

ALIA: the ongoing search for excellence



Virginia Walsh

Executive director

At a gut level, all of us know that much more goes into the process of keeping a large organisation vital and responsive than the policy statements, new strategies, plans, budgets, and organisation charts can possibly depict. But all too often we behave as though we don't know it. If we want change we fiddle with the strategy. Or we change the structure. Perhaps the time has come to change our ways.

Peters, Thomas J & Waterman, Robert H Jr, In search of excellence, lessons from America's best-run companies, Harper & Row, Australasian paperback edition, p3

The utility of the old adage 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' has always seemed, to me, dubious. It is often employed as an excuse for inaction — particularly in organisation reform. There is always room for improvement, but how to identify and implement the improvements we seek is not always easy.

And this is the task facing our Association as we embark on our current journey towards rethinking our goals and ambitions, our services and our governance. The revision of strategic plans, organisation charts, policy statements and the rest of the plethora of management tools is only part of the reform process. As Peters and Waterman conclude in their landmark publication, the ingredients for organisational success do not rely on reams of paperwork. What follows is a rough interpretation of some of the key positive aspects of successful companies which they identified:

- they get on with the job — they do not suffer from paralysis by analysis;
- they listen and act on the information they receive from their customers;
- they foster many leaders, encourage imaginative risk-taking and entrepreneurship;
- they achieve productivity targets through respect for their staff;
- their leaders have a hands-on, value-driven approach to their organisations; and
- they stick to their core business — the work they do best.

Since its establishment more than sixty years ago our organisation has constantly reviewed its operation and redefined its objectives. It has grown from a small organisation of professionals without formal training into one of the largest national associations in Australia. The Association has been responsible for securing and maintaining pro-

fessional standards and the accreditation of courses. Its leaders have worked hard to promote community rights to access the broadest spectrum of information in a variety of political and economic scenarios. On a per capita basis the membership of ALIA is bigger than either the Library Association in Britain or the American Library Association.

In this process of evolution and development the name of the organisation has changed from the Institute of Librarians to the Library Association of Australia and, in 1988, to its current name — the Australian Library and Information Association. The most recent change — the incorporation of the word 'information' in the name of the organisation — reflected one of the most fundamental shifts in our modern society. The emergence of the 'information society' has created exciting opportunities for libraries, has spawned the development of related information professionals and has also created some substantial challenges to and misrepresentations about the future of the profession.

As we tackle the next major transformation of the Association we will be providing a great deal of information to our members through *inCite*. The January issue contained president John Shipp's vision for the future. This issue contains more information about some of the key elements of the changes envisaged by the Leadership Committee. The greatest challenge is to create a new organisation which delivers better outcomes for the library community, whether these be in the delivery of excellence in education and training, strengthening our industrial muscle, raising our professional profile, escalating political recognition or enhancing opportunities for networking and personal development. Your feedback is required to ensure that the Leadership Committee can accurately interpret the signals for change which have come from our members. Please become involved in this process by either writ-

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Your voice

Good sense?

Following the transfer of the ISBN Agency from the National Library of Australia to DW Thorpe, we are now advised that DW Thorpe will levy an administrative fee for allocation of blocks of ISBNs and a fee of \$50 for the allocation of an ISBN within twenty-four hours. Until recently it was possible to speedily receive an ISBN and a cataloguing in publication from one agency — the National Library of Australia. The separation of the ISBN agency is bad enough, requiring as it does double handling. However to now have a charge imposed for ISBNs can surely only have one consequence — fewer books will have ISBNs and fewer will have CIP entries because the National Library of Australia will not provide a CIP entry without advice of the ISBN.

None of this makes good national bibliographic sense — or have I missed something?

Alan Bundy,
University of South Australia

Free to a good home

The former IFLA Clearing House for Australia has the following near

complete sets of items freely available to any library or individual willing to pay transportation costs: *IFLA conference papers 1977–1995*; *IFLA Journal 1977–c.1996*; *Information Hotline 1970–c.1989*; and Part 2 1972–1974; *Library Automation Research and Consulting Association series 1973–1974*; *LARC Reports v5–v7*; *LARC Newsletter v4:5–v5:4*; *Network v1:2, 5, 6*; *World survey series v1, 3–4, 5, 9–11*.

Please contact Edward Reid-Smith, 2 Salmon Street, Wagga Wagga 2650, ph 02 6921 4759; ereidsmi@postoffice.csu.edu.au. The material is otherwise due for recycling.

Edward Reid-Smith,
Wagga Wagga

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

IBM awarded \$13.8 million National Library contract

The National Library of Australia affirmed its commitment to the national sharing of library resources with the announcement that it has awarded the contract for the nation's new bibliographic system to IBM Australia and IBM Global Services Australia.

Based on AMICUS software, the new system will provide significant benefits to nearly 1400 libraries and all who use them. The \$13.8 million contract is for six years and is expected to be in operation Australia-wide within a year.

Librarians will use AMICUS to search, create, retrieve, manage and share bibliographic information, including books, magazines, pictures, maps, CDs, newspapers, sound recordings, oral histories and computer files. Collectively known as the National Bibliographic Database (NBD) and currently operated through the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) service, this invaluable national asset contains more than thirteen million bibliographic records and twenty-seven million holding statements showing locations in Australian libraries.

Announcing the agreement, NLA director-general, Warren Horton, said: 'Australian libraries operate in a highly co-operative resource-sharing environment. The NLA's establishment of the ABN network in 1981 was a ground-breaking co-operative computer network which gave the library community a new model for accomplishing national tasks. The new system, as its successor, will become the backbone of our capacity to provide immediate access to the knowledge stored in our libraries. We are delighted to have IBM as partners in this venture.'

ing to us with your views or by participating in one of the forums being organised by your branch or regional group.

While the exciting and time-consuming task of organisational change is underway we must be careful not to be deflected from so many of the important programs that are critical to maintaining our success. Although a federal election is not required until early 1999, it is very likely that we will see the election held around the middle of this year. We are already preparing our electoral action strategy with a view to lobbying as many candidates as possible during the campaign.

Our \$100 000 Online Public Access Initiative (OPAI) project is progressing well with Internet training programs for remote Aboriginal communities already taking place. The strength in our OPAI project derives from the co-operative arrangements we have developed with, in particular, the state/territory library services in Queensland, the Northern Territory and South Australia and also with Aboriginal communities.

ALIA has commissioned a labour-market study which is the most comprehensive survey of Australian librarians' working conditions that has ever been undertaken. More than 1600 ALIA members were invited to take part in the survey which was conducted for us by the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT). A magnificent response rate of more than seventy-five per cent was achieved — a remarkable result for a primarily postal-based project. The survey sample was very carefully constructed by ACIRRT to ensure that the distribution of library workers was statistically reflected, in terms of geographic location, industry sector and other variables. The information obtained constitutes a detailed snapshot of the way in which library and information work is being organised across Australia. A full survey report will be published soon in ALIA's Occasional Papers series and will form the basis for further employment policy development by the Association.

1998 is the year of our Adelaide biennial conference (25–28 Octo-

ber) with the theme *Libraries: pathways to knowledge*. This is also the theme for Australian Library Week (3–9 May 1998) and we are delighted that Lois O'Donoghue, former chair of ATSIC, has agreed to provide the Australian Library Week Oration on 29 April. Imaginative and artistic promotional materials are in the final stages of development.

Perhaps our greatest endeavours in 1998 will be devoted to education and training where the need for radical approaches to meeting the changing workplace demands are required. This was the message emerging from our Education Forum held late last year and the ALIA Board of Education has given this issue its top priority for this year.

It seems certain that this will be a year of great activity and innovation for ALIA. The task ahead for all of us is to ensure that we continue to work effectively on behalf of the library community while undertaking thoughtful and responsible organisational reform.