



The NextGen Leadership Scorecard Survey Findings

January 2020

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INTRODUCTION

ALIA President Robert Knight has taken leadership as the theme for his presidential year, from May 2019 to May 2020, highlighting the vital role of strong leadership at every level, in order to secure a sustainable future for the library and information sector.

The theme has been commended by ALIA Members, who have been keen to participate in what is seen to be a necessary and timely discussion.

A survey was carried out at the end of 2019 to generate responses to an Issues Paper, published on the [ALIA website](#). Responses were received from 158 people between 22 October and 15 November, 2019.

This report covers the findings from the survey and provides qualitative and quantitative data about our performance as a sector. This will provide the basis for further discussions at our ALIA Leadership & Innovation Forums early in 2020.

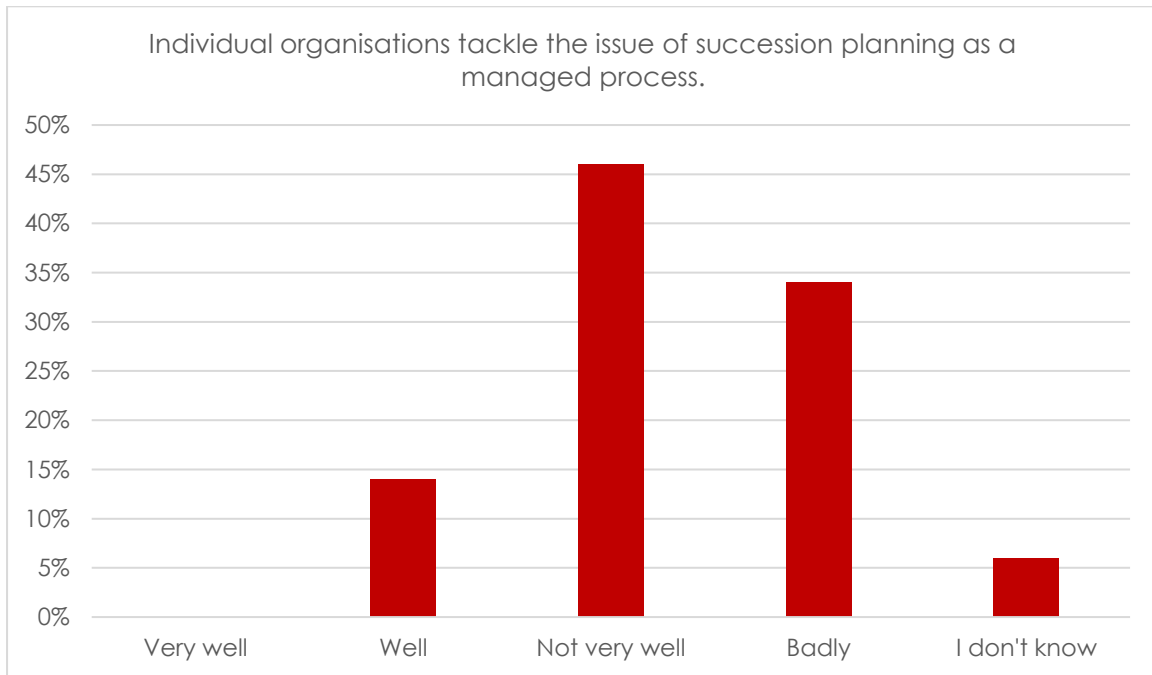
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



Survey respondents ranked the sector's performance against the eight desirable characteristics for the LIS sector identified in the first round of consultation. (For further information about these, see the [Issues Paper](#).)

While industry networks came out as the best area of performance, only just over half of respondents thought the sector did this well. The area of poorest performance was succession planning, with 80% of respondents saying that the sector does not do this well.

SUCCESSION PLANNING



Survey result

14% of respondents said the sector performed well in this sphere; 80% said not very well or badly and 6% didn't know.

Comments

Most of the comments in this section related to the ageing workforce, the retirement of Baby Boomers, a general lack of preparedness from employers and a number of examples of organisations bringing in people from outside the LIS profession as future leaders.

"It seems to be assumed that the same people will be doing their jobs indefinitely, so succession planning has not been held up as an important task."

"Succession planning is now hitting us as a critical need and should be undertaken in a more thorough and supported manner."

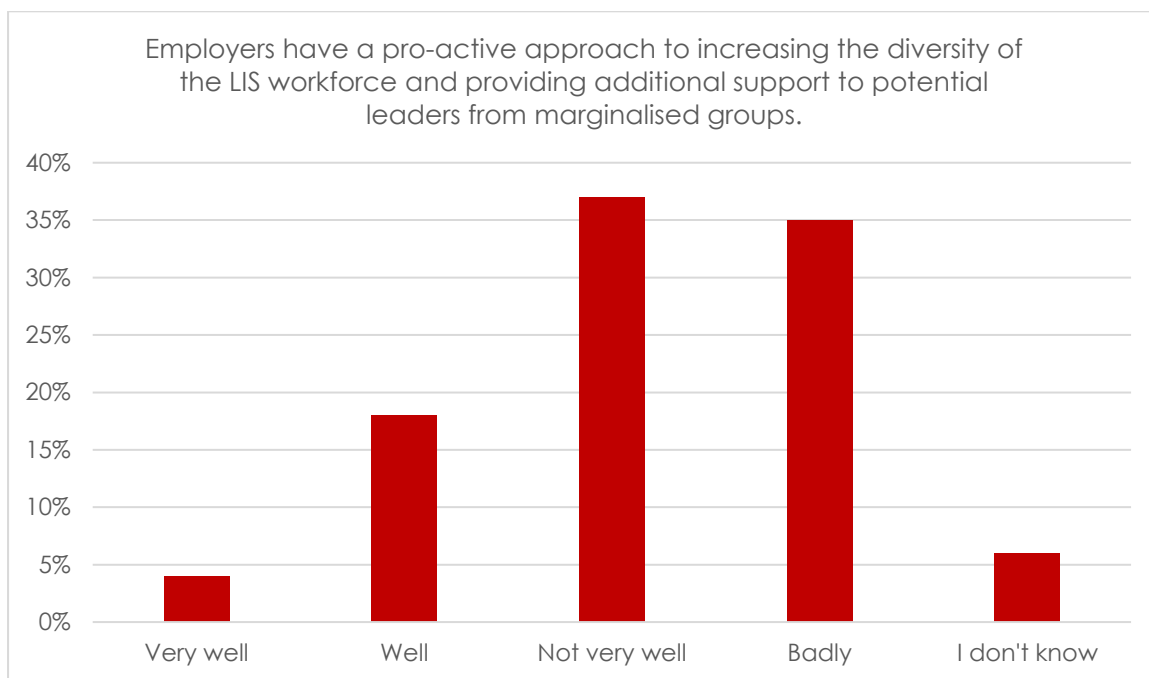
One concern was the loss of corporate knowledge resulting from a careless approach to succession planning and reluctance from people to hand over their hard-earned professional knowledge.

"The industry has a lot of tacit knowledge which isn't being passed on."

Respondents had few solutions but as a starting point, succession planning needed to be recognised as a major issue for the sector.

"Understanding leadership as a process which has identified tools or leadership approaches may make succession planning easier to conceptualise."

DIVERSITY



Survey result

22% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 72% said not very well or badly and 6% didn't know.

Comments

Respondents recognised the lack of diversity in their libraries, its importance, and that this was not something which could be cured overnight. Libraries outside the major cities were said to have greater difficulty in recruiting a diverse workforce than those in metro areas.

"This is so important to ensure the future relevance of libraries."

"Diversity is often seen by leaders as an afterthought while for the new generation of librarians it is paramount to inclusion."

The obvious solution is to recruit more staff members from different backgrounds but

respondents said current managers and staff needed to be equipped to develop and retain a diverse team. People would benefit from training and awareness-raising to understand the barriers to entry and the challenges others face in the workplace.

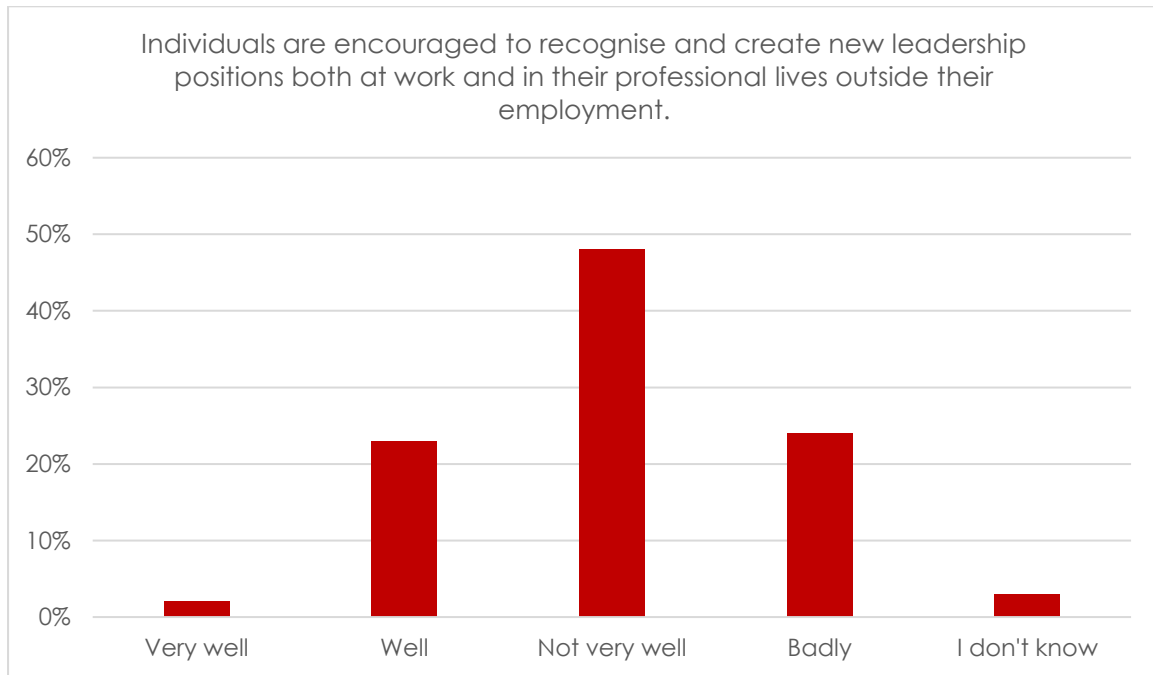
"Leadership training focused on emotional intelligence, personal style and value which has improved acceptance of diverse approaches."

"Instead of encouraging others to have the confidence to lean in, how about old white people lean out instead? Actively, radically cede that power?"

The lack of appropriately qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds was also highlighted as a gap.

"We need to address this through allowing unqualified staff to be mentored to study in the field."

ENCOURAGEMENT



Survey result

25% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 72% said not very well or badly and 3% didn't know.

Comments

In this area, the sector and the Association were seen to be performing well but the level of support from individual organisations varied considerably, with comments across the spectrum from good to bad.

"Supportive peers are all around."

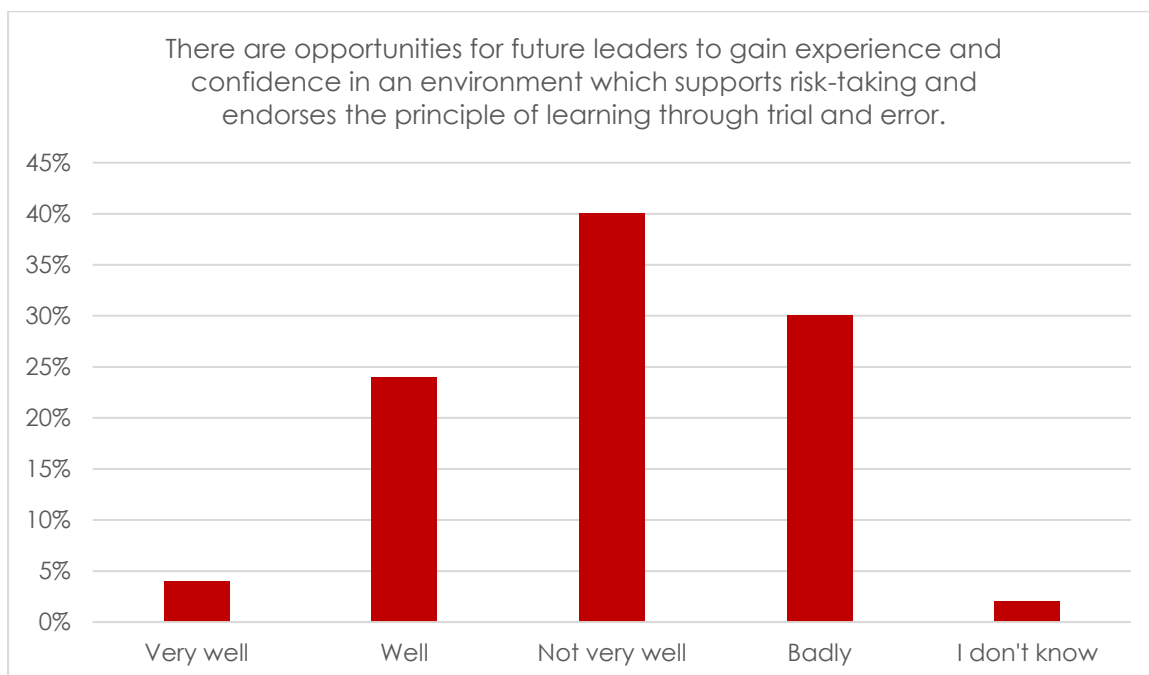
"Encouragement is haphazard, though not withheld if specific goals are mentioned."

"Alarmingly thin on the ground."

While organisational support was necessary, there were also statements about supporting each other as individuals.

"Peers need to encourage each other to complement any encouragement coming from leaders."

EXPERIENCE



Survey result

28% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 70% said not very well or badly and 2% didn't know.

Comments

Gaining leadership experience was seen as essential but, for most respondents, opportunities were limited and this was especially so for people in regional settings.

"It would seem the only way you can get a different experience is to change jobs, which is not always practical."

This was felt to stem from budget considerations (not filling higher positions when staff were on extended leave), lack of capacity to participate in projects beyond one's normal scope (staffing kept at a minimum), lack of movement in the higher realms of the organisation.

"Why don't we try more rotation, to walk in someone else's shoes?"

Another factor was risk-aversity in organisations.

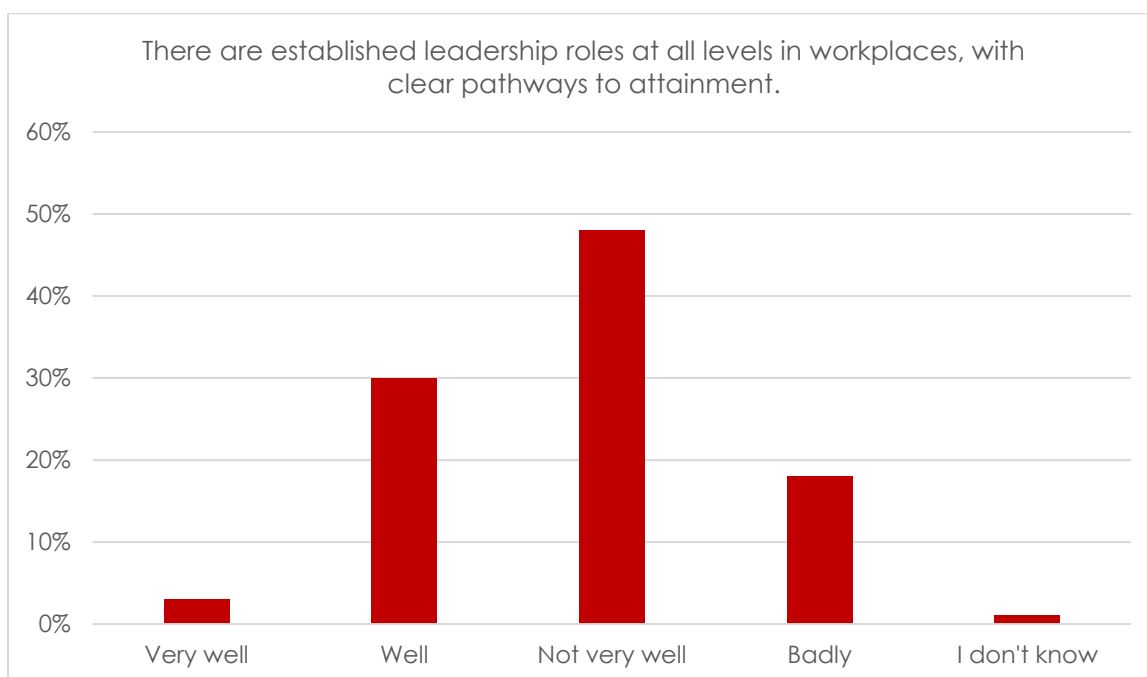
"If an innovation does not work, this is too often regarded as a failure, not a learning experience."

"Bureaucracy is also a barrier that makes it either too difficult to innovate or makes it seem too much effort to try."

One respondent talked about the importance of gaining experience across the wider sector. This was one of the factors behind the development of the ALIA PD Specialisations, which allow people to focus on a particular area which may not be part of their current role, and gain formal acknowledgement of this knowledge.

"Being able to transfer from one part of the industry to another would be good to highlight."

ROLES AND PATHWAYS



Survey result

34% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 65% said not very well or badly and 1% didn't know.

Comments

Respondents felt there was a lack of clarity about roles and pathways, partly as a result of recruitment practices of the larger organisation, partly because of restructuring or downsizing, and partly because of the changing nature of library work.

"I feel that pathways in the profession are murky. Library leadership roles are not being advertised as 'librarian' or similar information profession roles. I don't think this is inherently bad but I think that we have swung so far in the diversity of professional background that library teams are rarely being lead by librarians and that

young professionals are not seeing themselves in those team leader roles."

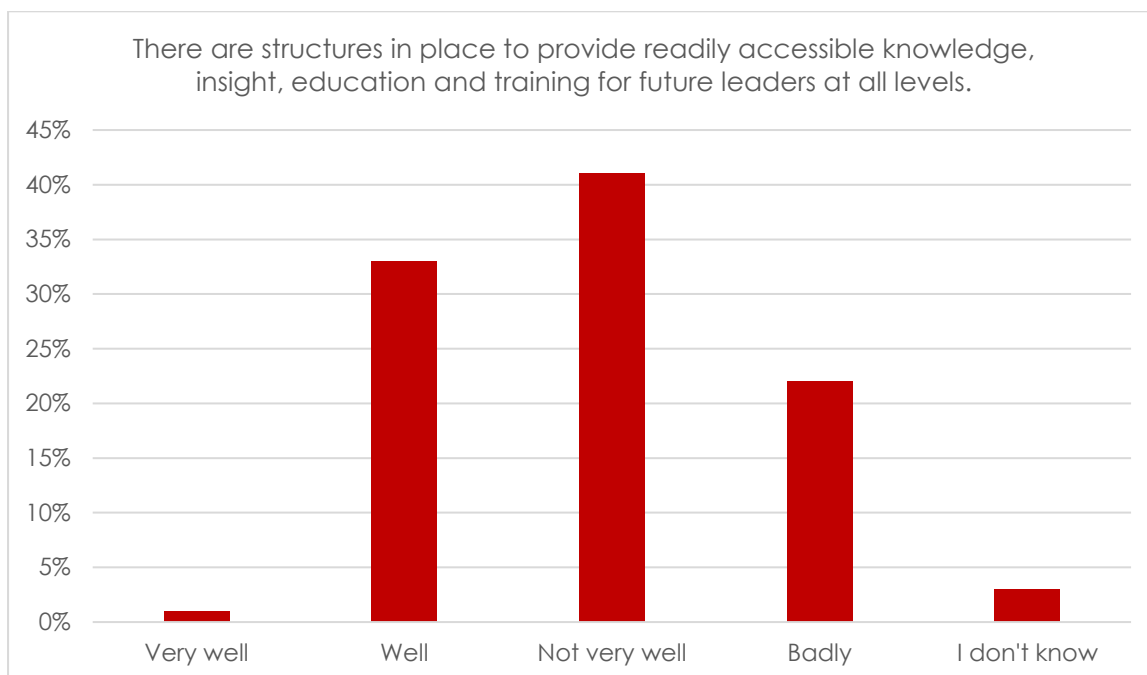
There were also comments about organisational hierarchies, which provide pathways but may lack flexibility and agility. Pathways to advancement included the need to be mobile and this was particularly true for those working in regional areas.

"You have to leave your current organisation to move higher."

One respondent talked about the potential for library staff to take on responsibilities in allied areas of the organisation to gain valuable leadership experience, for example education or community development.

ALIA could play a part in creating opportunities through the development of a formal exchange program.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Survey result

34% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 63% said not very well or badly and 3% didn't know.

Comments

Respondents reported widely varying access to opportunities for education and training in leadership and other aspects of their jobs. For some, there were plenty of opportunities; for others, they were few and far between, or it was felt they were mainly offered to a restricted group of staff.

"Competition for education and professional development places is strong so not all members in one organisation are given equal opportunities to participate."

"I don't think there are many leaders who encourage staff to undertake professional development activities. Quite often if it isn't directly related to things you are doing you are not permitted to go. This doesn't allow staff to develop their skills in

other areas, preparing them for future roles."

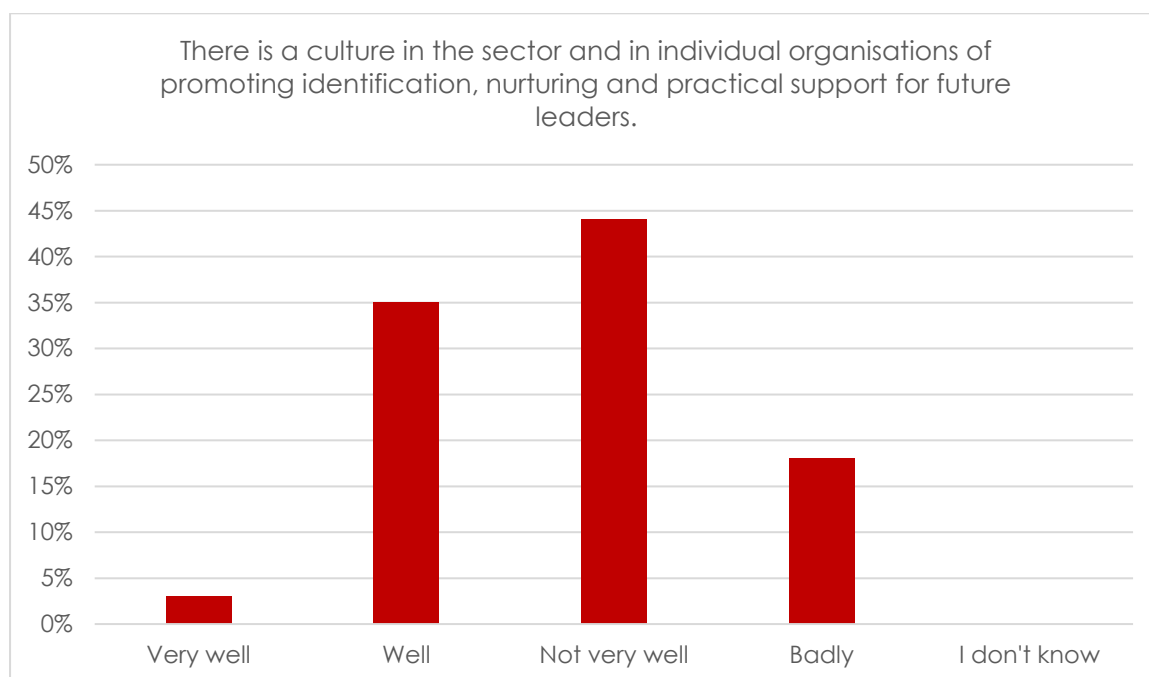
People with no local LIS courses were concerned by this gap in provision. While online study was available, this was less attractive, partly because of the loss of face-to-face networking.

There was an acceptance that while some training and professional development may be funded by the employer, people may also need to self-fund.

There were suggestions and requests for the sector to develop ways of formally recognising experiential and on-the-job training; for ALIA to create a leadership institute; for employers to support educational opportunities for librarians in management and leadership. This was in addition to LIS educators ensuring they remain in touch with the needs of the sector.

'Being educated as a librarian does not give the skills in leadership, people or the business of libraries.'

CULTURE



Survey result

38% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 62% said not very well or badly.

Comments

Some organisations were said to have a better leadership culture than others. The culture is dependent on the leadership team, and where the library is a small part of a much larger organisation, it can be even more difficult for library staff to win a place on the leadership track.

"Many public library managers are now expected to do much more than libraries, however they tend to learn on their feet. It is a credit to the industry that library managers are being recognised for their skills, however managers need to be trained to work well with elected members and be better 'salespeople' for their profession."

People talked about the scarcity of leadership roles and the high degree of competition in their local area. They also talked about the need to establish a positive culture to encourage leadership

growth: compassionate, supportive, sharing, collaborative, forgiving, kind, respectful and courteous, enabling people to take risks.

"Librarians have traditionally been risk-takers but this is hindered by risk-adverse state and local governments."

Respondents recognised that people needed to be given a choice and that leadership wasn't for everyone.

"Often library professionals do not want to step up into leadership roles, even when encouraged by others."

There were concerns about "gatekeeping" behaviours, holding on to knowledge and preventing others from progressing, and entrenched attitudes which create a barrier to change and innovation.

Diversity was a particular issue, with several comments about the lack of diversity in the workforce generally and in leadership roles in particular.

"It appears those who talk the loudest are the ones who are seen as leaders, regardless of their merit. This needs to change by identifying and encouraging other leadership qualities such as thought leadership and maturity."

ALIA was seen as having an important role to play in raising awareness about leadership issues, creating forums for people to exchange ideas, communicating and sharing best practice, and providing opportunities for people to explore leadership roles outside their workplace.

"The culture to promote leadership in library association groups and forums is strong."

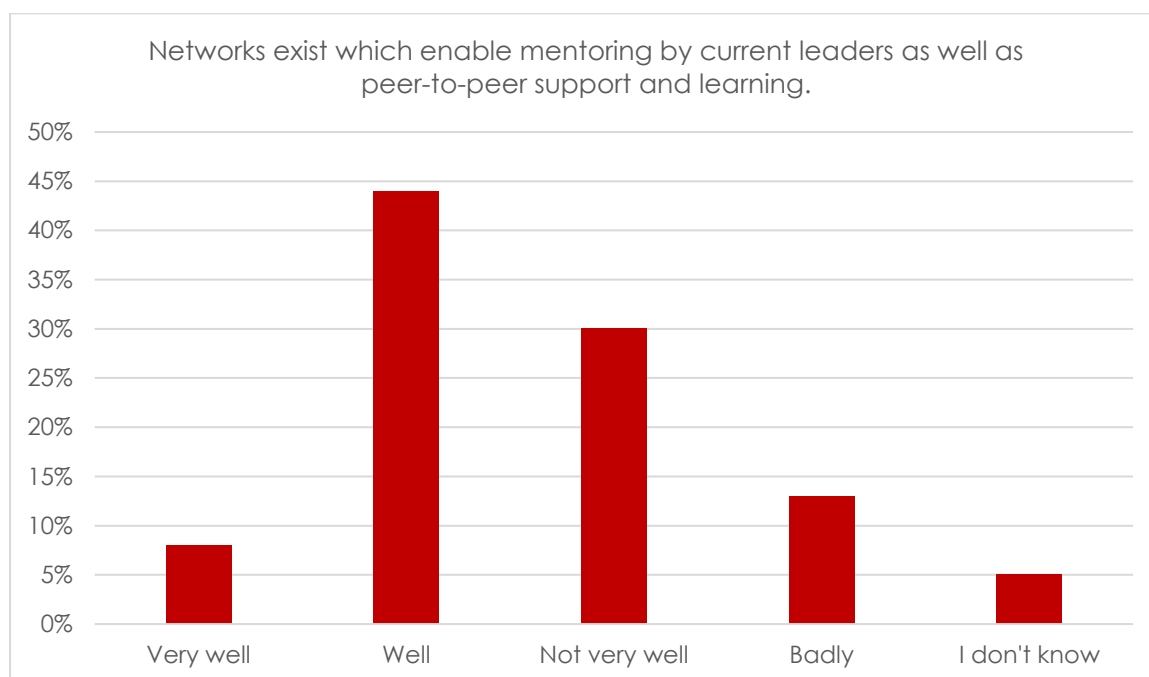
A need for more mentoring was identified, as part of the process of building the skills and confidence of people to step into leadership roles.

"I think library land is supportive of aspiring leaders from a cultural perspective, however there is a lack of confidence across the sector about our own leadership abilities – 'imposter syndrome' is rife, particularly amongst women."

There were also comments about people taking a lead on their own career development.

"We mustn't overlook the responsibility of each individual to take control of their professional development and seek out leadership and promotional opportunities."

NETWORKS



Survey result

52% of respondents said the sector performed well or very well in this sphere; 44% said not very well or badly and 4% didn't know.

Comments

This was the only area where more than half of respondents felt the sector performed well, and ALIA was credited for contributing to this strength.

"ALIA facilitates more networking opportunities than my organisation."

It was felt that personal networks were an individual professional responsibility, but that employers should encourage and enable staff to foster valuable connections with other libraries as an organisational benefit.

"Happy for you to join but please be ready to contribute and take on a role. Passive participation is not networking."

"Employees should be encouraged to work on these with consistency – it takes time to build genuine relationships and networks."

Respondents spoke about real life and virtual networks, the latter providing opportunities for people at all stages of their career and in different parts of Australia to connect.

"ALIA Groups are truly excellent, as are their conference committees. Plenty of great ways to network using social media, too."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

How we define leadership was raised. *"Leadership should be about providing vision, correcting erroneous vision, motivating the workforce, moving on to green pastures not wallowing in past mistakes."*

There was some blurring of the line between management and leadership. *"Many want to participate in leadership but don't feel they are able or suitable to take on the complex world of people management."*

LIS education was felt to be an area for expansion, *"incorporating other areas outside of librarianship – business management, staff management, HR and building and facilities management."* Respondents also felt we could learn a lot from other industries and that there is the potential to develop transferable skills in the leadership arena.

Leadership needed to keep up with changes in the LIS sector. *"What is the point of being equipped to lead a reference service team, for example, if the industry is moving away from providing a reference service?"*

Libraries need to promote leadership opportunities to a wider group, *"on job platforms, library sites, groups and social media, for better access."*

There was also the question of reward for people who step up to take on leadership positions at all levels of the organisation. *"What will people get out of being a leader? Are we expecting high levels of engagement and work from entry level staff but not paying them well or providing a good work environment?"* Burnout was a particular concern, especially for people at the early stage of their career.

We need a commitment to advancing leadership skills across all organisations in the sector. *"Could there be a code of agreement?"*

Respondents spoke of the need to articulate and build a profile around leadership. *"There is currently little debate and discussion in the Australian LIS literature. Only through understanding leadership can we develop appropriate tools and leadership approaches that will suit the LIS sector. Otherwise leadership continues to exist as a vague notion rather than a topic about which we can be informed."*