

Leadership development in the library and information profession: evaluating the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute

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Project endorsed by the Board of the Aurora Foundation Ltd and conducted as assessment for Masters in Library and Information Management at University of Canberra. © Kay Barney

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Leadership development in the library and information profession: evaluating the Aurora Leadership Institute

Executive summary

- This study shows that six months after the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute (A6), the majority of participants perceive a strong legacy from A6, which continues to influence their decisions about work and career.
- A6 was perceived by 100 per cent of respondents as beneficial to their work and careers.
- A strong link was found between participants' attendance at A6 and a subsequent increase in their level of professional activity.
- The analysis showed a trend for participants with less than 11 years experience in librarianship perceiving greater value in A6, compared with their more experienced counterparts.
- The analysis showed some evidence that the public and State/National librarians found more value in A6 to their careers than did the academic and special government librarians.
- The mentor interaction was shown to be a particular strength of A6. This finding supports the emphasis that Aurora places on the mentoring component of the program.
- Male participants were generally more appreciative of the value of the mentor and participant interaction opportunities at A6, than were their female counterparts, raising the question of whether the males usually have less opportunity in their working lives to network, perhaps because the profession is predominantly female.
- Although it is too soon to tell the effect of A6 on participants' careers in any real sense, four respondents had moved into higher positions since attending Aurora and another three were applying for other jobs. They cited A6 as an influence in their decisions. In a future study, it would be useful to study all the Aurora alumni since 1995 to see whether they have become leaders in the profession.
- This study is not able to absolutely prove that A6 has resulted in behaviour changes and resulting impacts on organisations, but this is not surprising due to the difficult nature of measuring this type of change. However, this study does provide convincing evidence of increased leadership activity through the many examples of changes in respondents' behaviour, attitudes and knowledge that they attribute (directly or indirectly) to their attendance at A6.
- The findings of this study imply that future demand for places at Aurora Leadership Institutes will increase over time as the benefits from attending are even more widely realised.

Research focus

Evaluating the impact of library and information management leadership programs

There is little research on the impact of library leadership training programs, even though there are more than 20 such programs in the USA. Furthermore, the research that has been conducted to date is inconclusive about whether library leadership programs are successful in developing leaders (Neely & Winston 1999; Nichols 2002; Weaver & Burger 1991).

Even looking outside the library profession, the situation is not very different. The community development sector in the United States and Canada is an area where leadership training programs are booming with an estimated 650-750 community leadership programs operating in the US. Some research has been done to evaluate their impact, yet even these programs are under-researched (Fredricks, 2001). Questionnaires administered at the end of the programs provide little information about the effect of the program on participants' behaviour on-the-job.

The lack of research may be due to the difficulty in measuring the impact of programs. While tests can be used to evaluate training programs that teach hard skills, leadership qualities and characteristics, often characterised as 'soft skills', are generally evaluated through anecdotal observations and/or perceptions (Sirianni & Frey, 2001). This involves asking leadership program attendees whether they think their skills/knowledge/behaviour have improved in certain areas, and using the perceived change as the criteria for determining the impact of the program. This approach is given validity by the concentration of leadership training programs on developing participants' self-perception of leadership behaviour, not increasing their basic knowledge (Brungardt & Seibel 1995).

When evaluating leadership programs, it is easiest to establish evidence of the level of participant's satisfaction with the program and most challenging to determine the level of impact that participation in the program had on the organisations in which they hold leadership roles (McLean & Moss 2003).

The challenge in assessing the impact of leadership programs is compounded by the difficulty of attributing any changes to the program (McLean & Moss 2003; Paterson 1999). Acknowledging the difficulty, or even impossibility, involved in obtaining absolute proof of the impact of a program, we have to be satisfied with supporting evidence instead (Kirkpatrick 1994, 68).

Evaluation of the Aurora Leadership Institute

The Aurora Leadership Institute can already claim success in that library and information organisations in Australia and New Zealand continue to sponsor people to attend the Institutes, at not inconsiderable cost, and demand exceeds the number of places available. There were 48 applications for 32 places for the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute. The cost of the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute to the sponsoring organisation was \$3410 plus any air travel and time away from work. (For the 2004 Institute, the cost is \$3800).

Yet there are no objective data on the Institute's impact and value. The literature provides descriptive information about how Aurora was conceived (Horton, 1996) and how some individuals have responded to the experience (Dan 1996; Gow 1996; Lilley 2003; Sutherland 2003).

Although participants complete feedback forms at the end of each Institute to evaluate the course itself (as well as rating each day on a scale of 1 to 5), a more pertinent question to be answered is how have participants been able to take what they learned at the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute and apply this to their professional lives to provide leadership in the profession?

The primary focus of this research was to analyse the short-term impact of the learnings from A6 (held in February) on the participants, and their perceptions of the value of A6 to their work and careers. The 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute will hereafter be referred to as A6 (because it was the sixth Aurora Institute).

The study includes mentors as well as participants, because many of the mentors commented at the end of the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute that they felt they had learned more than the participants. Aurora Foundation Ltd Chairman Warren Horton attended A6, but was not surveyed because he fulfilled a different role – that of 'meta-mentor' who acts as an advisor to the other mentors, as well as to the participants.

Method

Survey methodology was used. Data were collected by emailing the questionnaire in August 2003 to the 32 participants and 8 mentors who attended the Aurora Leadership Institute held in February 2003.

The 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute will hereafter be referred to as A6 (the sixth Aurora Institute).

Respondents had the option of replying by email, or if they preferred to answer anonymously, by mail. No one chose to reply anonymously. This reflected the lack of controversial questions and also that people answered voluntarily. Many of the comments provided were personal reflections, indicating a willingness on the part of respondents to respond thoughtfully and genuinely to the questionnaire.

The response rate was high, with 27 of the 32 participants completing the survey (a response rate of 84%). Of the five participants who did not respond, one is on maternity leave and two have moved jobs since A6 and could not be contacted. Six of the eight mentors replied (a 75 % response rate).

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 11.0.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was designed to look at the demographic backgrounds of participants, their years of professional experience and their perception of the short-term impact of A6 on their work and careers. It included a number of open-ended questions to elicit deeper insights into areas of particular interest to the Aurora Foundation Board, such as how A6 had affected their subsequent leadership behaviour and career aspirations.

The questionnaire was partly based on the instrument used in the US Snowbird study by Neely and Winston (1999). Basic demographic queries on age, gender, type of library and years of professional library experience and items on participants' perception of the impact of A6 on their careers and professional development were taken directly from this instrument or adapted.

The questionnaire for this study did not include the items about career progression used in the Neely and Winston survey because the Aurora study looks only at the participants from the 2003 Institute, and therefore it is too early to assess in any real sense, the effect on people's careers from attending A6. The Neely and Winston study also focused on publication rates and presentations as evidence of leadership activities, which reflects the academic background of the two researchers but which was not appropriate to A6 participants who were predominantly from public libraries.

Before it was distributed, the Aurora questionnaire was pilot tested on a group of University of Canberra postgraduate students. The questionnaire was also reviewed by Aurora Foundation Ltd Chairman Warren Horton and Secretary Ian McCallum. Horton and McCallum have been very supportive of this research, providing a letter to participants encouraging them to respond to the survey, comments on the questionnaire

and discussion of some of the findings. Also accompanying the questionnaire when it was emailed to participants, was an informed consent letter explaining the purpose of the research and assuring respondents that their responses would be confidential and that the research had been considered and approved by the University of Canberra Committee for Ethics in Human Research.

Individuals were asked about the value of A6 to their work, and to their career, using a Likert-type scale. Two items asked individuals about the value of A6 to their work and to their career. This was done using a four point scale ranging from 1 (great value) to 4 (no value). Two items asked about the extent to which their interactions with other participants and the Aurora mentors contributed to the quality of their experience. These items used a three point scale ranging from 1 (to a great extent) to 3 (not at all).

Although the survey relies on respondents' self-reports, the questionnaire also included six open-ended items that asked respondents to provide examples of the impact that A6 had on them, their level of professional activity and their career. It was hoped that this would enhance the validity of the data by causing respondents to think more carefully about their responses by requiring them to express them in their written answers.

Five items asked individuals to indicate their gender, age group, years of experience as a professional librarian, type of library in which they worked when they attended A6, and whether they were a participant or a mentor at A6.

Results

The findings are presented in three main parts: the demographics of A6 participants and mentors, respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of the A6 program, and the respondents' self-reported changes in leadership skills and behaviour as a result of attending A6.

For the analysis, the participants were split into a separate group from the mentors as the groups presented different demographics. For example, it was not expected that the mentors would have increased their professional activity as a result of attending the Aurora Leadership Institute because they are already at the peak of their careers and aware of the benefits and responsibilities of being active in professional organisations.

Cross-checking the data against the feedback forms filled out at the end of the Institute, was not possible, as the feedback forms were anonymous. Other forms of cross-checking were outside the scope of this study.

Demographics for A6

As indicated above, the following results do not include mentors, except where specifically mentioned. They have been treated in most instances as a separate group for the purposes of the study.

The Aurora Leadership Institute recruits participants from all types of libraries. Figure 1 shows that for the 27 A6 respondents, there was a predominance of librarians from public libraries (12), and from academic libraries (9). There were three from special government libraries and three from State/National libraries. There were no librarians from schools or from special libraries in the private sector at A6.

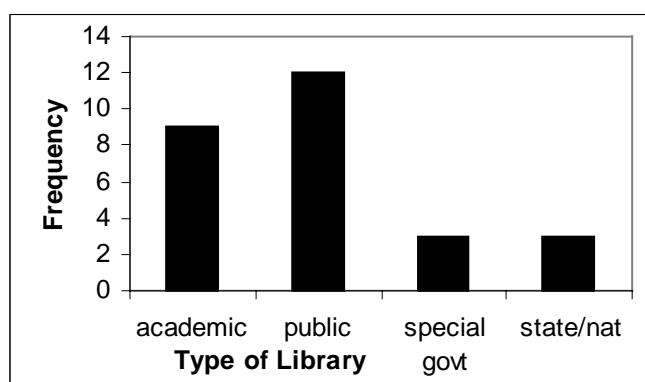
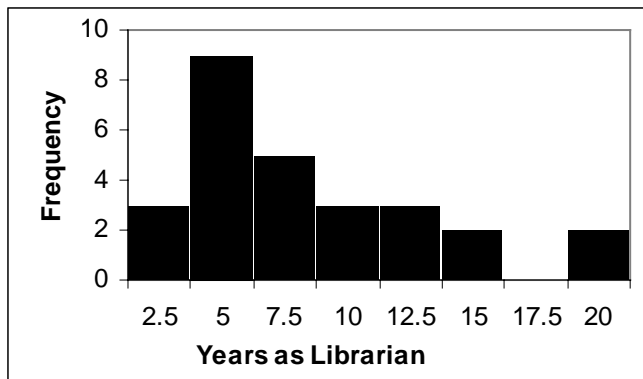


Figure 1. Type of library participants worked in at the time of A6

Although the Aurora Leadership Institute usually targets participants who are 5-10 years into their professional library careers, this is not a firm rule for selection, as can be seen from Figure 2. There were nine participants at A6 who responded to the survey who had 11 or more years of experience as professional librarians.



Mean = 8.6
Std deviation = 4.95

Figure 2. Participants' years of professional library experience

The age of participants indicated roughly even groupings in each of the age groups under 45 years of age (see Figure 3).

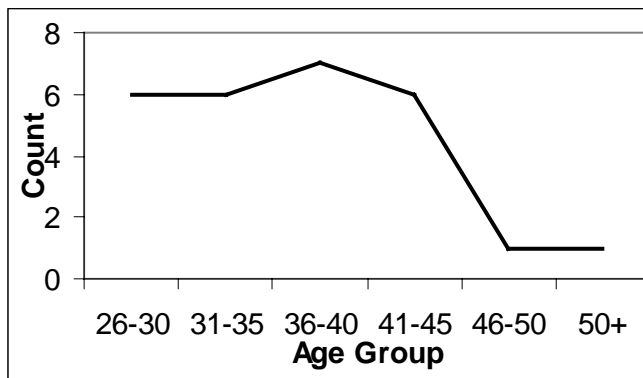


Figure 3. Participants' age groups

There were six male and 26 female participants at A6. All the males and 21 females responded to the questionnaire.

Attitudes about the Institute and Perceived Impact

Value to work and career

To gather data on participants' and mentors' attitudes about the Institute, the questionnaire included items about their perceptions of the impact of A6 on their work and careers, and the value of their interactions with other Aurora participants and mentors. The term 'value of A6 to work' relates to how A6 has benefited attendees' performance on-the-job. The term 'value of A6 to career' refers to how A6 has helped, or will help, attendees' career progression.

In response to the items regarding the value of A6 to their work, about two-thirds of the participants rated the Institute 'of great value' to their work. The remainder rated it 'of moderate value' to their work. No one rated it 'of little value' or 'of no value'.

A much higher proportion, 22 out of the 27 respondents rated the Institute as 'of great value' to their career, and the rest rated it 'of moderate value'. No one rated it 'of little value' or 'of no value'.

Examining the data further, participants were divided into two groups – those with less than 11 years experience and those with more, which was then compared to those who found A6 of great value to work and career. The following cross-tabulations in Table 1 shows that participants with 11 years or more experience as a librarian found less value in A6 to their work compared to those with less experience. Of those with 11 years or more experience, only half valued A6 'of great value' to their work, compared with nearly three-quarters of respondents with less than 11 years experience.

Similarly, those with more years experience as a librarian found less value in A6 to their careers (see Table 2).

Chi square tests were performed on all cross-tabulations using SPSS. There were no statistically significant findings. This was not unexpected, given the small population size.

Table 1. How participants rated the value of A6 to their work

	Value of A6 to work (frequency)			
	Great value	Moderate value	Little value	No value
Participants with less than 11 yrs experience	13	5	0	0
Participants with 11 or more yrs experience	5	4	0	0
Total	18	9	0	0

Table 2. How participants rated the value of A6 to their careers

	Value of A6 to career (frequency)			
	Great value	Moderate value	Little value	No value
Participants with less than 11 yrs experience	17	1	0	0
Participants with 11 or more yrs experience	5	4	0	0
Total	22	5	0	0

Examining the data on the basis of gender (Tables 3 and 4), the male participants found greater value than female respondents of A6 to their work but both were about equal in the perception of the value of A6 to their careers. Again, the population was too small to make the finding statistically significant. And, with only six male participants it is difficult to generalise this finding to the wider Aurora community.

Table 3. Participants' gender and the value of A6 to work

	Value of A6 to work (frequency)			
	Great value	Moderate value	Little value	No value
Female	13	8	0	0
Male	5	1	0	0

Table 4. Participants' gender and the value of A6 to career

	Value of A6 to career (frequency)			
	Great value	Moderate value	Little value	No value
Female	17	4	0	0
Male	5	1	0	0

Tables 5 and 6 show that males were generally more appreciative of the value of the mentor and participant interaction opportunities at A6 than were their female counterparts, although the small sample size means care must be taken if generalising to a wider Aurora population.

Table 5. Participants' gender and their perception of the value of participant interaction at A6

	Contribution of participant interaction (frequency)		
	Great extent	Some extent	Not at all
Female	14	7	0
Male	5	1	0

Table 6. Participants' gender and their perception of the value of the mentor interaction at A6 (Note: n = 26. One person did not answer this question.)

	Contribution of mentor interaction (frequency)		
	Great extent	Some extent	Not at all
female	18	3	0
male	5	0	0

Another cross-tabulation of interest is whether people from the different types of libraries perceived different amounts of value from A6. As shown in Table 7, this was definitely not the case for value to work. However, the public and state/national library respondents appear to have perceived more value from A6 to their careers (see Table 8), than those from academic and special government libraries. The significance cannot be tested due to the small sample size, but there does appear to be a trend. A similar trend is found when cross-tabulating library type and participants' perception of the value of the interaction with other participants. The public and state/national library respondents were markedly more enthusiastic than their academic and special government library counterparts (Table 9). However, there was almost no difference between the groups about the value of mentor interaction, which was equally highly valued by all groups.

Table 7. Type of library participants worked in at time of A6 and their perceived value of A6 to work

Type of library	Value of A6 to work (frequency)	
	Great value	Moderate value
Academic	6	3
Public	8	4
Special govt	2	1
State/Nat	2	1
Total	18	9

Table 8. Type of library participants worked in at time of A6 and their perceived value of A6 to their career

Type of library	Value of A6 to career (frequency)	
	Great value	Moderate value
Academic	6	3
Public	11	1
Special govt	2	1
State/Nat	3	0
Total	22	5

Table 9. Type of library participants worked in at time of A6 and their perception of the value of the participant interaction at A6

Type of library	Participant interaction (frequency)	
	Great extent	Some extent
Academic	5	4
Public	9	3
Special govt	2	1
State/Nat	3	0
Total	19	8

Mentor interaction

Participants valued highly the interaction with mentors at A6. Of the participants who responded to the survey, 23 of the 26 who responded to the item said that mentor interaction contributed ‘to a great extent’ to the quality of their experience at A6. The remaining three reported that mentor interaction contributed ‘to some extent’. No one reported that it contributed ‘not at all’.

Some of the comments from participants on the mentors included:

- ‘This was access to experiences and knowledge that I didn’t have anywhere else in my career. Here were people who had achieved something beyond the experience of those other participants. I felt these were the people I was there to learn from. Without the mentors it would have just been a 5-day workshop/conference. The mentors and the feedback they gave to me was a highlight.’
- ‘I felt very privileged to have such high-calibre professionals at the Institute. I often re-think the feedback I received as I think it was very accurate. When I get side-tracked, I think back to their advice and try to stay focused.’
- ‘Listening and talking to the mentors was a real inspiration, and provided me with great insights and renewed motivation and enthusiasm.’
- ‘This was outstanding, and easily the most valuable part of the experience to me.’
- ‘The insights of the mentors were incredibly valuable, both on a personal level, and to the dynamics of the group as a whole.’

Participant interaction

The opportunity to interact with other participants was also rated highly by respondents, but not as highly as the mentor interaction. Nineteen out of the 27 participants who responded to the survey (70%) reported that participant interaction contributed to their experience at A6 'to a great extent'. The remainder said it contributed 'to some extent'. Five of the six males rated it 'to a great extent' compared with about two-thirds of the female respondents.

Comments about the participant interaction included:

- 'It was a fantastic opportunity to spend quality time interacting with other members of the profession and discussing/comparing, themes, issues, trends etc...'
- 'My interaction with other participants was invaluable; meeting other professionals with similar depth of experience, but from diverse backgrounds was a fantastic networking/information sharing opportunity.'

Professional activity

In order to gauge the impact of the Institute on respondents' level of leadership activity, they were asked to indicate their level of professional and other leadership activity before attending Aurora, and since attending Aurora. The data were collected from open-ended questions. Mentors have been included in this part of the analysis.

The responses have been tabulated on the basis of whether the level of activity after A6 was none, the same or increased. An increase in activity could be constituted by either joining professional associations in Australia and New Zealand, to sitting on more committees, or taking a more active role on the committees they already sat on.

Table 10 shows that two-thirds of the participant who responded reported an increase in their level of professional activity since attending Aurora 2003. About 30 per cent reported the same level of professional activities before and after attending Aurora 2003. Only one participant reported no involvement in any professional activities, but that person was studying for a postgraduate qualification and noted this was consuming all his/her spare time.

Table 10. Changes in professional activity after attending A6 – participants and mentors

	Professional activity (frequency)		
	None	Same	Increase after A6
participants	1	8	18
mentors	0	4	2

Comments included:

- ‘My involvement has changed in committees I am on. I have been taking less of a back seat and in some committees have made suggestions and changes so that these committees work more effectively. Aurora has also made me even more aware of the multitude of benefits not just to the organisation but also to me personally of being an active participant on committees. ‘

Mentors

All of the mentors who responded to the questionnaire had more than 22 years experience as professional librarians. The mentor respondents comprised five females and one male.

In contrast to the participants, five of the six mentors who responded to the questionnaire rated the Institute of great value to their work, but only two rated it ‘of great value’ to their career (with the rest rating it ‘of moderate value’ to their career). All of the mentors said that interaction with the participants contributed ‘to a great extent’ to their A6 experience.

In regard to professional activity, predictably four of the six mentors who responded to the survey reported the same (high) level of activity before and after A6 (Table 10). Two reported an already high level of participation, that they increased even further, with one mentor attributing this to A6 and one not.

Self-reported changes in leadership skills and behaviour

Although it is very difficult to prove the benefits of attending the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute, emerging leadership awareness and behaviour were evident in many of the responses to the questionnaire. Four of the A6 respondents said they had moved into higher positions since attending Aurora and another three said they were actively applying for other jobs as a result of attending the Institute. They cited their participation in the Institute as an influence that assisted with their decisions.

The comments have been broken down into a number of areas that characterise leadership behaviour:

Self-awareness

- 'Better understanding of myself, my behaviour and others' reactions to me. I have also re-focussed and crystallised my own personal goals.'
- 'More confidence, less fear of not being liked, as I now realise this was holding me back.'
- 'I have a clearer focus of my capabilities (and where my strengths lie) and which direction I want to head in my career. As a result, I am a lot more confident in my own decisions about what I do.'

Career management

- 'I can now see myself going further in my career than I could before [Aurora]. I am more confident when applying for promotions/new positions...'
- 'My perceived career path has changed trajectory, becoming higher both long- and short-term. I am keen to take on more responsibility earlier, and to make a more significant contribution throughout my working life.'
- 'I have increased expectations about what I want to achieve now...'
- 'I show more confidence in being in a leadership role and this has resulted in me applying for and getting a new position, as well as being more involved in the professional association in NZ.'
- 'I have become more daring and since Aurora have applied for 2 jobs (that I would have previously thought too far beyond me and not applied for).'

Vision

- 'Try to keep my eye on the vision and big goals and not get too bogged down in the day to day work.'
- 'I am working at a different level – taking more of a place amongst the 'big guns' in terms of policy and strategic alliances. I am more sure of my worthiness to contribute and know I have something valuable to offer to these bigger picture forums.'
- 'I'm more self-aware and determined to look at the future and bigger picture – where are we going – rather than just short term solutions to any issues/problems.'
- 'I have also considered the broader profession, rather than merely myself in terms of what I would like to achieve in my working life.'

Self-confidence

- ‘A general improvement in my self-confidence as a leader, resulting in better leadership!’
- ‘More confident in my leadership ability. I observe people more and pick up on their interests to drive an innovation or project.’
- ‘I am much more confident about giving ‘not so good’ feedback and talking to staff members about a ‘difficult’ issue when the need arises.’
- ‘More confident in my leadership ability. I observe people more and pick up on their interests to drive an innovation or project.’

Taking risks

- ‘Aurora has made me realise that there are many opportunities and possibilities and I need to be more proactive.’
- ‘Knowing that I will encounter many obstacles along the way and that tackling these is the only way to move forward – step into the fear.’
- ‘Looking hard at career opportunities outside my comfort zone (either geographically, or in a different field) [take more risks]’

Setting goals

- ‘Increased confidence that I could attain a very high level of position within the profession.’
- ‘There have been changes in my leadership behaviour since Aurora. One main factor is confidence. I have the confidence to try new things and I am working more effectively with team members and managers. It has given me the professional edge to be more objective and proactive.’
- ‘Surprisingly, it has slowed me down a bit in some ways – helped me focus on what’s important – bring some balls down out of the air and get some of my personal priorities clearer too.’

Adapting to change

- ‘I am also more likely to suggest changes, or new ways of looking at how things are currently being done to how they might be done in the future. Thinking outside the box and challenging the status quo...’

Discussion

The questionnaire elicited a strong response rate – 84 per cent for the participants and 75 per cent for the mentors. Respondents completed all multiple-choice questions and the majority commented on each of the six open-ended questions.

A6 was perceived by 100 per cent of respondents as beneficial to their work and careers. The majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with A6 in terms of its impact on their work and careers. A large majority also valued the interaction at A6 with other Aurora participants and with the mentors.

Although the population of 32 participants and 8 mentors who attended A6 is too small to produce cross-tabulations with any statistical significance, the general trends indicated by the quantitative analysis are backed up by the written answers to the open-ended questions in the survey.

Mentoring was shown to be a particular strength of A6. The Aurora Foundation Ltd Board considers the mentoring component a key part of the Institute. Aurora Chairman Warren Horton, former Director-General of the National Library of Australia, personally selects and invites the mentors for each Institute. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents said the interaction with mentors contributed to the quality of A6 ‘to a great extent’ and the remainder said ‘to a moderate extent’. This finding supports the emphasis that Aurora places on the mentoring component.

Male participants were generally more appreciative of the value of the mentor and participant interaction opportunities at A6 than were their female counterparts, although the small population size warns against generalising this finding to a wider population. However, it raises the question of whether the males usually have less opportunity in their working lives to network, compared with females, perhaps because the profession is predominantly female. To promote networking and provide continuity for the Aurora community, the Aurora Foundation has a closed electronic mailing and discussion list available only to participants and mentors. State-based subsets of the list are sometimes made available to Aurorans who are organising special Aurora events.

In a future study, it would be useful to ask participants whether they had maintained contact with the mentors, and with other participants, to see whether professional networks had been established and sustained as a result of attendance at the Institute.

In contrast with the participants, who found greater value in A6 to their careers than to their work, five of the six mentor respondents rated the Institute of great value to their work but only two of the six rated it ‘of great value’ to their career. This would seem to reflect that the mentors are already at the peak of their careers, but can still benefit in their working lives from refining their leadership skills.

Mentors reported high levels of value in both their interaction with participants and with the other mentors. This may reflect the fact that the networking with other mentors was a valuable opportunity in otherwise busy professional lives. The value of the participant interaction may have been in seeing the rising talent in the profession which reassured them that future of the profession was in good hands, and also served as a first-hand recruitment opportunity.

The analysis showed a trend for participants with less than 11 years experience in librarianship perceiving greater value in A6 to their work and careers, compared with their more experienced counterparts. This is not unexpected, since those with more experience probably already had acquired leadership skills and knowledge on-the-job and perhaps attended previous courses that covered some aspects of leadership training. One of the participants said that continuous training over a period of years, including a senior management course, meant that 'the impact of Aurora was less dramatic'.

This trend does raise the question about whether Aurora should restrict its recruitment to early-to-mid career people, like the Snowbird Institute that targets people who are at a relatively early point in their library careers (Summers and Summers, 1991, p38). This would also depend on whether the Aurora Foundation Board feels this finding for A6 would apply more broadly to other Aurora Leadership cohorts.

A strong link was found between participants' attendance at A6 and a subsequent increase in their level of professional activity, indicating that A6 has already had an impact on participants. The increase in activity could comprise an increase on the number of committees they joined, an increase in their activity on existing committees, or some combination of the two. Any discussion should note that people who have been in the profession for longer are more likely to have a higher level of activity. However, this study focused instead on the change in the level of activity, rather than try to compare levels of activity. Mentors reported mostly the same high level of activity before and after attending A6. This was expected because the mentors are leaders in the profession who are already aware of the benefits and responsibilities of professional association membership and activity.

The analysis showed some evidence that the librarians from public, State and National libraries found more value in A6 to their careers than did the academic and special government librarians, although every group found the same value in A6 to work. This could be because public librarians have until quite recently, due to lack of funding been under-represented at Aurora Leadership Institutes compared with their academic counterparts,. Therefore they may value the opportunity more and work harder to get the maximum benefit from the Institutes.

Since the purpose of the Aurora Leadership Institutes is to develop leaders for the future, it is critical that the program has lasting effects. The responses show that six months after the Institute, the majority of participants perceive a strong legacy from A6, which continues to influence their decisions about work and career. The perception of positive benefits flowing from A6 is important because participants noted that participants who have a positive reaction to the training are more likely to learn and to transfer the learning to their jobs (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

When assessing the impact of A6, a question arises about whether a sufficient amount of time has elapsed since A6 for behaviour and attitudinal changes to demonstrate the greater leadership abilities of the participants. This six month follow-up study allows preliminary investigation, but it would also be useful to study all the Aurora alumni since 1995 to see whether they have moved up to become leaders in the profession. This was outside the scope of this study.

Although it is too soon to tell the effect of A6 on participants' careers in any real sense, four of the A6 participants specifically mentioned that they had moved into higher positions since attending Aurora and another three said they were actively applying for other jobs as a result of attending the Institute. They cited their participation at A6 as an influence that assisted with their decisions.

There is also a question about whether the activities and benefits resulting from attendance at A6 can necessarily be attributed wholly or in part to the Institute, given that the participants were chosen to attend on the basis of their leadership potential and may well have taken on leadership activities and career progression anyway. While it is not possible to separate the effect of A6 from everything else that has occurred in participants' lives over the past six months, participants provided compelling evidence that A6 enhanced their leadership abilities, knowledge and attitudes.

While this study of A6 used a self-evaluation approach, a possible alternative for future research would be to ask the nominators of the participants to comment on their performance at work post-Aurora. This could provide useful validity indicators that were not possible within the scope of this study.

This study is not able to demonstrate conclusively that A6 has resulted in behaviour changes and resulting impacts on organisations and communities, but this is not surprising due to the difficult nature of measuring this type of change, as found by McLean and Moss (2003). However, it does provide evidence of an increase in leadership activity through the many examples provided by respondents that they attribute (directly or indirectly) to their attendance at A6, reflecting changes in their behaviour, attitudes and knowledge. A6 participants variously described how they have gained confidence in their abilities and ideas, put into practice new leadership skills and applied for promotions.

It is worthwhile noting that the Aurora Leadership Institutes have had the same facilitators since their inception – the previously mentioned John Shannon and Becky Schreiber. The facilitators provide continuity and consistency in terms of course content, so that every participant who attends and Aurora Leadership Institute, no matter what year they attend, has the same experience, which gives cohesion to the group. In addition, the mentor selection policy has been choose some mentors who have previously mentored at Aurora together with some who have not mentored before, thereby increasing the pool of available mentors over time. This too, has provided continuity and consistency for the program. If there is a change of facilitators in the future, this could impact on the program itself and how it is perceived.

Conclusion

Aurora Foundation Board Ltd members Warren Horton and Ian McCallum believe the findings of this study will further substantiate Aurora's high reputation in the community and encourage even more people to nominate for the program, thereby raising standards in the profession even higher. The findings of this study imply that demand for places will increase over time as the benefits derived from attending are even more widely realised.

Like A6, the 2004 Institute at Thredbo NSW in February is oversubscribed (with 56 applicants applying for the 32 places). This suggests an unfulfilled need for leadership training in Australia and New Zealand that would justify running the Institute more frequently or increasing the number of places available at each one. The Aurora Foundation Board tried increasing the number of places to 40 at the 2002 Leadership Institute, but it proved unwieldy.

As the number of Aurora graduates increases, a further effect will be to raise awareness of the importance of leadership in the profession in Australia and New Zealand. This will raise the bar for everyone, whether or not they have attended an Aurora Leadership Institute.

Summing up the impact of A6, one participant called it 'the gift that keeps on giving' and another wrote:

'At the end of Aurora I felt that I had been given a gift – support, ideas, a fresh perspective, time to focus on and embrace my strengths and lots of ideas and affirmation. I believe I am better at my job as a result.'

Appendix A - Questionnaire

This survey is designed to discover your perceptions of the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute. I am also interested in finding out the impact of attending the Institute on your subsequent professional activities. I expect it will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses are confidential and will not be connected to any individual in the reporting phase. Please read the Informed consent form for more privacy information.

This research has been considered and approved by the University of Canberra Committee for Ethics in Human Research. Please contact Ms Alison Langley of the Committee Secretariat with any queries about the ethics process on (02) 6201 2148.

There are 2 ways to complete the questionnaire:

1. Email: please bold your answer for the multiple choice questions
2. Mail: please circle your answer for the multiple choice questions

1. In what type of library did you work at the time you attended the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute?

- Academic
- Public
- Special (government sector)
- Special (private sector)
- State/national
- School
- Other (please specify)

2. How many years of professional library experience did you have before participating in the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute?

Years_____

3. How do you rate the value of the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute, to your work?

- Of great value
- Of moderate value
- Of little value
- Of no value

4. How do you rate the value of the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute to your career?

- Of great value
- Of moderate value
- Of little value
- Of no value

5. To what extent did your interaction with Aurora participants contribute to the quality of your experience in the program?

To a great extent

To some extent

Not at all

5a. Please expand

6. To what extent did your interaction with Aurora mentors contribute to the quality of your experience in the program?

To a great extent

To some extent

Not at all

6a. Please expand

7. Please indicate your involvement in professional associations before and since participating in Aurora?

7a. National or international professional library associations?

Before _____

Since _____

7b. Other professional associations?

Before _____

Since _____

8. Since attending Aurora, has your level of involvement changed on committees at institutions where you have been employed (i.e., college/university committees, school or departmental committees, city or local committees)?

9. Can you describe any changes in your leadership behaviour, that are attributable in some substantial part to your attendance at the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute?

10. Can you describe any changes in you, that are attributable in some substantial part to your attendance at the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute?

11. Please indicate any additional comments that are important with regard to the impact of your participation in the Aurora Leadership Institute on your work.

12. What impact has your attendance at the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute had on your perceived career path and progression?

13. Were you a participant or a mentor at the 2003 Aurora Leadership Institute?

Participant

Mentor

14. What is your gender?

Female

Male

15. What is your age group?

21 – 25

26 – 30

31 – 35

36 – 40

41 – 45

46 – 50

50+

Please email, or post, your responses back to me by **Friday 29 August 2003**.

If you prefer post, I would be happy to provide a reply-paid envelope. The reply address is: Aurora Survey, School of Information Management and Tourism, University of Canberra, ACT 2601 Australia.

I will email you a copy of the research when it is completed.

Thank you for your participation. Kay Barney

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