

# **ALIEP-2006 conference on Library Leadership at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore: A summary report**

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## **Abstract:**

This report outlines few selected presentations of the ALIEP 2006 conference based on the theme "Preparing Information Professionals for Leadership in the new age" held at the Executive centre, School of Information and communication, NTU, Singapore, during 3-6, April 2006. The four-day event provided both professional librarians and educators a unique opportunity to explore the collaborative agenda emerged due to pervasive convergence technologies in today's knowledge society. The author, who was also a speaker provides an overview of the ALIEP- 2006 Asia Pacific discussion forum, which carried out a variety of program viz. industry updates, keynote sessions, Paper presentations, invited guests and local tours to national library, university libraries and national Archives of Singapore.

## **Purpose:**

There is a growing concern about leadership qualities need to be developed among librarians/ information professionals owing to changes in information needs in the society. It is observed that leadership attributes are becoming increasingly important in the information sector. As a result of limited focus on Library leadership in the peer-reviewed journals and the fact that the articles that addressed the role of libraries and librarians in addressing various aspects of crisis and change had not identified the leadership roles. There is felt need for publications citing the examples of library leadership which are taking place in national and international discussion fora, but not reflected in the research literature.

## **Originality/value:**

Based on the discussion and paper presentation during conference and personal interaction the author had with the participants in ALIEP-2006. This report is a useful summary of the conference which can be a topic of interest to managers of the organizations, teachers and educators, librarians, Chief knowledge officers(CKO) and information provider communities. Some very creative thinking and new ideas that have not made the traditional literature are introduced in this Asia Pacific forum. Many case studies and presentations were made about applications of latest technologies to overcome the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

**Keywords:** Library leadership, Convergence technologies, Information Professionals, School of Communication and Information, Asia Pacific Conference on Library and Information Education and Practice

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## Introduction:

Asia-Pacific Conference on Library and Information Education and Practice (ALIEP-2006) was possibly the first LIS conference focused, on leadership issues in the Asia-Pacific region covering the twin pillars of LIS Education and Practice. In the preface of the ALIEP-2006 proceedings editors Christopher Khoo, Diljit Singh & Abdus Sattar Chaudhry stated "...the LIS profession in Asia –Pacific has often looked to the west for ideas and leadership; LIS educators and professionals in the region are often unaware of valuable developments, innovations and expertise in neighboring countries. This conference intends to bridge the gap". The goal of the conference was to summarize the main issues and challenges the Library and Information profession currently facing due to paradigm shift in information industry and identify the best practices for solutions. The presentations highlighted contemporary issues in library and information practice and education with an emphasis on Leadership and Partnership. The conference surveyed, accumulated and synthesized the experiences and insights of LIS educators, researchers and practitioners and provided opportunities for scholarly exchanges and knowledge-sharing between academics and practitioners through paper presentations, discussions and workshops.

ALIEP 2006 was organized by the Division of Information Studies, School of Communication & Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, in collaboration with the Department of Information Science, Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, University of Malaya, and the Nanyang Technological University Library. The theme of conference was designed keeping in mind the importance of Leadership for information professionals in this transitional era. It was a landmark event and stimulated greater collaboration and cooperation among LIS educators and researchers in Asia Pacific region. This report attempts to provide a general summary of the conference, extracting salient details from the few selected papers on importance of partnership and Leadership for the information professionals in the new age. It also describes major events in the order that happened during the conference. ALIEP was a stimulating and enjoyable conference and the issues discussed ranged from day to day practical problems to theoretical. Distinguished academics and professionals joined from countries such as USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Korea and India.

The conference objectives were to:

- Examine how Leadership qualities help to overcome the challenges facing by libraries, librarians and library schools in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Discuss how to measure the value and impact of library and information services in the new age
- Identify the entrepreneurship opportunities in the information industry
- Recognize the trends, innovations and best practices in information services and systems in Asia-Pacific region

ALIEP-2006 conference addressed a large number of themes and issues and intended to bridge the gap between different areas of education and practice. The leadership role of information professionals in this transitional era and related topics exerted a strong influence on the conference. The experts are of the opinion that new age Librarians need to develop partnerships with different stakeholders along with Leadership skills and entrepreneurial instincts to overcome the huge challenges posed by infrastructural changes, user needs, and collection development policies. The conference venue was Nanyang Executive Centre, at the garden campus of the NTU, Singapore.

## Conference participants, workshops, opening sessions and Keynote addresses:

Table 1: Country-wise distribution of conference participants

1	Australia	13
2	Bangladesh	2
3	Brunei Darussala	1
4	Canada	1
5	China	8
6	Germany	2
7	Hong Kong	1
8	India	13
9	Indonesia	8
10	Japan	6
11	Kuwait	2
12	Malaysia	14
13	New Zealand	1
14	Pakistan	1
15	Philippines	2
16	Singapore	133
17	Sri Lanka	2
18	Taiwan	10
19	Thailand	5
20	UK	4
21	USA	10

On Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006 there were seven pre conference workshops- three parallel sessions in the morning and four in the evening as below:

1. Strategic Marketing of Information Services by Mr Michael Leach, President, American Society for Information Science & Technology.
2. Strategic Planning for School Media Centres by Dr Diljit Singh, Dept. of Information Science, University of Malaya
3. Web Archiving by Paul Wu, Division of Information Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
4. Equipping Librarians for the Role of Knowledge Managers by Mr Lee Chu Keong, Division of Information Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
5. Effective Market Research for Information Services by Dr Mark Hepworth, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University.
6. Archives Workshop: Access to Archives by Ms Elaine Goh, National Archives of Singapore.
7. A special workshop for doctoral students was conducted by Dr Edie Rasmussen, School of Library, Archival and

Information Studies, The University of British Columbia. The purpose was to bring together a panel of academics in order to give feedback to doctoral students about their research. The participants had to submit an abstract of their research before the conference. At the conference, they presented an overview of their research topic. Each member of the panel offered their comments and suggestions after the presentation.

The ALIEP 2006 conference started with a fascinating and entertaining conference introduction by Abdus Sattar Chaudhry Head, Division of Information Studies, School of Communication & Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore and welcome note by Ang Peng Hwa, Dean School of Communication and Information Science.

The first keynote address "Singapore's vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Library service delivered by N Varaprashad, Chief Executive, National Library board Singapore opined that library is now embedded in a complex and dynamic society and networked computers are producing profound cultural changes creating unintended consequences that are likely to upset conventional extrapolations of current trends or even historical parallels. He identified six core functions of the librarians which are widely acknowledged:

- Ø Statutory- Legal deposit
  - Ø Heritage- collection and preservation of historical materials.
  - Ø Social- promote reading and life long learning
  - Ø Cultural- promote a well informed and cultured society
  - Ø Academic- Provide reference and research services,  
Publications, conferences and seminars
- } LEADERSHIP
- Ø Economic- Timely information that is of economic value to business and government

Dr. Varaprashad further posits that library education in the future would have to incorporate both tacit and explicit knowledge management.

Keynote Address II: Knowledge Mobilization: The Challenge for Information Professionals by Peter G.W. Keen, Professor, School of Communication & Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore was of special interest. The author makes a distinction between management and mobilization and argues that the organizational success depends how tacit and explicit knowledge are managed efficiently. Knowledge management needs knowledge sharing and collaboration. There is a need to undertake projects in this area and Library managers are expected to lead the projects for success. Hence Leadership qualities are essential to run a successful Knowledge management system in any library.

#### Paper Sessions:

Under the main theme of the conference entitled “Preparing Information Professionals for Leadership in the new age” the delegates stressed the importance of global collaboration and Leadership to manage the changes in Libraries and information centres. They exchanged ideas and research experiences including crucial information needs of users and leadership role of the Librarians in their institutions. There are ninety six papers included in the Conference proceedings, few of them are in Chinese script, and few more are only in abstract and total pages are 658. Paper selection was very competitive, total number of proposal received 121 out of which 43 full papers and equal number of short papers were accepted. In addition to the papers, 8 posters presentations and project demonstrations rounded out the ALIEP 2006 program. The program consisted of a mix of full papers (20 minute presentations) and short papers (15 minute presentations), splitting in three parallel sessions.

One of the key issues were discussed is the changing nature of the information profession with a highlight on few important issues e.g. Challenges facing libraries, librarians and library schools in Asia Pacific region, Innovation and best Practices in information Services and systems, Trends and innovations in education in Asia Pacific region. The papers cover a wide variety of topics and perspectives including global and regional trends in LIS education and Practice, quality and innovation in information services, professional development strategies, digital libraries and institutional repositories, information literacy and many others. The following are few of the highlights from this information packed conference:

Michael Koenig of Long Island University, USA in his paper ‘Leadership roles for Information professionals’, stated “the salient point to observe is that leadership roles for information professionals is a logical consequence of this sea change, and secondarily that education for information professionals and KM is a logical and necessary fit”. He further suggested that ‘information professionals should endeavor, whenever possible to get line management experience

within the organization'. According to him current period is an exciting time for information professionals to anticipate larger and more challenging leadership roles. Stepping into those roles will require great attention to and immersion in the context of the organization:

1. Immersion to gain the necessary knowledge of context
2. Immersion to communicate with the organization and to make it aware of the capabilities and contributions of the information professionals.

Leadership in Organizations is commonly defined as having and being seen to have the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of a working group or an organization. 'Library leaders must find ways to encourage their followers to engage in risk taking, at least calculated risk taking. Errors from experimentation must be encouraged and embraced by library leaders' (Riggs, 2001). Agreeing with this suggestion Sajjad ur Rehman, Kuwait University in his presentation emphasized on corporate mindset by saying that "if the LIS professionals are to survive and prosper in today's competitive employment market they need to develop a corporate mindset". He discussed leadership roles in information and knowledge management positions in corporate world and advised to explore the managerial and functional competencies that would make LIS professionals as successful leaders relevant to the emerging market. He identified following management competencies essential for competent LIS professionals:

1. Strategic planning and decision making
2. marketing and public relations
3. Physical dimensions
4. Financial strategies and budgeting
5. Benchmarking and valuation
6. Competencies for service enhancement and user empowerment
7. Customer focus
8. Information literacy

To implement a leadership program for future library managers from public and academic libraries a plan for continuing education need to establish and national or regional Library and Information associations must take initiatives in this regard.

Kanwal Ameen's paper "Challenges of preparing LIS Professionals for Leadership Roles in Pakistan: An analysis of the Status" pointed out that library leadership is almost an unexplored area in LIS education and literature in Pakistan. Through this study Ms Ameen analyzed the challenges faced by library leadership in Pakistan and attempted to:

1. Highlight the needed traits for promoting and enhancing library leadership on the basis of peer's perception.
2. Prepare a list of common leadership traits and inquire as to what extent library leaders in Pakistan are endowed with them
3. Brainstorm with professionals from libraries of various kinds in facilitated discussions about the leadership challenges
4. Explore the possibilities of library leadership development plans in the country

Educating 21<sup>st</sup> century LIS Professionals- The needs and expectations: A survey of Indian LIS Professionals and Alumni by R.S.R Varalakshmi, sketched out some emerging visions for the twenty first century LIS professional from the employers and alumni point of view and proposed a new pattern of LIS education. According to her LIS education programs are bestowed with two

responsibilities- maintenance of quality education through effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness; link up more systematically the educational supply to the profession's market value and to achieve these students, curriculum and infrastructure are important components.

Paper "The challenging and critical role of information professionals in combating AIDS in India" presented by this author critically reviewed the changing information needs of local communities due to the arrival of deadly diseases like AIDS, considered as one of the most challenging public health problems ever faced by the country. The author further stated that Information Professionals serving in different libraries/ potential information dissemination centers can provide leadership in the process of HIV/AIDS literacy program and actively participate in information dissemination efforts initiated by the government of India by offering dedicated services to the society and helping to access AIDS information not only in urban setting but also in rural environment. The author further stressed the need to identify strategies for effective collaboration in the context of AIDS literacy promotion efforts.

Has the market Place for Information Professionals Changed? Presented by K.S. Raghavan According to him there is increasing 'dis-intermediation' and 'de-institutionalization' of the process of information search, access and delivery. The composition of the emerging information market also needs to be understood in order to design and implement appropriate manpower development. Based on an examination of market indicators, he suggested that the divide between products of educational programs and the requirements of the market place needs to be bridged.

In recent years stress and burnout issues are discussed frequently in every profession. One of the interesting paper presented "Stress and burnout in libraries and information centres by Hasan Siamian & et.al. This research was designed for the librarians employed in the libraries affiliated to Mazandaran and Babol Medical Sciences in the north of Iran. The objectives are:

1. Examine the level of burnout librarians in central universities that is to find out if there is any burnout among this group of librarians
2. Reasons of burnout in librarians
3. Effected factors of burnout between librarians
4. Comparative burnout among University librarians in Babol and Sari Medical Universities

The authors investigated reasons and signs of librarians' burnout to help the higher authorities for keeping of healthy mental condition of their librarians and increase the productivity.

The negative or toxic leadership attributes are also discussed and it is opined that a pervasive and defective leader can be organizationally devastating.

### **Inauguration of IFLA regional office:**

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, [www.ifla.org/](http://www.ifla.org/)) established in 1927 providing leadership to the Library and information profession through its various core programs, sections and round tables, accepts memberships worldwide from all types of library organizations. In addition to the Secretariat located in The Hague, Netherlands, IFLA has three regional Offices, located in Dakar, Sao Paulo and newly opened at Singapore National Library.

A special event that took place at National Library of Singapore was the inauguration of IFLA regional office at National Library of Singapore on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Prof Peter Lor, Secretary General of IFLA .

### **Concluding remarks:**

ALIEP 2006 was the most appropriate Asia Pacific forum for library and information professionals to both retrospectively assess their roles and contributions to the building of 21<sup>st</sup> century progress, and to solve the negative problems which occurred almost parallel to the developments. It was indeed a great opportunity to meet and talk with lots of wonderful information professionals from around the world. Overall, the conference provided a very informal, relaxed and cozy atmosphere, and this was a great time to meet people from all kinds of libraries and discuss on Leadership issues, which otherwise would be impossible. The parallel session allowed interested attendees to concentrate on a certain theme or to attend sessions of interest in related topics. The author found, new ideas and opportunities for collaboration and partnership and it enabled to visit a beautiful country, and learn from peers in the exchange of ideas and common interest. It hosted speakers from all over the world, with over 240 participants from 21 countries. The author was able to interact with a wide section of speakers, information professionals in the Asia Pacific region. The venue executive centre proved to be a very good choice. In the ensuing discussion many participants was able to find the relevant sources from questions addressed at the Conference. Although the emphasis was on Leadership aspect of the information profession in Asia-Pacific countries, but it also covered all the important issues within the profession. An online evaluation form have made available to the participants and it is expected that ALIEP conference will receive a very positive evaluation. In view of the growing importance of library Leadership and lack of related literature specially in developing countries it is worthy to recommend leadership courses/ discussion fora for Librarians/ Information professionals to be conducted by national/ regional associations and societies for the benefit of the community.

**Note:**

A Web portal on LIS Education in Asia (LISEA), for the purpose of resource sharing and networking, has been launched during the Conference and all library schools and LIS educators are invited to participate in developing this portal. For a start, a [directory of LIS programs in Asia](#) is being compiled.

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