standards and in defining and advocating for professional values – when you put standards and professional values together – to an outsider, that's what professionalism looks like.”

“Being a member of a national professional organization requires higher expectations from us, not in a competitive way but in raising the bar and showing potentials and possibilities of the collective.”

Participants felt that developing and supporting the vision for, and the unification of, the profession was a major impact of the national associations, however they also felt that more work was required in each of these areas to maximize the impact. Creating a vision for the profession was seen as a pivotal role of the association. Participants spoke about the current projects that aim to define the future of the profession, and also of the perception that much of the effort of the associations is now focused on libraries rather than on the profession.

“Our associations must protect and project the vision about where the professional fits in with the changing society.”

Participants spoke about the impact of unification which they saw as a responsibility of the national associations. The perceived fragmentation of the profession was raised in various contexts including the small proportion of the profession who are members of the associations, the barriers between library sectors and the small groups being formed to respond to the need for local or specialist support.

“Fragmentation and sector silos are too evident - there are gulfs between the sectors. It feels difficult to move from one sector to another. We are trying to sell our specializations and our unique realm of knowledge and skill and we are not selling it as librarianship – we are selling it as special librarianship, school, librarianship, government librarianship, public librarianship etc. and then there are all sorts of bits and pieces within each of those.”
Participants considered the development of leadership for and within the profession as a major impact that the associations have on the profession. They see the associations as having a role in ensuring that leaders are developed and nurtured within the profession. Many spoke at length about their frustration with the ways appointments were made within the associations, sometimes allowing inexperienced people to take on key roles, other times allowing very experienced people take on roles for the wrong reasons.

“I think people have their little agendas and often the associations are the conduit for the focus of those agendas. It often comes from the particular individuals that are on certain committees or the council.”

They also expressed their concern at the reluctance of the association to change as they saw this as a cause of the perceived lack of relevance.

“I think they run people for election because they're comfortable with them instead of running someone who's going to challenge them.”

Participants considered the articulation of the scope, value and purpose of the profession to be a major impact of the activities of the associations. They felt that this influenced recruitment to the profession and the way the profession is perceived by our user communities, funders, decision makers at all levels and our employers. While acknowledging this, many also conceded that it is the role of all members of the profession to do this constantly and consistently. This requires consistent terminology and a concerted effort to help people understand the profession and our value.

“Our association is, and should be, the face of the profession nationally and our ‘stamp of authority’. As the association is its membership, it should be the leading force in shaping our identity and professionalism, alongside the communities/customers/organizations we serve and the learning institutions providing our training.”

Participants saw the education of employers in regard to the profession as a role of the national associations, and one which has the potential to have a significant impact on the profession. They agreed, however, that this impact is not yet maximized. As librarians take up more non-traditional roles this becomes increasingly important to ensure that employers understand what it is that librarians are able to do to support business and industry.

“It is important for the association to work with the employers … often the processes and the practices in the workplace are developed without the input of the experts in the profession.”

“We still have people who don’t understand the expertise behind the scenes in a library, so we're not seeing the promotion of the expertise of the profession.”
EMERGING ROLES FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Successfully leveraging the potential of our profession through leadership and consolidation will forge a redefined role for professional associations. Combined with the responsibility of the members of the profession for their own continual learning and career development, this has the potential to influence the development of a stronger and more clearly defined profession of librarianship.

Many of the issues raised in The Human Age report (Manpower Group 2011) can be addressed through stronger and redefined professional associations. These include consistency and mobility. The call for members of the profession to be mobile means that the education, standards and guidelines developed by the associations must be internationally recognized and consistent. This includes qualifications, terminology, and standards such as competency and ethics as well as a globally consistent understanding and perception of the profession to enable not only global but also cross-sector mobility.

The call for highly skilled individuals who are trained to international standards (Manpower Group 2011) raises the issues of the formal education for the profession, continual learning and global consistency. National associations accredit the content of the LIS courses of study delivered by our universities. The critical elements associated with education for the profession are:

1. the differentiation of the core skills and teachable skills
2. consistency in curriculum content, terminology and qualifications
3. collaboration in accreditation to ensure consistency

Individuals within the profession must “be challenged to maintain a learning mindset” (Manpower Group 2011). This provides the associations with an opportunity to not only provide the challenge through professional registration, chartership and CPD programs but to provide the learning through conferences, training courses, seminars and other types of information dissemination. It also provides an opportunity for the associations to work with employers to define the teachable skills required for specific roles and establish ways of developing and maintaining those skills. Having said that the associations could, and should, provide the leadership and consolidation needed to enable the profession to thrive in the human age, it is clear that associations must understand what it is that motivates their members, and that the members of the profession must share the responsibility. As the motivations and preferences of individuals become increasingly important (Manpower Group 2011) they should be understood and leveraged – individuals require a learning mindset and be committed to re-skilling and up-skilling (Manpower Group 2011). Attitudes, behaviours and personal characteristics become critical as do the importance of soft skills, such as conflict resolution and strategic thinking (Manpower Group 2011) is recognised and as particular ways of operating become important (Manpower Group 2011).

The desire of individuals to contribute to the profession (Manpower Group 2011) provides a further opportunity for associations to expand their resource base and their offerings, as does the leveraging of our ageing workforce. The Manpower Group report discusses the value of the older worker to a profession in terms of their professional knowledge, expertise and leadership. If we are to effectively harness the
knowledge and expertise of the older members we cannot ignore the need for formal and informal knowledge transfer processes, programs and opportunities both within the workplace and within the profession. We have the opportunity to engage the older workers beyond retirement through professional development and mentoring programs. To address the generational tension within our profession we need integration programs to meld the generations and leverage the strengths of each.

CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings in this paper are based on the preliminary data gathered through semi-structured interviews of 52 members of four national library associations. Subsequent stages of the analysis of the data collected will include the identification of themes, relationships and dependencies according to the career stage of participants, the association to which they belong, and their library sector.

Participants who were interviewed for this project expressed their thoughts about a number of areas where they felt the associations have an impact on the profession. They also expressed their concern that in most of these areas, if not all, the impact is not maximized and could be greater.

When examining the perceived impacts from the research study in light of the predictions made in the Manpower Group’s report (Manpower Group 2011), a number of themes become clear and it becomes evident that the associations need to consider the following if they are to become sustainable:

1. Global consistency of education, qualifications, standards and terminology, and in promoting the profession. This is necessary for employment mobility and the development of a global identity for the profession.
2. Unification of the profession with regard to sectors and groups.
3. The value of communities and connections developed through association membership - although they may not be the reasons for joining initially, they often become the reasons for continued membership.
4. Leveraging the expertise and knowledge of the older workers, as they prepare for retirement, through mentoring and coaching programs and through integration processes both within the profession and within workplaces.

To become sustainable and ready to take the profession of librarianship into the future our professional associations must understand the impact they have on the individuals within the profession, on the organizational and institutions that employ those individuals and on the profession itself. The evidence indicates that there are many positive impacts in each of these areas, however perceptions are that very few, if any, are maximized. This provides an opportunity for the associations to increase their impact on all aspects of the profession of librarianship.

REFERENCES


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