

POTENTIAL STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS **2002-2007**

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION PAPERS: METHODOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The approach taken to strategic planning at LISWA has historically been leading edge, challenging and exciting. With the development of strategic directions for the period 2001-2007 the senior management team of LISWA has taken this opportunity to share their experiences.

This paper describes the roles and functions of the Library and Information Service of Western Australia and outlines the background and objectives in developing the future directions statements. The methodology selected to develop our strategic directions was Soft Systems Methodology. The four stages of SSM are discussed and some of the activities are shared to enable a better understanding of the steps undertaken to achieve our objectives.

A brief synopsis of each of the papers, the authors and their teams provides the reader with a snapshot of LISWA's potential directions for the future.

INTRODUCTION

The Library and Information Service of Western Australia (LISWA) is the operational name of the public sector organisation established under the terms of The Library Board of Western Australia Act (1951-1983). Since July 1997, LISWA has been a service agency within the merged Ministry for Culture & the Arts, that provides corporate services such as human resource and financial management to LISWA to enable it to carry out its business.

The mission or purpose of LISWA is "to provide and promote equitable access to information resources and services which support the intellectual, economic, cultural, social and recreational needs of the people of Western Australia" (LISWA 1996). LISWA's motto is "LISWA: Your Guide to Knowledge" and its strategic, business and operational plans are directed towards achieving this outcome (LISWA, 1997).

The major service delivery units within LISWA are Reference Services, Western Australian Documentary Heritage Services, Public Library Support Services, Records Management and Archival Services, Business Development and Information Services, all of which are located in the Alexander Library Building in Perth, Western Australia. These services are provided to the community with a full time equivalent (FTE) of 258 as at 30 June 2000 (LISWA, 2000). The distinctive features about LISWA as opposed to some other public sector organisations are the large number of hours it is open to the public, the significant number of female staff members (in 1999 women made up 72.3% of staff and were predominant in all categories of employment including senior management roles) and the large numbers of casual staff which numbered 84 as at 30 June 2000.

INFORMATION AND BEYOND

Under the leadership of LISWA's Chief Executive Officer, Dr Lynn Allen, senior management has a successful track record in developing strategic directions. *Information and Beyond* (1997) was an innovative and challenging document, mapping LISWA's future directions for the period 1997-2001 and providing the impetus for developing business and operational plans. Implementation has been recorded in quarterly and annual reporting, and accountability has been monitored and audited.

LISWA's leading edge approach to strategic planning has been well documented by Dr Allen (Allen, 1996). Considerable changes have taken place since the mid 1990s with management restructuring (reduction from 26 managers to 9 managers by June 2000) team based ways of working with team leaders providing highly focused client services (Allen, 1996) and greater flexibility in terms and conditions of employment (Baetge & Horstman, 2000). However, the most significant impact on LISWA during the past five years has been changes in service delivery through technological processes. This has changed the way in which clients are provided with services and has resulted in access to a greater variety of resources through the Internet. Clients are able to access a plethora of information without direct assistance from LISWA staff and from anywhere in the world. While LISWA's motto "Your guide to knowledge" is as valid today as it was five years ago, the emphasis has changed to client self sufficiency, as illustrated in the 1998-1999 Annual Report:

"We wish to empower Western Australians to be information literate and so become self sufficient in finding the information they need. Our role is to provide the staff, systems and services that guide people to this goal." (LISWA, 1999, page. 6).

As with so many other organizations, developing strategic directions occurs in an environment of change and uncertainty. For LISWA uncertainty exists in relation to adequate State Government funding at a time when electronic delivery is a primary service tool, organisational changes are imminent with the creation of the Ministry for Culture & the Arts where there is less control over resources and directions, and legal and financial imposts require diversion of resources from client services to Government accountability. This required a shared understanding and frame of reference that saw the future as challenging and multifaceted rather than threatening and diminishing. In developing strategic directions, there were opportunities for LISWA to reinvent itself based on its wealth of professional expertise and past successes, and it required a methodology known for its scope in exploring new pathways and possibilities.

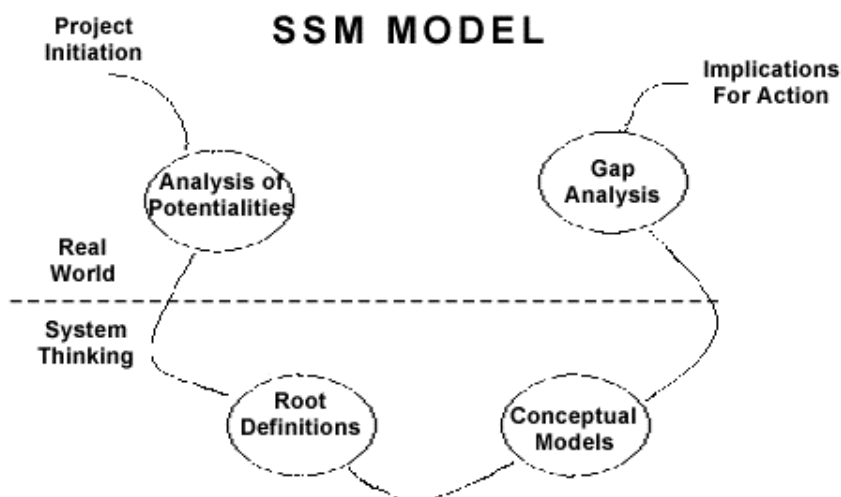
TOWARDS CONNEXITY

This was the name given to the strategic directions project that encompassed training, development, research, consultation, presentations and culminated in this collection of professional papers contributing to LISWA's strategic directions for the period 2001-2007. Towards Connexity was developed from the concepts presented by Professor Geoff Mulgan (1997) in his work *"Connexity – how to live in a connected world"*. His presentation of a world which is becoming increasingly globalized and interconnected through information technology is very relevant to an organisation such as LISWA. He explores the interconnectedness of technical, financial, political and ecological systems within a shrinking world and at a pace of change that has not been experienced in the past. Individuals, groups and communities have the potential to forge links with each other within a few microseconds in terms of the movement of information, and this is changing the structures, functions and relationships of organisations, including LISWA. In terms of strategic leadership it means exploring a range of possibilities for the future within a wider context than in the past – the emphasis on interdependence and interconnectedness provided a frame of reference for developing potential strategic directions.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The tool used for developing potential strategic directions was soft systems methodology (SSM) developed by Checkland (1981). This methodology is not new to LISWA and has been used for strategic and project planning in the past. The 1991-1995 strategic plan was developed using SSM (Allen, 1996), however changes in staffing and the management structure meant that the principles and concepts were familiar to some participants but not to others. All of the participants had previous experience with strategic planning and with a range of tools for developing strategic directions.

The decision to use SSM was based on providing an interactive environment where the participants could develop a shared vision for LISWA's future, where they could contribute to each other's strategic directions (developing models of interdependence and interconnectedness), and identify and appreciate different world views. Checkland (1981) states that "soft systems methodology embodies a paradigm of learning a process of learning which, as a process, is never-ending. To this extent the methodology as a whole clearly articulates a phenomenological investigation into the meanings actors in a situation attribute to the reality they perceive". (page 279). SSM has been used in a wide variety of contexts and organizations and in both problem solving situations and for strategic planning (Bentley, 1993; Bennett & Kerr, 1996; Checkland & Scholes, 1991; Platt & Warwick, 1995; Rose & Haynes, 1999). While a number of practitioners and researchers provide for seven stages in SSM (Buchanan, 1997; Checkland, 1981) the methodology prescribed for LISWA involved four stages: Organisational Analysis and Synthesis, Root Definitions, Conceptual Models and Gap Analysis as outlined in the diagram below (Pattison, 1995).



Exponential Learning

Many of the concepts espoused by Peter Senge (1992) were incorporated into the project. For example, there was a shared vision with the project title "Towards Connexity" and continuous improvement through interactive and iterative learning. The methodology itself is considered an ongoing process of learning (Buchanan, 1997; Checkland & Scholes, 1991). Portfolio leaders nominated project teams, and through this process the project leaders consolidated their learning and expanded their understanding of SSM by teaching the principles and concepts to their teams on an ongoing basis. This process of consultation and participation added to the richness and diversity of information and analysis. Databases were established to enable access to information, distribution of papers, course notes, and a discussion forum for the exchange of ideas and issues.

The Directors and Managers of each of the strategic areas within LISWA were nominated as Portfolio Leaders and their portfolio or projects teams comprised of staff within their directorates and from other areas. Teams consisted of staff from different classification levels and from different backgrounds and there were from 3 to 6 staff in each team.

The training schedule covered 5 hour sessions approximately once per month over an eight month period, with a combination of theory and practice. Training was facilitated by a consultant specializing in soft systems methodology, the training being a combination of theory, workshop sessions, presentations, and feedback on each of the phases. Group and individual training and facilitation were included in the consultant's specifications.

There were outcomes for Portfolio Leaders to achieve between each of the sessions, as well as consultation with their portfolio teams. This contributed to the richness and diversity of information required for each phase of the project methodology.

Project Outcomes

The outcomes for the project were as follows:

- For Portfolio Leaders to develop strategic thinking and explore alternative futures for LISWA;
- To provide training to senior management in soft systems methodology as a tool for planning and analysis;
- To promote leadership skills in senior management by making them responsible for training and development to the portfolio teams in the concepts and principles of SSM, consultation, analysis, generation of ideas and articulation of concepts, and presentation skills;
- To promote conceptual or “blue sky” thinking about future options (Allen, 1996);
- To develop visionary professional papers for public discussion;
- To challenge current management structures or the ‘silo mentality’ (Allen, 1996).

Portfolio topics

There were six areas selected for strategic analysis and the development of strategic directions :

Networking Knowledge
Smart Reference
Generators, Guardians and Gatekeepers
21st Century Public Libraries
Heritage Collections of the Future
Income Generation for Survival or Growth?

SSM - Phase One – Analysis of Potentialities

The first phase of SSM was Organisation Analysis and Synthesis (Galliers, 1998), which required gathering information about the organisation, researching the topic and identifying the most salient features of the landscape. The Portfolio Leaders used a variety of tools to explore the “real world”, including literature research (local, national and international), SWOT analysis, key values and missions, public opinion surveys, user profiles, key indicators, issues and trends, critical success factors, trends analysis, comparative analysis, scenario planning and mind mapping. This provided a rich, varied and interesting context to this phase of the methodology and served to highlight the connectedness between a number of the project areas. Rich pictures were used to “re veal a rich moving pageant of relationships” (Checkland & Scholes, 1991 page 45) and illustrated the connections between systems and activities.

Rather than focusing on problem solving, emphasis was placed on exploring the potentialities within a strategic context for the future. Thus, the “Organisational Analysis and Synthesis” phase was defined as the “Analysis of Potentialities” to better suit a strategic planning context. It is suggested that strategic planning using SSM assists in clarifying and structuring systems, activities and emerging ideas in a holistic rather than a one-dimensional way, and provides a way to portray the level of complexity inherent in any organisation (Checkland & Scholes, 1991). By changing the methodology to an analysis of potentialities, it assisted the project teams in looking to future possibilities rather than focusing on present contexts. The methodology also facilitates the exploration of different world views, which enabled the participants to explore the future from the perspective of different key stakeholders in the information and knowledge cycle.

Presentations were given by each of the Portfolio Leaders and all team participants were invited to attend. This was a significant learning exercise – it generated enthusiasm, appreciation for the complexity and diversity of information, and provided feedback on potential directions that may not have been previously considered. The consultant critiqued the work of the portfolio teams throughout the whole process from the perspective of SSM theory as it was translated into practice – this was a critical part of the iterative and learning process of SSM (Pattison, 1995).

Themes for interdependence and connectedness emerged after phase one. One continuous theme was the changes brought about by technology during the past five years and speculation on the impact on client services during the next five years. This had implications for funding, digitization of collections, broadening the range and diversity of clients, and the future of printed and electronic mediums.

SSM - Phase Two – Developing the CATWOE

The second theoretical component was getting to know about Root Definitions which were defined as “a concise, tightly constructed definition of a human activity system which states what the system is” (Checkland, 1981, page 317). This is where the iterative process and systems learning was most clearly demonstrated. Portfolio Leaders became proficient in developing CATWOEs (Customers, Actors, Transformation process, “*Weltanschauung*” or world view, Owners, Environment) but were they of strategic significance and far enough on the horizon to be incorporated into a visionary strategic directions document?

To encourage “blue sky” thinking the Chief Executive Officer, Lynn Allen, instructed Portfolio Leaders to select their most creative, innovative or stimulating scenario and provide a presentation at the next training session:

“The year is 2006. What is happening from the client’s perspective now that this system has been implemented”.

The CATWOE was placed on the overhead as background information, so that the participants could relate the theoretical constructs to the story unfolding before them. Some exciting stories emerged – incorporating humour, vision, daring and drama.

SSM - Phase Three – Conceptual Models

Conceptual models are defined as “a systemic account of a human activity system, built on the basis of the system’s root definition, usually in the form of a structured set of verbs in the imperative mood. Such models should contain the minimum necessary activities for the system to be the one named in the root definition.” (Checkland, 1981, page 313). It is at this point that the participants “have to assemble the minimum necessary activities to meet the requirements of the root definition and CATWOE” (Checkland & Scholes, 1991, page 37).

The directions to the Portfolio Leaders for this session were to provide handouts to the rest of the group showing their models and activities derived from the root definitions (between 5 and 12 activities) and to present two models– one from the client or community point of view, and the other from a LISWA strategic directions point of view. The focus was to be on the underlying values and belief systems, as well as the human activity system. Participants were to seek feedback from the group with regard to their models.

Again, the process highlighted the iteration, communication, participation and learning that is an essential element of soft systems methodology. Between each formal training session, Portfolio Leaders would meet with their teams and change and redefine their activity systems as a result of further analysis and feedback.

SSM - Phase Four – Gap Analysis

Gap analysis is where the participants “return to the real world” and compare conceptual models with reality. At this stage of the methodology, Checkland advises to “ensure that the comparison stage is conscious, coherent, and defensible”. Further, in developing strategic directions, “the comparison cannot be with what exists, only with some defined expectation” (Checkland, 1981, page 179).

In undertaking the gap analysis, Portfolio Leaders were instructed to consider the viability of their proposed conceptual models, and to make an overall judgement as to whether the proposed human activity system could be introduced, that is, to determine if the models were systemically desirable and culturally feasible (Checkland, 1981, page 16). These criteria would determine whether or not the models should be included as potential strategic directions for LISWA’s future.

An appreciation of the iterative and learning nature of SSM was reinforced in that the CATWOE’s and conceptual models were refined to complete the proposed activities for translation into strategic directions.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

In reviewing the project outcomes, it is interesting to reflect on what was achieved. Certainly the training and development objectives were achieved with an understanding and practical application of soft systems methodology. Leadership skills for Portfolio Leaders should have been extended through interaction and facilitation of their project teams.

In terms of conceptual or ‘blue sky’ thinking and the development of visionary professional papers, the readers of these discussion papers will be the judges of this outcome. It is our intention to distribute these papers to LISWA staff, the Library Board and sections of the community in order to stimulate discussion and enquiry into our future directions.

Towards Connexity Revisited

In reading through the papers the most pervading theme is the impending changes in technology and its potential to impact on LISWA’s services to the community. In each of the papers scenarios are framed in terms of the future impact of electronic service delivery and its implications for LISWA in terms of staffing, training, funding, customized information services, value added products, free and fee based services and challenges from competitors. These scenarios are presented as challenges and opportunities for future directions.

Another recurring theme is the recognition that LISWA is funded by the Western Australian Government, and hence the community, and as such it is our role to be responsive to the

community's information needs. This takes many forms, including return on investment for taxpayers, accountability issues, collection management philosophies and delivering economic and social dividends. These scenarios reinforce LISWA's emphasis on client services as being the fundamental basis of our existence.

The strategic importance of forming partnerships and liaisons with other Government agencies, local government and the business sector is recognized by a number of authors and these scenarios provide different and varied future directions for consideration.

The papers are summarized below to enable the selection of those areas of most interest. Members of the portfolio teams are acknowledged and thanked for their contribution to the ideas and scenarios that have emerged throughout the project.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS DISCUSSION PAPERS – 2002-2007

Networking Knowledge

In *Networking Knowledge* – The role of LISWA within the information society, Graham Hilton, Chief Information Officer, presents some exciting futuristic scenarios by way of story telling and provides a glimpse of what the future may hold in a technologically advanced society. Can LISWA respond to the challenges and opportunities suggested in these scenarios?

Graham Hilton was assisted by his portfolio team comprising Kaye Hill, Peter Lambert and Collett Richards.

Smart Reference

In *Smart Reference: exploring the future for a state-funded information and knowledge based service*, the Director of Reference Services, Claire Forte, explores the difference between "information" and "knowledge" and considers the role of the reference librarian as both information provider and knowledge navigator.

Clair Forte was assisted in the development of this paper by her portfolio team consisting of Barbara McGuire, Brian Dawson and Carole Baetge.

Generators, Guardians and Gatekeepers

Generators, Guardians and Gatekeepers: The function and role of recordkeeping and the State Records Office of Western Australia suggests that the role and function of the archival authority and the Government agency have been relatively easily identifiable and capable of being achieved – but will this be the case in the future in light of technological developments. Redefining the role and function of the recordkeeper in the 21st century is explored in this paper presented by Christopher Coggin, Director of the State Records Office of Western Australia.

Chris Coggin was assisted in the scoping and development of this paper by his portfolio team consisting of Isabel Smith, Tom Reynolds, Jill Jones and Lise Summers.

21st century public library services

In 21st Century Public Library Services it is suggested the time has come to develop a new model that recognizes public libraries as a “place”, but a “place” that may provide very different public library services. Changing environments, future partnerships, and electronic service delivery will impact on the future of public library services. A range of scenarios are presented for consideration in searching for a model that recognizes the wide diversity of information needs and the demand for a variety of traditional and non-traditional public library services.

The new Director of Public Library Services, Susan Feeney, commenced with LISWA on 19 February 2001. A number of staff contributed to the research and development of this paper. Debrah Lewis, prior to vacating the position of Director: Public Library Services undertook research into public library systems both nationally and internationally. Significant research and writing the paper was undertaken by Susan Feeney, who was employed on contract with LISWA from October 1999 to February 2000, and has since contributed to the finalisation of the paper. Other contributions were made by George Cowcher, Acting Director of Public Library Services and Yvonne Morant.

Heritage collections of the future

Heritage collection enables a community to learn about and interpret the past, while reflecting on its cultural identity. Heritage collections can help shape cultural identity, or can provide a selected view of the community and reflect the biases of the institutions and its members. These are some of the issues discussed in formulating scenarios for the future of Western Australia’s heritage collections and providing access to selected information.

The author of the paper, Ronda Jamieson, is Director of the J S Battye Library of Western Australia and prepared this paper in association with Jennie Carter, Brian Stewart, Leigh Hays and Sue Sondalini.

Income Generation for Survival or Growth?

In this paper the author provides evidence for a growing demand for fee based customized information products and services, that are ancillary to free library and information services. It is suggested that libraries will need to make major changes to their organisational and professional culture, redefine “core” business and apply a range of business principles and commercial practice to existing activities. Different scenarios are presented to achieve effective and profitable income generation activities.

The author of the paper, Greg Doehring, is Manager of Business Development at LISWA. He was assisted in the development of this paper by Ross Withnell, Gabrielle Reynolds, David Hodgson and Ken Smith.

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