

Celebrating the Future – Adelaide Style

of the conference on Sunday. Unlike some of the other English delegates I was only there for the week so I had to choose what I could do with the only free day I had which was Saturday. I decided to book an excursion to Hermanus in the hope of catching sight of the Southern Right Whales. To see whales in their natural habitat and hear their sounds was spiritually very uplifting. It set the scene for the conference itself.

The conference programme was exceptionally good and we were extremely privileged to have presenters of such gravitas and excellence. Not only did I learn about the laws and history of South Africa, I learned about the people and the challenges they face. The organisers had put together a very finely balanced programme peppered with visits to the various attractions such as Table Mountain, Two Oceans Aquarium, Boulders Beach to view the penguin colony and Cape Point, Robben Island and culminating in the annual dinner at Neethlingshof Wine Estate after the obligatory wine tasting! Meeting the delegates from other African nations and hearing

about the challenges they face in such countries as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria was a humbling experience. We all grumble about bottom line costs and down-sizing. These law librarians face much harder challenges not only from a lack of resources but from censorship and a disregard for human rights.

South Africa is a beautiful country but it has many challenges and the biggest one is the AIDS epidemic. I came back with a different perspective on life. We are so lucky in the West and we should not grumble as we all invariably do. I would urge those of you who have never applied for a bursary to do so with haste and alacrity. Check out the BIALL web site. I would like to take this opportunity to thank BIALL for making such a wonderful experience possible and for the support I also received from my employer.

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Reference

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Claire McWilliam reports on her trip down under to attend the Asia Pacific Special Health and Law Librarians' Conference.

The 10th Asia Pacific Special Health and Law Librarians' conference took place in Adelaide in August 2003 and as a slightly nervous recipient of a BIALL bursary I walked into the breathtaking new Convention Centre for the opening reception. However from the first night there was no shortage of interesting and friendly people to talk to. Brian Murray of Legal Library Services Ltd in Yeovil engineered my introduction to the committee members of the Australian Law Librarians Group – without actually moving from his stand. Brian and I were the only UK representatives at the conference although Richard Susskind gave his presentation on video and others came from Norway and the USA. While lunching with a group of Australian Department of Defence librarians it became very clear to me how big a country



Claire McWilliam and Brian Murray

Australia is – most of them had spoken on the phone or e-mailed others round the table but had never actually met before and so quite expected me to be another of their number.

Like BIALL conferences there was a most enjoyable social programme – Lexis Nexis Australia sponsored the conference dinner at which Mem Fox, a leading Australian children's author, spoke, or more accurately, read from some of her titles. Was I glad that I was past the bedtime story stage of life as my efforts were so inferior to her magical narrations! The actual conference format differed: there were five keynote speakers who brought us all together and the five remaining sessions were concurrent ones

with streams aimed at audiences from different backgrounds – health, law or special. Some brave souls tried to

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session hop – attending one paper here and another paper there but not many speakers kept sufficiently to time to make it a very satisfactory option. In early mornings and at lunchtimes there were publishers sessions and meetings of special interest groups – from the Federal Libraries Information Network to National OPALs (one person libraries, rather than those specialising in jewellery!) – and AGMs of the Australian Law Librarians Group and other groups. The whole programme was a masterpiece of planning!

There were interesting gems in many papers and I came away with the feeling from the whole conference that problems down-under were similar to those here, but usually with a different twist. For example, Cate Dawson gave a very inspiring paper on how she turned the situation to her own advantage when the charity for which she worked for seriously reduced her budget. But it was the keynote speakers who really inspired me.

Learning Leadership's Lessons – for a Future Worth Celebrating

The highlight of the conference for me was this opening paper from Dr Marianne Broadbent, Group Vice President of Gartner, the world's largest adviser on the business uses of information technology – I wanted to find a quiet corner afterwards to digest her advice on how to deal with life in the 21st century. It was all the more pertinent as Marianne had started her career as a school librarian. Her message was that everyone had to behave like a leader and it was critical that information managers were totally integrated with their environment and knew the business and the decision-makers. As our organisations were under pressure to do things better, more quickly, more cheaply so we had to too. Good enough was often OK as long as we communicated our group's true value to the enterprise, actively managed the trade-offs and the conflicts and understood that what we do was more critical than the behaviour we talked about.

Marianne's top tips for a future worth celebrating included:-

- Know and engage key decision-makers as individuals and colleagues
- Position yourself and remind others what you have achieved
- Keep your message simple: ask "How can I help this executive to be successful?"
- Provide case studies and examples – paint pictures
- Take every opportunity for "soak time" with business colleagues
- Make it really easy to use your services
- Help your business colleagues to be successful
- Have a business colleague as one of your mentors
- Brand everything you do – perception is everything.

There were six imperatives that information and technology professionals had to "live" to be effective and to gain deserved credibility: they must simultaneously

- Lead – be the bridge between the business and the information service
- Anticipate – sense key trends
- Strategise – shape demand and manage informed expectations
- Organise – sustain a high-performing team
- Deliver – provide cost-effective, timely services which are perceived as such
- Measure – know how you are going and why eg cost per employee

Other advice included:-

- work out your "elevator pitch" so that you can instantly make the connection between the services you provide and an increase in the organisation's revenue;
- always present options not problems
- build and sustain personal and positional credibility – think of yourself as your own brand.

How to Think About the Future

Richard Susskind reflected on the impact of current, emerging and future technologies on the work and careers of librarians. He argued that the professions in the future would no longer be dominated by one-to-one consultative, advisory services. Instead much professional knowledge and experience will be imparted via information systems, widely available across the internet. These information systems would be developed by a new breed of "information engineers" and librarians were ideally suited for this new role.

Susskind drew the distinction between automation (the traditional use of IT to streamline an existing service) and innovation (to do things that were not previously possible eg the cash dispenser giving 24 hour access to money). The internet had three fundamental uses: global e-mail; the worldwide web information system and facilitating online communities – people round the world, wherever they are, can communicate through bulletin boards, chatrooms, video conferencing. Professional firms can exploit this to communicate with their clients.

Susskind suggested that the internet revolution was at an interim stage – we were at the transition between a print-based society and the new information society – its long-term impact was underestimated. The dotcom bubble was like the railway bonanzas or the gold rushes in the past. While we still marvel at the internet, the next generation, who really never knew a pre-internet world, just take its services for granted and will turn to it rather than to books or to people. If we care about the next generation we will have to embrace the internet. It should give law firms access to a latent market as more people will be able to access legal guidance. Legal advice on the internet may be inferior to one-to-one services but it will be a lot better than having no guidance at all. To exploit this there would be a move toward expert systems. In the next generation of information and knowledge systems

the distinction between internal and external access would gradually dissolve so new systems should be being designed to offer access to external users.

E-learning would become the preferred interactive multi-media way of training/learning/teaching (better than books) and become the fundamental resource for knowledge management – ie just in time training. This had many advantages over just-in-case training which may be forgotten before it is actually used. After all, people remember better once they have used the information. Knowledge management in the past was reducing knowledge to paper – how much better would interactive e-learning be.

Susskind suggested that law firms should organise information round client episodes eg how to fire an employee or how to start a business – and not by departments or classification schemes – using all types of resources and make this available to clients. This sounds feasible for websites – I am not sure about reclassifying the bookstock that way!

Just in time knowledge management

David Snowden maintained that knowledge management should be the servant of the organisation as a whole and if it became a step on the career track it stopped being a servant. He suggested that there were three phases in the history of KM:-

- Up to 1995 information was gathered to support humans in their decision-making
- Business process engineering followed – efficiency at the cost of effectiveness to reduce the dependency on human beings. It was believed that nothing that happened in the past had any relevance for the future. Big consultants were now abandoning their KM practices as they were finding that people only looked at the documents to identify the authors
- The third stage was development of natural trusted knowledge networks with the focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency – 15 was the maximum number of people who can simultaneously trust each other; 150 was the maximum number of acquaintances that an individual can maintain.

There were three common misconceptions:-

- People make rational decisions based on carefully assessing all the options. Instead a new idea is matched against previous experience. As a result new ideas are usually derided because they do not fit previous experience
- Good practice is what matters – it is far better for survival that stories of failure go round the office quickly so that mistakes are not repeated

- You can write down all you know – to the contrary you know more than you can say and say more than you can write down. If you have a long-standing relationship with questioner you understand the context and trust what he will do with the information. If there is no shared relationship everything is qualified and transfer is inhibited.

Context management which links or connects people is much more important than knowledge management. Yellow pages of CVs are not the answer as people forget what they know and only remember in context. Informal networks lead to knowledge sharing.

Snowden is a strong advocate of narrative management as stories reveal patterns and it is possible to capture a huge number of stories very quickly and cheaply.

Purpose, Passion and Professionalism – the Keys to Knowledge Management and Service Success

The closing presentation was from Simon Tupman who gave an inspiring finale to the conference. He encouraged us not to take ourselves too seriously – life should be fun. We should get out of our comfort zone and challenge ourselves. We have to be in great SHAPE ie

Skills – continually enhance

Health – mental and physical

Attitude – how we work with others

Persistence – be prepared to slip back occasionally and don't take it personally

Energy and enthusiasm

If our value is identical tomorrow to what it is today, we are in great trouble: we must improve ourselves, promote ourselves, and have confidence in ourselves.

My conference souvenir was a copy of his book *Why lawyers should eat bananas* (ISBN: 0646404326 – in Hammicks catalogue). I just had to find out why (because they are good for you and great value for money – these essential qualities of a banana should be synonymous with those of a lawyer). Reading it I have learnt a lot about the pressures of being a lawyer along with much useful advice on work / life balance which is just as relevant to librarians as to lawyers.

Conclusion

The Adelaide conference was a brilliant experience and I am immensely grateful to BIALL for making it possible. I would recommend everyone to apply for a bursary if at all possible – and see how another part of the world lives and works.