

Developing sustainable leadership capability in the Victorian State and public library sector

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There have been substantial changes in the labour market over the past few years and survey results indicate 60% of staff will leave public library service over the next decade. While this creates opportunities for library staff, limited training budgets and a focus on compliance and specific library skills training have led to a gap in the formal development of leadership skills.

This paper explores the impetus for action and describes the strategies implemented to develop and support leaders for the future at the State Library of Victoria and within Victorian public libraries. It also considers the impact of these initiatives and the learnings.

More specifically, it details the establishment of the Shared Leadership Program in 2006 by the State Library. The library recognised that leadership, at all levels of the organisation, was essential to successfully deliver a new extensive program of work and to prepare the workforce to adapt to changing roles and expectations. Learning Forums were also implemented to provide further opportunities to grow individual and collective leadership capabilities. In 2009, the Shared Leadership Program was extended to the Victorian public library network.

Introduction

The rapid pace of change, combined with public expectations of high quality service, has created opportunities and challenges in the area of leadership development within the Victorian public library sector. This paper outlines the development and delivery of a program that was initiated by the State Library of Victoria in response to these challenges. The program proved to be so successful in identifying and supporting potential leaders that in 2009 it was rolled out to Victorian public library services as a Statewide Public Library Development Project.

Workforce demands

Leaders within the library profession now need to operate within an environment in which library customers expect to access, interact with and create content through their library's resources as well as use libraries to perform a range of research tasks and leisure activities. Increased reliance on the internet for information and the introduction of free wireless service provision at the State Library and Victorian public libraries have also meant the number of physical and virtual library visits has increased exponentially. In 2008–09, for instance, there were over 27 million physical visits



to Victoria's public libraries, and over 31 million virtual visits to public library websites (compared to just over 6 million virtual visits in 2006–07) (Department of Planning and Community Development 2010). Moreover, the State Library had over 1.5 million physical visitors with nearly 6 million website visits in 2008–09 (State Library of Victoria 2009a).

The significant increase in the number of customer interactions and the speed of change have created a need for the development of both leadership and change management skills to support customers and library staff as they try to adapt to the changing environment. As Chris Batt OBE, former CEO, Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (UK) said at ALIA's Capitalising on knowledge the information profession in the 21st century conference, 'getting a sense of where trends are leading will be of no particular value if that sense cannot be translated into action' (Batt 2000).

Compounding the issue is the fact that in the Victorian public library sector, which includes the State Library of Victoria and Victorian public libraries, 52 per cent of staff were aged 46 years and over in 2007 (Hallam 2007, p.12). In addition, 60 per cent of public library staff indicated they will leave the sector within the next decade and 32 per cent of senior library managers are expected to exit by 2013 (Considine, Jakubauskas, Oliver 2008, p.47). The combined impact of an ageing demographic and the anticipated exodus make it clear that 'public libraries will be increasingly facing staffing and skill shortages if attempts aren't made to adequately invest time and resources in workforce development' (Considine, Jakubauskas, Oliver 2008, p.63). Underpinning this paper is the notion that succession planning and the creation of leadership learning opportunities are crucial to ensure a vibrant future for public library services.

While the departure of experienced staff will inevitably create opportunities for some, it also presents significant challenges to the sector. One challenge centres on the identification, encouragement and support of potential leaders. The 2007 Workforce survey of Victorian public

library staff indicated that while more than half of all respondents are looking to progress from their current position in the near future, 'less than half of all employees (46 per cent) reported that their 'supervisor is supporting [their] career development'; only 19 per cent state their 'supervisor is helping [them] prepare for a higher role'; and, even fewer (13 per cent) are being assisted to 'change roles at their current level' (Considine, Jakubauskas, Oliver 2008, p.9).

Another challenge focuses on the area of leadership training and development. A national neXus survey conducted in 2006, indicated that when asked what type of skills would be most important to their future career, 20 per cent of Victorian public library respondents stated that 'leadership or advanced leadership development was one of the most critical areas for their own career advancement' (Hallam 2007, p.73). To date, however, a combination of limited training budgets and an emphasis on the delivery of training programs that focus on compliance and the development of specific library skills have failed to address the development of leadership skills across the sector. The skills and knowledge gap is compounded by the fact that while newly qualified library staff may come equipped with technical and/or specialist library skills, undergraduate and para-professional library courses do not provide them with opportunities to acquire management or leadership skills.

Shared Leadership Program

In 2005, the State Library of Victoria identified the need for a number of initiatives to make the library more relevant and accessible in the digital age, and developed the slv21 package of projects. Developing 'organisational capability', in particular leadership capability, was included as a pillar of slv21 to enable and lead a dramatic shift in workforce attitudes and skills to support the slv21 new priority areas at all levels of the organisation.

The State Library recognised there was latent leadership talent in the organisation, which could and should contribute to the future of the organisation, but were hampered by hierarchy and the separation of functions within a vertical

organisational structure. The State Library's Executive Team was keen to tap into this pool of talent and release their energy across a range of initiatives, particularly slv21, which would support the library's future development.

With these factors in mind, and recognising the importance of leadership development, the State Library established the Shared Leadership Program, targeting approximately 100 middle managers. Middle managers were recognised as having an important role to play in the transition of the State Library into a library of the 21st century.

The State Library engaged Upton Martin Consulting to deliver the Shared Leadership Program. The program was designed to be highly experiential rather than lecture-based, and emphasised contemporary approaches to best practice leadership development relevant to cultural agencies. This also enabled the State Library to deliver a program tailored to its environment, specific needs and challenges, and to take into account leadership styles more appropriate for the public sector.

The ten-day Shared Leadership Program focused on experiences and opportunities for participants to explore their leadership potential in a safe learning environment. The program aimed to provide broad leadership and management skills relevant to any leadership role, now or in the future. The themes of the program were: self-awareness, strengths and limitations; frameworks of performance management, project management, empowerment, responsibility and accountability; leading change; managing people; influencing others; skills relating to collaboration, teamwork, communication and information presentation; and career directions and life-work transitions (Upton Martin Consulting 2007).

The State Library ran five Shared Leadership Programs for groups of 18 participants between 2006 and 2010. Each program ran for approximately three months and was delivered in four modules:

- Module 1: Self-awareness (three days) – topics covered included developing communication skills, Team Management Profile, valuing

difference, core values, and emotional intelligence.

- Module 2: Leading change (two days) – topics covered included understanding the scope and range of changes impacting the State Library, and further developing communication skills directly relating to managing change.
- Module 3: Achievement through teams (two days) – topics covered included building high performing teams, and team dynamics.
- Module 4: Leadership and influence (two days) – topics covered included leadership styles, coaching, managing performance, and effective presentations.

A pre-program interview was held with individual participants, their managers and a facilitator to share information about the program and get an understanding of individual development needs. A detailed *Team Management Profile* was completed by each participant which was used extensively in the program to understand self, work preferences, appreciate diversity, and encourage an understanding of the differing requirements of team members.

In addition, to support Module 2: Leading change, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian, presented a strategic overview of the State Library's changing environment to each group. It gave participants an opportunity to ask questions, and to share their perceptions of the State Library's future directions and imminent challenges.

To consolidate their learning, participants formed action learning project teams and worked on projects of benefit to the State Library. This component of the program provided an opportunity to investigate and implement projects of organisational importance. Project Sponsors were selected from the State Library's Senior Management Team, as appropriate to the project subject matter, to support the team members and provide guidance on their project approach.

Each Shared Leadership Program was reviewed and improvements were implemented. For example, in the first program, participants were required to think of their own project ideas. In

subsequent programs, strategically relevant ideas to the State Library were supplied for participants to choose from. You can see from the following examples of action learning projects that the projects focus on tangible outcomes at an appropriate level for learning and achievement by the Shared Leadership Program participants:

- Gaining an understanding of State Library reference staff's knowledge of web 2.0 technologies – this project resulted in a large number of library staff from many different divisions completing Learning 2.0, a program adapted by Yarra Plenty Regional Library based on the '23 Things' online training.
- An assessment of the potential for energy savings across the State Library – this project was expanded upon by a subsequent action learning team resulting in an Environmental Action Plan which has been submitted to Sustainability Victoria and integrated into State Library organisational plans.
- The development of a business case to support formal mentoring at the State Library – a key recommendation has been actioned with the creation of a State Library of Victoria Alumni group who can act as mentors.
- An investigation of current diversity programs within the State Library with a comparison to other State Government programs – as a result, a Cultural Diversity Plan was created for the State Library.
- Building collaborative relationships – this project surveyed State Library staff on how they interact with each other and aimed to strengthen the relationships across the organisation. The project resulted in the creation of a social committee and a series of events have been held.
- Showcasing staff skills – this project explored different ways to identify, promote and celebrate State Library staff skills, both internally and externally.
- The development of a costing framework for partnership projects – with a focus on strategic partnerships a key component of the 2010–13 State Library Corporate Plan, this project produced a framework and evaluation tool to assess potential partnership endeavours.

The final component of each series was a Presentation Day. Participants presented their program learnings to members of the State Library's Executive Management and Senior Management Team. The event facilitated recognition of participants' development and provided an opportunity to celebrate the completion of the program.

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, CEO and State Librarian, said 'the Shared Leadership Program represented a huge commitment to supporting the future leaders of the State Library of Victoria and helping them to deliver the slv21 program of work. Leadership, at all levels of the organisation, was essential to successfully deliver this extensive program of work and to prepare the workforce to adapt to the changing role and expectations of the library'.

Extending the learning

To continue the development of the Shared Leadership Program alumni, a series of Learning Forums was then implemented by the State Library. These forums provided ongoing opportunities to grow individual and collective leadership capabilities. Participants heard from and engaged with an impressive range of guest speakers focusing on leadership issues, coaching and change, and sharing knowledge. The forums also provided informal opportunities for senior managers and the Shared Leadership Program alumni to meet and consider a range of relevant theories, models and practices.

Highlights from the forums included:

- Library Board of Victoria members, Hon. John Cain, President, Library Board of Victoria, Catherine Dale, CEO, Boroondara City Council, and Kevin Quigley, Deputy President, Library Board of Victoria, sharing their thoughts on 'Leadership challenges in a political context'.
- Glenn Mescher, Group General Manager, Group Regulatory Affairs and Compliance, National Australia Bank, and Library Board of Victoria member, gave a thought-provoking talk about his 'Leadership Learnings' and shared insights from his recent trip to the US immediately prior to the global financial crisis.

- Mary Mercurio, CEO, RSPCA, who inspired many with her talk about the RSPCA journey in 'Building an Award Winning Culture – Organisational Transformation'.
- David Hyde, General Manager, Consumer Finance, Westpac, shared valuable and stimulating insights into 'Leadership and Cultural Change – Corporate Sustainability'.
- Kevin Panozza, CEO, Salesforce, prompted much thought about organisational culture when talking about 'Turning a Call Centre into a Vibrant and High Performing Workplace'.
- Gary Gaffney, Director Economic Recovery, Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, spoke about 'Leadership in a time of crisis'.
- Pat McCafferty, General Manager Strategy and Communications, Yarra Valley Water, shared thoughts on the shifting paradigm of 'Leadership in a Changing Environment'.

Feedback gathered in 2008 indicated that participants found the forums to be a valuable learning experience and noted that they provided a wider perspective on leadership not just a focus on State Library issues:

- 'Most useful as I have always worked in a library/government environment so they provided insights from the private sector.' (Learning Forum attendee, 2008)
- '[It] generated a fair amount of discussion back in the office.' (Learning Forum attendee, 2008)
- 'I found most of the sessions gave me something fresh to think about, and sometimes a fresh way of looking at an old issue. I think the best feature is that it gives me access to ideas that are being applied outside libraries.' (Learning Forum attendee, 2008)

Leadership across the Victorian public library sector

In 2009, the Shared Leadership Program was extended to the Victorian public library network as part of the Statewide Public Library Development Projects, to address one of the key issues identified in the research into Victorian public

library workforce planning: 'targeted training in leadership competencies will position the network to identify emerging leaders and assist them in their career aspirations' (State Library of Victoria 2009b).

Library service managers were encouraged to support the program by identifying staff who would embrace the opportunity to develop their leadership capabilities. The competitive recruitment of 20 participants focused on enthusiastic future leaders at any band level within a public library service who aspire to be library service managers or to be leaders in specialist areas. Applicants were required to submit an application form and be endorsed by their library service manager. Shortlisted applications were interviewed by library service managers and State Library staff.

Some of the articulated benefits were for participants to 'grow professionally, resulting in increased motivation and confidence; develop and practice enhanced leadership and teamwork skills; establish and consolidate peer networks across the Victorian public library sector; and be better prepared to take the next step in their career.' (State Library of Victoria 2009c) The program was also intended to have a cascading effect with participants expected to share their learnings with their teams through discussion, knowledge sharing and demonstrated role-modelling.

Action learning project ideas were submitted by Victorian library service managers with a focus on strategic ideas and issues that benefit the wider Victorian public library network. Project Sponsors were library service managers, which gave the project teams an opportunity to work with a senior manager from a different library service with an interest in the project topic. Action learning projects from the public library program include:

- Library services to baby boomers – an investigation of current library services to baby boomers and recommendations of a range of initiatives to support the baby boomer generation as they move into retirement.
- A framework for Victorian library partnerships

– the development of a partnership framework to provide library staff with a practical tool to assist in developing successful partnerships to deliver programs and services to the community.

- Customer service excellence in self-service public libraries – an investigation of the impact of self-service technologies on customer service in the public library environment and a detailed report on four case study libraries.
- Strategic evaluation of programmes – the development of a report and toolkit to support strategic evaluation pre- and post-program for public libraries.
- Exploring Library 3.0 and beyond – the identification of advances in technology, how they will impact public libraries and can be harnessed to benefit library users and staff.
- Guidelines for joint use public libraries – this project will document existing joint-use and co-located libraries and produce a specification brief to develop guidelines for future joint-use library projects.

In *Module 2: Leading change*, John Murrell, President of Public Libraries Victoria Network, presented an overview of the public library landscape and the challenges ahead for Victorian public libraries. It was also an opportunity to explain to participants the role of the network association and its relationship with the State Library.

Learnings from the State Library's Shared Leadership Program implementation were incorporated into the public library program rollout. One notable point of difference was the increased residential component of the program for public library staff to facilitate networking opportunities and relationship building. This was an imperative in the public library program due to the mix of participants from country and metropolitan libraries, and the need to focus on strategic issues as well as their own professional and personal development away from the demands of their day-to-day lives.

The Presentation Day, attended by Victorian public library managers and senior State Library

representatives, consisted of detailed presentations on the action learning projects as well as individual participant's program learnings and development. It was also an opportunity for participants to 'shine' in front of their existing manager as well as potential employers.

Feedback from the Shared Leadership Program for Victorian public library staff was overwhelmingly positive with one manager commenting '[my staff member] has really developed and consolidated her leadership skills and is more comfortable in her own leadership style ... she has grown and developed so much that we will need to think of other opportunities for her to show leadership in the team and broader sector to maintain the momentum.' (Victorian public library service manager, 2010) Other comments included:

- 'The program gave me greater confidence and developed skills I can use which can feed back in to the library I work for and the wider public library service.' (Victorian public library program participant, 2010)
- 'I have been able to assess my aspirations, motivations and question my position and career path. I was able to change my circumstances and achieve success in many areas.' (Victorian public library program participant, 2010)
- 'I have already noticed the changes in my staff member and her capacity to lead within her team and also her greater understanding of required leadership skills.' (Victorian public library service manager, 2010)

John Murrell, President of Public Libraries Victoria Network, said 'the Shared Leadership Program has provided each participant with the foundation to make a difference that can benefit the wider Victorian public library network and its future. Sharing and demonstrating the learnings will have an exponential effect on the leadership potential of the network'.

The 2010–11 Shared Leadership Program for Victorian public library staff is currently underway.

Building on success

Looking forward, it is important for both the State Library and Victorian public library network to provide constructive leadership development opportunities for Shared Leadership Program alumni to further stretch and nurture their potential.

To date, the Victorian public library network has engaged with the Shared Leadership Program alumni in the following ways:

- Eleven alumni attended the 2010 New Horizons planning retreat, where international and national speakers inspired public library and State Library managers as part of the planning process for the next triennium of Statewide Public Library Development Projects.
- Another alumna participated on the 2010 Pierre Gorman Award selection panel.
- Three alumni helped interview applicants for the 2010–11 Shared Leadership Program for Victorian public library staff.
- An action learning project team (Library services to baby boomers) was invited to present its project to the Public Libraries Victoria Network meeting. As one of their key recommendations was the delivery of a professional development day centred around services to baby boomers, the State Library's Statewide Public Library Development Project team intends to work with interested alumni to develop a program for a training day on the topic in 2011.

To further develop the State Library's Shared Leadership Program alumni, a number of staff have already been engaged in a variety of activities and projects, including:

- Facilitating an intensive process with all State Library staff to identify the State Library's organisational values in 2007.
- Participating in an organisational structural review in 2008 which gave the participants an opportunity to learn interview and information gathering techniques to support organisation-wide recommendations.
- Shaping and facilitating a review of the Learning Forums in 2010.

The State Library has also commenced development of a Workforce Talent Development Plan to continue its leadership development work. The identification of projects and initiatives to engage the Shared Leadership Program alumni is top of mind and many alumni are keen to embrace further challenges and development opportunities.

While the State Library's Shared Leadership Program has been successful in increasing the knowledge, skills and confidence of the alumni in leading their teams, and creating new networks and communication channels across the organisation which contribute to staff working more efficiently together, the State Library is still grappling with the challenge of harnessing this workforce energy and getting full value out of its investment. Of the 91 State Library participants, 26 per cent have either been promoted (12 per cent) or reclassified with higher duties or responsibilities (14 per cent) since completing the Shared Leadership Program. While opportunities at the senior level of the State Library are scarce, the Shared Leadership Program has increased the skills and confidence of alumni to encourage them to apply and compete for alternative positions.

Following the 2009–10 Shared Leadership Program for Victorian public library staff, 10 per cent of participants have been promoted, 15 per cent have acted or are acting in higher positions and 20 per cent have secured new positions. Anecdotally, many alumni have indicated their participation in the Shared Leadership Program has had a direct impact on their confidence to change their circumstances.

The implementation of the State Library's Shared Leadership Program has also had some unanticipated ramifications. Most notably, traditional library management practices have been challenged and for some senior managers, it has been a challenge to manage and continue to develop staff who have been through the Shared Leadership Program who are ready and enthusiastic to step up and work on new initiatives while juggling day-to-day delivery.

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, CEO and State Librarian, said 'I am proud of the way that colleagues have

welcomed leadership development, through the Shared Leadership Program and Learning Forums, as well other formal performance management activities. It means the State Library is in an enviable position, with talent available to step up and embrace the leadership challenge’.

Conclusion

The Shared Leadership Program has provided a solid platform on which to develop leadership talent within the public library sector. However, continued investment in programs and the provision of opportunities to build and support leadership development are critical for the State Library and public libraries in Victoria as the sector tackles the issues associated with an ageing workforce, increasing physical and virtual library visits and evolving customer expectations.

This is not a time to be complacent. As new challenges loom on the horizon, the sector will need strong leadership and innovative solutions to motivate staff and remain relevant by delivering services that meet users’ needs in the 21st century.

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Melanie has a particular interest in training and developing people as well as a focus on the impact of leadership at all levels of an organisation. She was pleased to participate in the State Library's Shared Leadership Program before rolling it out to Victorian public library staff.