



National Library and Information Technicians Symposium 2017

Conference Paper

Paper Title: A bridge to the future – future-proofing your career in times of change.

Author: Natalia Fibrich, General Manager, Library Training Services Australia

Postal Address: PO Box 2808, Ascot, QLD, 4007

Email: Natalia@ltsa.edu.au

Abstract:

A foundation stone of the library and information services sector has always been a commitment to lifelong learning. With rapid changes and evolution of the Library and Information Services (LIS) sector, that commitment to lifelong learning is more important than ever. A bridge to knowledge is a commitment to the future, a commitment to 21st century knowledge and skills, and a commitment to the success of your career and the success of the LIS sector more broadly.

This paper identifies elements that need to be considered when creating a strategy to future-proof one's LIS career. These elements include Experience, Networking, Attitude, Foresight, and ongoing, relevant Professional Development. Far from being something to fear, we feel that by embracing the enormous potential that lies before us, and taking steps to adapt and learn, library professionals can indeed flourish in a rapidly changing environment, and seize the enormous opportunity at hand. Seneca tells us that "*Luck is where opportunity meets preparation*". With the right preparation, library professionals can create outstanding 21st century LIS careers that attract opportunity and are relevant in amongst the winds of change.

Introduction – the current state of LIS employment

It is important to start by acknowledging the proverbial elephant in the room, which is the current state of Library and Information Services employment in Australia. From the ALIA LIS Education, Skills and Employment Trend Report (2016), we know that over the five year period from November 2010 to November 2015, there were 43.5% fewer Librarian positions in the workforce; 16.3% more Technician positions, and 12.4% fewer Library Assistant positions. The prediction by the Department of Employment is that as we move towards 2020, there will be no further loss of Librarian positions, a 4.8% increase in Technician positions, and a further drop of 27.6% Library Assistant positions, with most decreases occurring in unqualified Library Assistants.

These percentages may seem small or insignificant, but for Librarians, these percentages equate to a loss of 8,400 jobs in the last 5 years, an increase of 1,500 jobs for Library Technicians, and for Library Assistants these percentages equate to a loss of 800 jobs over the last five years, which is expected to double to a further 1,700 job losses over the next five years. It is important to note that whilst Library Technician roles are increasing, many Library Technicians will be competing with professionally qualified Librarians for those roles.

Further to that, in 2014 there were 4,080 students enrolled in LIS courses, with 25% in higher education (university level) and 75% in Vocational Education and Training (mostly at Diploma level). We have a large number of new entrants into the sector.

The implications of these sobering statistics for Librarians, Library Technicians, and Library Assistants is profound. There is a big shift that we are experiencing in the sector, and it is having a big impact on the job market for new and experienced Library professionals alike. The reality is, that there is a lot of competition in the sector, for fewer jobs.

Libraries and disruption

We are also dealing with a rapidly changing sector. The context in which Libraries are operating, has fundamentally changed. We are dealing with a different world to what we were dealing with 5, 10, 20 years ago. It is true to say that Libraries have been disrupted.

By definition, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, to 'disrupt' is to prevent something, especially a system, process, or event, from continuing as usual or as expected; and to change the traditional way that an industry operates, especially in a new and effective way.

Libraries have been disrupted. They can no longer continue to operate under their previous strategies, systems, structures and operations, and continue to maintain relevance. Those that lose relevance in their communities, will no longer be able to attract the funding required to continue, and they will cease to operate.

An example of this has been demonstrated in the UK, where there has been a catastrophic impact on libraries, with 343 libraries having closed (as of March 2016), with a further 111 closures planned for the remainder of 2016, with 174 libraries being transferred to community groups, and with 50 being handed over to external organisations to run. The number of paid staff in libraries has fallen by 25% (nearly 8,000 jobs), with 15,500 volunteers recruited. This was due to a number of factors (not necessarily just disruption), however, it is important to note that without rapid adaptation and agility, libraries will not maintain their relevance, and they will not be able to justify their existence.

The GLAM Innovation Study (2014) identified that the digital revolution, from web to mobile devices to 3D printing to social media, has completely disrupted the LIS sector, changing the sector in ways we never imagined. It goes on to say that the sector is undergoing profound shifts driven by a number of trends, chiefly those arising from the dramatic changes in how people access, share and engage in digital services and social media enabled by broadband and mobile networks. This is creating new forms of competition for the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector, challenging the sector's traditional positions of authority and



expertise and driving fundamental changes in people's interactions with GLAM organisations and their collections.

The study identified that only a rather small number of GLAM organisations have made fundamental changes to their strategic planning, structures and operations to place innovation and digital services at the core, rather than as add-on activities. Many have started the difficult transformation, but most are yet to complete the process.

And so, the result of all of this is that when the broader context changes, so too must library professionals adapt, learn and grow. It is clear, that to differentiate one's self in a challenging economic environment, and a competitive job environment, that a qualification is absolutely necessary, but not enough. It does not entitle anyone to a job at any level. Rather, it may just get one's resume into the "For Review" pile, as opposed to the "Rejected" pile.

It is important to note, for the purpose of this paper, that one assumes that the reader has the requisite minimum qualification for their role or desired role they wish to have in the Library and Information Services sector – that being undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications for a professional Librarian role; a Diploma of Library and Information Services for a Library Technician role; or a Certificate III or IV in Library and Information Services for a Library Assistant role. If they don't, then the first step must be to get a relevant qualification which is aligned to one's desired future or current role.

Nationally recognised or accredited training delivers graduates consistency in the level of skills and knowledge graduates receive. It is a quality indicator (at least to a base level of competency), and gives employers the peace of mind that not only the graduate has (or should have) a base level of skill and knowledge, but also that the graduate has demonstrated a commitment to excellence, a commitment to their own professional development, and has successfully navigated the rigours of study. This alone says a lot about a graduate!

Future-proofing one's career

Future-proofing can be loosely connected to the concept of resiliency in a changing environment. Future-proofing is the process of anticipating the future, and developing methods of adaptation - mitigating any negative effects, while taking advantage of positive effects of the future (Rich, 2016). It isn't just about creating a strategy to avoid a perceived negative impact of change – it is about embracing change to embrace the enormous opportunities that the future presents.

Future-proofing one's career means ensuring one is as employable in the future as they are now. It means standing back and think about one's job strategically, rather than just letting it happen. It means looking at the bigger picture: what's happening in the LIS sector and outside of the LIS sector; where's the growth; which jobs are vulnerable; how does one measure up?

So what is going to make the difference between one qualified LIS professional and another qualified and future-proofed LIS professional? Five things: practical experience, networking, foresight, attitude and ongoing relevant professional development. These five things combined, will give a 21st century LIS professional, regardless of level, the best chance at a future-proofed LIS career.



Let's start with the first of the five key components of future-proofing a Library Professional's career.

Experience

The next best thing to a qualification, is experience. There is nothing that is going to empower a LIS professional's career outside of a qualification more, than experience. This demonstrates that a LIS professional has applied their theoretical knowledge and developed their skills in a practical context. In a practical context, there is an instant feedback loop that facilitates further, ongoing learning, in response to new and often unexpected situations. No study can make up for this practical experience.

According to the 70:20:10 principle of adult workplace learning, 70% of learning happens in the workplace during informal, experience-based learning on-the-job; 20% is via coaching, mentoring and development through others; with 10% being formal learning and structured courses (Kajewski & Madsen; 2013). Whilst these each have a different weighting based on a percentage – each and every one of these concepts is important. Informal learning without formal, structured courses facilitates the reproduction of poor habits and old, often out-dated practices, whereas all formal, structured learning without informal, experience-based learning is knowledge and skill developed in a vacuum, without grounding in the real world with real-world issues. Experience also provides social proof of your level of skill and knowledge. The reality is that to be a successful, future-proofed LIS professional, we need all three elements of the 70:20:10 principle.

Unfortunately, like in all work place contexts, a graduate has to prove themselves. Sometimes, this means that they will need to volunteer their services on a regular basis, to build up their hours, to build up their skill, their professional network, and to build up social proof in their capability. Public libraries sometimes have limitations on volunteering, so graduates may need to volunteer at other types of libraries, such as school libraries, academic libraries and so on.

If a graduate can find a paying job straight out of studying, then that is fantastic. However, for most, graduates will need to build up a portfolio of evidence of practical application, skill, knowledge and results – all grounded in a practical context. This may also mean that a graduate will need to work their way up from Customer Service Officer, to Library Assistant, to Library Technician, and should they decide to proceed further with their qualifications and education, professional Librarian. This may be regardless of what qualification they have – for example, a graduate with a Diploma may need to start working as a Library Assistant, despite the qualification level they have achieved.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Graduates will simply need to work hard, learn lots, demonstrate their skill and knowledge, be innovative, and have a great mindset and attitude that makes them irresistible for higher-level roles as they become available.

Networking



PO Box 2808
Ascot QLD 4007



1300 17 15 60



hello@itsa.edu.au



www.itsa.edu.au

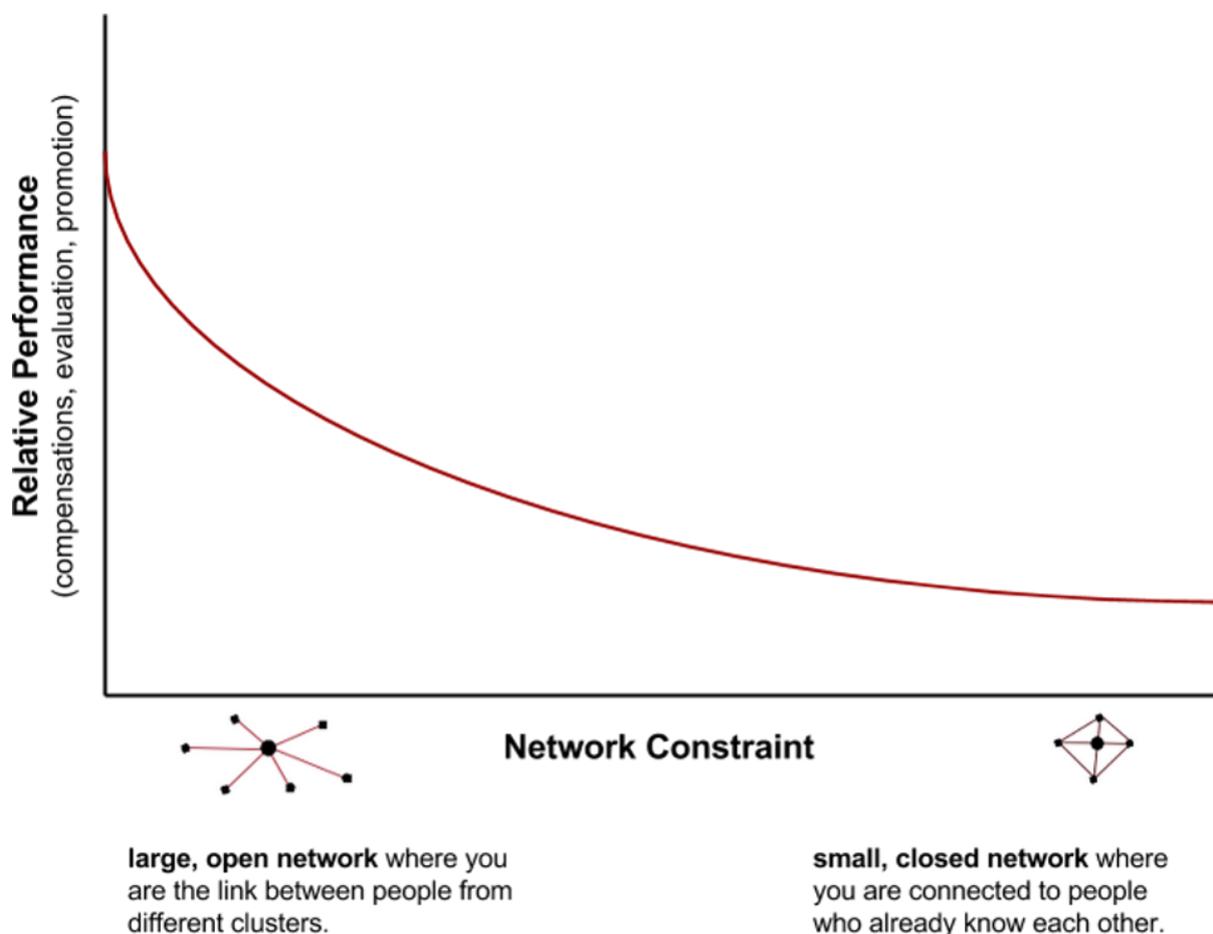


33 604 836 277

One of the most critical ways in facilitating a successful, future-proofed career, particularly during challenging times, is to have robust and open networks. A professional network is a type of social network that is focussed on interactions and relationships of a professional nature, rather than purely of a personal nature. Far from being solely the realm of extroverts, a LIS professional can play to their strengths and connect with people they actually like. It is about building real connections and being authentic.

Developing and maintaining relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit can help individuals search for and secure employment opportunities, gain access to needed information or resources— especially on short notice—and obtain guidance, sponsorship, and social support. Such networking skills are crucial for enhancing social capital and career success (de Janasz, Forret; 2007)

Whilst the number of people in your network isn't necessarily the goal, it is the quality of those connections, and the open structure of a network which makes it most useful. A large, open network where a LIS professional is the link between people from different clusters has been shown to be a robust predictor of career success. (Blickle, Witzki, & Schneider, 2009)



Source: Simmons, M. (2016)

In the graph, the further to the right you go toward a closed network, the more you repeatedly hear the same ideas, which reaffirm what you already believe. The further



left you go toward an open network, the more you're exposed to new ideas. People to the left are significantly more successful than those to the right, particularly with regards to promotion, financial compensation and industry recognition (Burt, 2004; Phillips, 2016)

The diversity of one's network supports a LIS professional through the following ways (Simmons, 2016):

- It leads one to have a more accurate view of the world;
- It gives one the ability to control the timing of information sharing;
- It provides the ability to serve as a translator/connector between groups;
- There are more breakthrough ideas.

Networks don't have to be all from within the GLAM industry. Having a diverse network can keep a LIS professional open to new breakthroughs occurring from outside the sector, and can provide access to new opportunities for learning, development and growth.

Networking also can provide access to the hidden or informal job market, which is a helpful tool even if one isn't actively job searching. There are surveys that suggest that up to 85% of jobs are filled via networking of some sort (Adler, 2016). Being recommended prior to formal job advertisements increases the chances of successful job outcomes.

Networking ideas include Facebook or LinkedIn Groups, various ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) Groups, GLAM industry events, Twitter events such as #auslibchat, workplace project or interest groups, taking part in an industry elist or LISTSERV, GLAM social events, attending conferences, and numerous other events and industry activities. Or simply start your own!

A great tool to help support professional networking is LinkedIn. Every LIS professional should be on LinkedIn, and should be utilising it to collect the LIS professionals and other professionals they engage with along the way, and to manage their network. We are now well into the 21st century – not being on a professional social network, such as LinkedIn, is a warning sign of rigid thinking and a lack of agility and relevance in a 21st century context.

Attitude

Future-proofing isn't just what one does, it is the mindset and attitude one carries throughout their life. It is about being resilient, agile and adaptable under rapidly changing circumstances, whilst not, under any circumstances, becoming complacent. Complacency is a fast road to becoming irrelevant and as time goes on, unemployable.

Having the right attitude involves having an insatiable thirst for curiosity and learning. If one doesn't, then that is fine. But another LIS professional will, and they will have the competitive edge and become an employee of choice for LIS organisations above you.

Having the right attitude also involves understanding that your career is always in Beta mode – that is, that it is always "Under Construction". This attitude extends to the LIS foundational value of lifelong learning. We are all first and foremost lifelong



learners, and it is critical that we continue to push ourselves to always be learning something new – new skills, new knowledge, new mindsets.

Foresight

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, foresight is the ability to judge correctly what is going to happen in the future and plan your actions based on this knowledge.

To judge correctly what is going to happen in the future, is a skill that is dependent on utilising a strategic approach to look at what is happening now, and pre-empt the issues, trends and challenges that are or will be impacting on one's sector, and then take decisive action to prepare oneself and one's career for those challenges, issues or trends.

It is about understanding the critical drivers impacting on the LIS sector, and the mega trends we are seeing not just in the LIS sector, but more broadly. The LIS sector doesn't occur in a vacuum, so understanding the broader context that is impacting on the LIS sector is critical to developing a future-proofing strategy. This includes technological and digital disruption, but also goes far beyond that.

A formal career future-proofing strategy will need to consider the following current trends in the LIS sector, including:

- Capturing data and analysing it to create meaningful outputs that empower library services in the new digital economy. Using, managing and visualising metadata effectively. Turning big-data into a meaningful narrative;
- Digitisation, discovery, access, and the effective curation and management of digital materials;
- Digital preservation;
- Self-funded or co-funded business models for LIS;
- A clear Value Proposition; Effective articulation of the value of your and your library's services to all stakeholders, including financial stakeholders;
- Trans-disciplinary collaboration and partnerships to enhance the delivery of meaningful services;
- Organisational-wide transformation, change management and skills development;
- Shared systems and infrastructure, with a focus on integration;
- Sustainability and eco-friendliness;
- Re-invention of physical spaces, including the shift towards community centres that foster community wellbeing;
- Interactive experiences, immersive learning and leveraging new technologies e.g. Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, 3D printers, Gamification, Makerspaces, the Sharing Economy, the Internet of Things (IoT), Robotics, Coding, Cloud Computing etc.;
- Social media and networking;
- Engaging new audiences and staying relevant e.g. Enterprise Hubs;
- Digital rights management and licensing;



- Copyright reform;
- E-resources;
- Self-publishing and community created content;
- Customer-focus and customer-centricity;
- Privacy and data-protection.

It is also critical to consider the following mega-trends outside of the LIS sector that are, or will be having an impact on the LIS sector:

- Scarcity of resources (power, water, food). More from less – a focus on resource efficiency;
- Interconnection and globalisation – Geopolitical, Economic, Social and Cultural impacts and instability (think Trump, Brexit, Refugee crisis etc.);
- Capacity Capture – finding and unlocking exciting new sources of value, or finding creative ways to eliminate any wasted resources;
- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning;
- Accelerating global climate change;
- Personalisation of consumer goods and services;
- Cyber security;
- Divergent demographics.

One can't future-proof themselves against each and every one of the above trends straight away. However, one can start to prioritise which ones are most relevant to their current or future role, learn a bit about each, and consider how it is, or will impact the LIS sector and their current or future roles. One can then select one or more to work on each month as part of their ongoing professional development strategy.

Professional Development

Once a LIS professional is clear on the local and mega-trends impacting the LIS sector and the world more broadly, they can then create a professional development strategy to ensure that they are continuously learning and updating their skill set in a strategic manner, to ensure that they future-proof their careers and achieve their desired outcomes in life. This professional development needs to be relevant, and it needs to be ongoing. Again – complacency is a derailer to any career future-proofing strategy.

Professional development can include:

- Joining an association such as ALIA, who will help keep one up-to-date on important industry information and changes;
- Join the ALIA PD scheme;
- Join networking groups;
- Read industry magazines and newsletters (including those that are outside of the LIS sector);



- Engage with library vendors, who can help educate LIS Professionals on the latest, newest products and services impacting on the LIS sector;
- Create a Google Alert to update one on the latest info of any topic of interest;
- Read, read, read – search out information relating to key areas that one wishes to develop or learn about;
- Undertake short courses on Lynda.com or other short-course providers;
- Undertake study via a MOOC – or Massive Open Online Course. These are a free course of study made available over the internet without charge to a very large number of people;
- Update one’s skills and knowledge in particular key areas by undertaking further study in individual, nationally-recognised VET sector subjects (e.g. Maintain digital repositories, Copyright, or Cataloguing), or further tertiary education. Target key areas that one wishes to learn more about. One doesn’t have to study a whole qualification, but can do individual subjects;
- Attend conferences and other learning opportunities;
- Share information with one’s colleagues – learn from each other. Utilise the collective wisdom that lies amongst both professionals and those new to the sector.

Conclusion

Overall – the rate of change is exponential – that is, the changes in the next five years will be greater than the rate and scope of changes that occurred in the last 20 years. It is clear that libraries are being disrupted, and that this disruption extends to Library professionals. Change is the new constant, the new modus operandi, and it will have a profound impact on the LIS sector. Each library professional will need to have a strategy to adapt and cope with the changes that will be occurring. A career future-proofing strategy must include at least a Qualification, Networking, the right Attitude, Foresight and ongoing and relevant Professional Development.

These elements will lead library professionals across the bridge to knowledge and to career success, which will in turn sustain a healthy and adaptable library service that continues to solve meaningful problems through the 21st century and beyond.

A healthy 21st century library sector is only so due to the skill, ability and knowledge of those who work in libraries, and of those who lead them. The next generation of Library Leaders will have a very different world to navigate through, and we need to ensure that we are preparing for that world now, rather than when it’s too late.



References

Adler, L. (2016). *New Survey Reveals 85% of All Jobs are Filled Via Networking*. Retrieved from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-survey-reveals-85-all-jobs-filled-via-networking-lou-adler>

Australian Library and Information Association. (2016). *ALIA LIS Education, Skills and Employment Trend Report 2016*. Retrieved from: http://repo.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/alia_lis_education_skills_and_employment_trend_report_2016.pdf

Australian Library and Information Association. (2014). *Future of the Library and Information Science Profession*. Retrieved from: <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/advocacy/ALIA-Future-of-the-Profession-ALL.pdf>

Blickle, G., Witzki, A., & Schneider, P. (2009). Mentoring support and power: A three year predictive field study on protégé networking and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74 (2), 181-189.

Burt, R. (2004). *Brokerage and Closure: An introduction to social capital*. Retrieved from: http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/ronald.burt/research/files/B&C_Introduction.pdf

Cambridge Dictionary. (2017). *Disrupt*. Retrieved from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disrupt>

Cambridge Dictionary. (2017). *Foresight*. Retrieved from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/foresight?q=Foresight>

Center for the Future of Libraries. (2017). *Trends*. American Library Association. Retrieved from: <http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends>

Clark, D. (2016). *Professional Networking*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lynda.com/Career-Development-tutorials/Professional-Networking/466176-2.html>

De Janasz, S., & Forret, M. (2007). Learning The Art of Networking: A Critical Skill for Enhancing Social Capital and Career Success. *Journal of Management Education*, 32 (5), 629-650.

Diamond, J., Hargrave, J., Luebke, C., Magnini, E., & Sherwin, K. (2015). Future Libraries – Workshops Summary and Emerging Insights, *ARUP University*.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2014). *Riding the Waves or Caught in the Tide? Navigating the evolving information environment*. Retrieved from: https://trends.ifla.org/files/trends/assets/insights-from-the-ifla-trend-report_v3.pdf

Kajewski, K., & Madsen, V. (2013). Demystifying 70:20:10 Whitepaper. *Deakin Prime*. Retrieved from: http://deakinprime.com/media/47821/002978_dpw_70-20-10wp_v01_fa.pdf



Libraries lose a quarter of staff as hundreds close. (29 March 2016). *BBC*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35707956>

Mansfield, T., Winter, C., Griffith, C., Dockerty, A., & Brown, T. (2014). *Innovation Study: Challenges and Opportunities for Australia's Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums*, Australian Centre for Broadband Innovation, CSIRO and Smart Services Co-operative Research Centre. Retrieved from: https://mgns.w.org.au/media/uploads/files/GLAM_Innovation_Study_September2014-Report_Final_accessible.pdf

Mount, D. (2016). *IFLA Trend Report 2016 Update*, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). Retrieved from: <https://trends.ifla.org/files/trends/assets/trend-report-2016-update.pdf>

Phillips, D. (2016). *Networking differently could increase your salary*. Retrieved from: <https://review.chicagobooth.edu/strategy/2016/article/networking-differently-could-increase-your-salary>

Rich, B. (2016). *Future-Proofing: Seeking resilience in the historic built environment*. Retrieved from: <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/36402>

Simmons, M. (2015). *The no. 1 predictor of career success according to network science*. *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelsimmons/2015/01/15/this-is-the-1-predictor-of-career-success-according-to-network-science/#6811a34ae829>

State Library of Queensland. (2016). *Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2014 -2015*. Retrieved from: http://www.nsla.org.au/sites/www.nsla.org.au/files/publications/NSLA.Aust-Pub-Lib-Stats_2014-15_2.pdf

Wikipedia. (2017). *Professional network service*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional_network_service

