

Title of paper: Climate Control via Professional Identity Convergence

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This paper contends identity convergence of archivists with other information and cultural professionals is required to optimise services and ensure role continuance in the current and future world context.

Introduction: The “climate” driving change to professional identity

The 21st Century’s living and working environment has been transformed by technological advancements, and affected by the trends of globalisation, financial restriction and citizen participation (Innovation & Business Skills Australia Ltd, 2011). Consequently, parent bodies favour the convergence of information and cultural management, sites, and operations.

It will be argued that to control the current context or climate, a merger of the gallery, library, archive, and museum (GLAM) professions should be sought. It will be demonstrated that the formation of a composite professional identity does not necessarily entail a radical change to perceptions and practices; furthermore, that this convergence is an opportunity for improved service delivery and increased levels of job satisfaction and job security.

Background and scope

The paper draws upon a Ph D thesis investigating the convergence of memory institutions (CMIs), and the methodology comprised a literature review, survey and case studies. The literature review was international; the survey was sent throughout Western Australia, and the case studies were of four Western Australian local government areas: Wanneroo, Busselton, York and South Perth. The discussion of the research results focuses on the interrelationship of site and staffing convergence, given that the latter is usually dependent on the former (Robinson, 2012).

The history of collecting sector professional identity

“Professional identity” has been described as the persona which is designed to facilitate the attainment of that profession’s objectives (Crowbold, n.d.; Epstein, 1978)

Collecting sector literature demonstrates that the convergence of information and cultural domains is not an entirely new phenomenon; as MacNeil (2010) stated, the collecting sector was established on the twin notions of being a trusted repository with trusted custodians. Memory institutions all have the common ancestor of the Museum of Alexandria, and up until the 19th century nor the objects or their care was separated – collecting was “*an undifferentiating passion*” (Waibel & Erway, 2009, p. 324). Role stratification is attributed to the rise of democracy and the establishment of modern nation states, with new ideas emerging about how information should be collected, managed and shared; and the separation of the sites for institutions according to collection characteristics.

The current collecting sector professional identity

The recent forces impacting upon the collecting sector have escalated the commonalities between the domains. For the purpose of discussion, the elements of professional identity have been grouped into four categories.

1. Philosophy (beliefs) and values

The literature reveals core beliefs and goals of the domains of the collecting sector are shared, such as preservation of the human record, and unfettered access to information and culture (ICOM, 2007). The case study participants noted the similarities between the domains in terms of a focus on public service.

2. Training, education and skillsets

Authors (Henninger, Hanisch, Hughes, Carroll, Combes, Genoni, ... & Yates, 2011) indicate the component parts of information and cultural science such as librarianship, archival studies, and museum studies are increasingly taught as parts of a single program of study. Training has also changed due to employers emphasising the need for workers in any of the domains to possess generic skills including customer service and strategic planning.

There are similarities in the skillsets required of each domain. For instance, all professionals acquire, organise, search, present and preserve information and culture (Pember, 2005). The case study councils and staff noted the compatibility of GLAM skills – As one interviewee observed, “*we [collecting sector workers] have similar and different skills... they complement each other*”.

3. Roles and practices

The literature reveals that despite some differences, the roles of the professions of the collecting sector can be placed under the umbrella term of “stewardship” (Bundy, 2001). Irrespective of institutional type, the core aspects of work are collection management, institutional management and institutional services, and the mobility of workers between the disciplines is increasing.

4. Affiliations, a shared history and terminology

The escalation in sector-spanning associations, conferences, events and journals is deepening affiliations and constituting a shared history (Robinson, 2011). A partially-shared language has traditionally existed between the GLAM practice areas, with numerous instances of consistent use of the same words for concepts and processes, such as “retention” (Kennedy & Schauder, 1998), and terminology previously found in only one or some of the four traditional memory domains is diversifying in use.

Barriers to professional identity convergence

The prospect of a unified profession is not universally welcome, although the cumulative majority (60%) of survey respondents did register a favourable opinion. There is the comfort of staying in silos (Duncan, 2004); entrenched competitive behaviour between the domains; and a fear that merging will lead to insufficient acknowledgment of contribution and loss of respect (Oliver, 2010). Survey respondents and participants from most of the case study sites warned that people have “ownership” of collections, and indicated as per the literature (Sayers, 2001) the hesitancy of the information profession to change, and the high level of effort that mergers require.

However, as Sassoon (2007) concluded, the convergence of professions is possible because archives are part of the broader cultural system, overarched by heritage. For instance, the creation of a converged memory institution at Wanneroo was viewed as an opportunity to share passions, and to leverage the pulling power of the separate occupants. The survey data indicated the need for identity evolution and convergence for the current and future climate, with respondents viewing the modern information and cultural professional as “*a jack-of-all-trades*”, and the modern institution as “*co-located with other cultural facilities*”.

Controlling the climate: Actions to reposition identity

The discussion of actions to reposition identity is framed in the previous grouping of elements. Survey respondents were asked to nominate which memory institutions (and subsequently which staff teams) were most suitable to merge, using the starting point of a library. The merging of an archive with a library was suggested by 27.8% of respondents, which was lower than expected given the numerous examples worldwide of this partnership. This domain merger featured in the case study sites of Busselton and South Perth. The subset of results is used for the remainder of this discussion. Respondent opinion on additional partners for the merged archives-library site was sought, and the highest response (46.7%) was received for “Museum”; “Gallery” was the second-most

common suggestion (40%), followed by “Records Centre” (26.7%) and “Visitor/Tourist Centre” (6.7%). Examples of these domains partnering with archives include the Rooms in Newfoundland (an archives, museum and gallery) and from the case studies, at Wanneroo there is a gallery and the archives are located within the museum, and at York it was intended that the archives, records, visitor centre and library be co-located.

1. Philosophy (beliefs) and values

Philosophical and value change is required for professional identity convergence. Caron (2010, para. 9) noted, “*A commitment to core values should triumph over the pursuit of factional interest*”, and 42.9% of survey respondents believed staff attitude would prompt a merger. An interviewee from the case study of Wanneroo attributed the success of the convergence in part to the common philosophy of the managers of Library Services and Museum, Heritage and the Arts “*Because we had shared values, shared professional respect...we were both ready to take that step*”. However, a participant from York remarked in relation to the prospect of a shared location that, “*Archivists are nervous and this is a public library and I imagine they would not feel very confident having it all in here just for everyone to look through as they please with dirty fingers*”. As discussed elsewhere (Cathro, 2007) stereotypical views hinder the convergence of the professions, and impede the functioning of cross-domain teams. This has been countered in the case study sites and at other CMIs by measures such as values workshops (McShannon, 2009), and team building exercises (Wanneroo) to ensure successful staff integration and harmony. As Walters and van Gordon (2007, p. 392) note, “*Addressing cultural differences is especially important because doing so can help operational staff develop appreciation for each other and find new value in working together*”.

It was discovered that the breaking down of rivalries is partially reliant upon management and staff establishing a common purpose (Winkworth, 2005). For example, the staff of the Busselton memory institutions were willing to collaborate to best serve the district – as one participant noted, “*I’m sure we can work out how to help each other*”.

Professional interaction will be facilitated by a converged management structure (McShannon, 2009). This was suggested by survey respondents, and demonstrated at the case study site of Wanneroo, where the archives, museum and gallery staff report to one manager, and also in York, where the records and library staff noted their common management meant “*everyone’s on the same wavelength*”.

Identity convergence (and CMI functioning) is advanced when a clear vision of the integration of staff and services is communicated (Walters & van Gordon, 2007). This approach was taken at the Hive in Worcester, which contains the Archive and Archaeology Service, Hub Customer Service Centre (council information and services), and public and university library collections (Keene, 2011), and was also apparent at the case study sites. For example, from Wanneroo, participants advised “*to be well-informed was half the battle*”, and consequently that, “*Morale has been quite good*”, and from South Perth a participant remarked in relation to the convergence of staff and collections, “*I think it is a natural fit*”.

The literature (for example, Marshall, 2011) reveals that a new environment will foster new behaviours and the shedding of old ways and cultures. Consequently, the modification of professional identity will be aided if integrated services begin in a new building (as per the two metropolitan case study sites), or at least in a renovated workplace (as per the two rural case study sites).

2. Training, education and skillsets

Progress towards a composite identity will be made by recruiting graduates of professional association-accredited multidisciplinary courses (such as Curtin University’s Bachelor of Arts (Library and Corporate Information Management) degree, which allows employment as librarians, archivists and records managers); enrolling staff in training directed to all the domains of

the collecting sector (for example, the Aurora Institute’s leadership training – see <http://www.aurorafoundation.org.au>) and instructing employees in skills necessary to work in other practice areas.

The importance of staff skills as a prompt of a merger of memory institutions was nominated by 35.7% of respondents, one of whom suggested that “*Where possible staff should be trained or upskilled to move seamlessly across the differing service areas, particularly in the customer service areas*”. This is the case at Wairarapa Archives in New Zealand, which is under the management of the Masterton District Library, and the archival team is assisted by library staff, all of whom are trained in archive services and familiar with the collections (Green & Winter, 2011).

The survey respondents were asked what training they needed if the collecting sector’s professions were converged. Four categories of training (each with lists of skills) were examined. Participants ranked each skill in order of necessity, and Table 1 presents the data for institution-related training.

Table 1 Ranking of need for various institution-related skills

Institution-related training, skill type required, ranking of 1	%
Collection knowledge	42.9
Collection maintenance and preservation	28.5
Collection development	14.3
Reference and information services	14.3

The most common gaps in terms of “Institution-related” training needs were those associated with the collections of merger partners. 42.9% of respondents assigned “Collection knowledge”¹ top ranking. This is not unexpected given that participants in a merger would need to become familiar with the content of collections held by their partners, for best service delivery. As a Busselton interviewee noted, “*Staff fear feeling stupid if they get asked a question they can’t answer*”.

“Collection maintenance and preservation” was indicated by respondents as the second most needed institution-related training (28.5%), indicating that some respondents acknowledge a gap in their knowledge related to the life-cycle management of the different domains’ collections of the partners in the merged institution. “Collection development” and “Reference and information services” each received a response of 14.3%. This is likely due to these duties not always being undertaken by every staff member.

The next question investigated IT- training needs (see Table 2).

Table 2 Ranking of need for various IT-related skills

IT-related training, skill type required, ranking of 1	%
Creating and maintaining collection databases	53.8
Copyright	15.4
Digitisation	15.4
Creating and maintaining institution website	7.7
Licensing	7.7

The highest response (53.8%) was received for “Creating and maintaining collection databases”, with “Copyright” and “Digitisation” equally chosen (15.4%) as the second most required training. This data indicates that respondents clearly recognise the need for familiarity with the processing of their partners collections, for optimal functioning of the merged team and site.

¹ In this instance meaning “knowledge about the partnering institution’s collection”

Generic skills (see Table 3) were the third type of training that a respondent might require in a merged institution.

Table 3 Ranking of need for various generic skills

Generic training, skill type required, ranking of 1	%
Time Management	33.3
Communication	25
Interpersonal	25
Administration	16.7

“Time management skills” training was ranked first by 33.3% of respondents as the most needed generic skill in a merged institution. This foreshadows concerns about an increase in workload, as the data from the upcoming Table 5 will report. The equal second most frequent ranking of “Communication skills” and “Interpersonal skills” might indicate respondents’ recognition of likely interaction with a wider demographic of clients when more than one service is offered, and also with different collecting professionals.

The fourth and final type of training that a respondent might require in a merged institution was tested under the blanket title of “Other training”. “Staff co-ordination and management” was given a number one ranking by 44.4% of respondents, which supports earlier discussion of the effort required for identity convergence. Other training needs respondents identified (via comment boxes) were “*Socialisation*”, and “*an understanding of organisational fit*”. These answers indicate awareness of potential inter-domain antagonism, and the previously-noted importance of clear arrangements.

3. Roles and practices

If archives merged with another institution, the majority of survey respondents (71.4%) suggested a combined team of staff to work for both institutions. This arrangement was implemented at The Oregon State University after the merger of the University Archives and the Special Collections Library (Nutefall & Chadwell, 2012). However, a Busselton interviewee remarked, “*Working in both [domains] is not something everyone would do well*”.

The anticipated impact of convergence by respondents on their roles is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Effect of a merger on role

Aspect of role	Respondents predicting an increase (%)
Task variety	100.0
Workload	92.3
Promotional opportunities	61.5
Hours worked	38.5
Wages	28.6

This data reflects previous studies – for instance, Ingles, De Long, Humphrey, Sivak, Sorensen, and de Peuter (2005) reported 38% of respondents rated functional area integration as the greatest cause of role change. All respondents (100%) predicted an increase in task variety. Survey respondents hoped for other benefits from a merger of professions, with 61.5% predicting more promotional opportunities and 28.6% anticipating higher wages. The cross-tasking of staff may increase levels of job satisfaction, due to other research (Ingles et al., 2005) demonstrating that professional development, more career opportunities and more challenging work are important contributing factors. Commentators (Crowbold, n.d.) have also observed that the role of an “information professional” carries higher status and delivers higher wages than domain-specific roles, and in Australia, earnings for full-time Archivists, Curators and Records Managers are below the median pay for all occupations (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

However, a high proportion (92.3%) of survey respondents also anticipated an increase in workload, and more than a third (38.5%) expected their working hours to rise. This might lessen receptiveness to professional identity convergence, due to reports

(Considine, Jakubauskas & Oliver, 2008) that these possibilities decrease staff motivation to remain in information and cultural services.

The impact of roles and practices upon the evolution of professional identity is also affected by whether servicing all domains is optional or mandatory. Some converged memory institutions favour staff choice - for example Parker (2011) explains that staff in the transformed Manchester Library and Information Service can opt in or out of cross-domain roles; similarly from the case studies, some participants believed individuals should be able to decide whether they remain working in their single area of specialty - *“some would be comfortable, some not”*. However, a South Perth manager warned that team unity may be disrupted if not all staff are involved. Some of the research participants were already cross-domain tasked and rostered, and as a Customer Service Officer from York explained, the dual aspects of her role meant her identity was affiliated with both services.

The consensus of opinion from research participants was that professional identity evolution as mostly embodied by cross-training and cross-tasking of teams should occur:

“There are some areas where it works really well.”

“I agree with that; I think there is great value in team members in a converged situation such as ours knowing how those other areas work and having some of those basic skills and understanding.”

However, the support was qualified - it depended upon whether the role was customer care (“front-of-house”) or collection care (“back-of-house”). Participants from all the case studies almost unanimously recommended cross-domain backgrounds for the “front-of-house” staff. This reflects the system of staffing at the Hive, where there is *“an integrated front-of-house-team drawn from all services, able to answer or refer any question in relation to collections and services”* (Keene, 2011, slide 9). Support for the convergence of the “back-of-house staff” depended on the level of the role, with convergence of lower and middle ranking positions preferred to that of the more senior positions.

The research data also demonstrates that the design of display and work-areas can assist in the convergence of professional identity, and the synergy of service programs. For example, Libraries and Archives Canada has integrated the physical layout of the buildings and no longer has single floors for specific disciplines (Doucet, 2007) and at the case study site of the South Perth Library and Community Centre the local history (and archives) collection is shelved alongside the public library collection, and the local history staff member shares an office with public library staff. At many merged institutions, visitors are directed from a common enquiries desk, and this design and subsequent practice was supported by the majority of case study participants.

4. Affiliations, a shared history and terminology

Affiliations can be established between professional associations by the signings of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU’s), such as between the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA).

Sayers (2001) observes that a shared history can be begun by holding cross-domain staff meetings before the move to an integrated facility, and continuing these meetings afterwards. Evidence from the case studies supporting this recommendation are the York library, administration and records staff meeting monthly and the Busselton Arts Complex partners meeting quarterly.

The literature (for example, Waibel & Erway, 2009) indicates affiliations between staff are frequently fostered by joint activities, and this strategy is reflected by evidence from the case study of Wanneroo, where staff often combine programs in support of events and exhibits. For example, when the display “Symbols of Australia” toured, a focus group member said that *“it was really*

something to bond on". Ongoing socialisation between the professionals of the various domains is essential, and can be achieved via everyday interaction in shared amenity areas (such as kitchens, as intended at York). Green and Winter (2011) report that the staff of the Masterton Library and the Wairarapa Archives celebrate all staff and social occasions together. This approach is evident at the case study site of Wanneroo, where a participant stated, *"everyone is connected to each other – say it's a birthday, someone makes a cake"*.

Authors contend that an increase in shared language would foster GLAM collegiality - *"a broader and more inclusive vocabulary that both recognises and celebrates the expanding landscape of the field"* (Henninger et al., 2011, p. 2), and a change to professional identity can also be fuelled by restructuring and re-titling divisions and jobs (Marshall, 2011).

The advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes of professional identity convergence that have arisen from climate change and actions to reposition the collecting sector are now examined.

Advantageous outcomes of professional identity convergence

There are numerous advantages to staff and institutions when workers are cross-trained, cross-tasked and collaborating. A manager from South Perth noted that convergence *"had corrected the fragmentation of our information and cultural service"*, and survey respondents remarked upon the reduced duplication of work. There is the chance to resolve common problems (Oliver, 2010), and staff skills and competencies also increase from working in different services (Parker, 2011).

Winkworth (2005) noted the potential to improve practices, the latter stating *"The ideas and insights we gain from museum collections complement what we learn from material in galleries, libraries and archives"* (2005, p. 6), and a case study interviewee remarked, *"It's great to be able to take advantage of the experience of the other sections"*. The sharing of knowledge between staff forms a larger knowledge base in that community (Oliver, 2010), and subsequently collection care, projects, patron experience and service are maximised - it is *"the best for the customer"*, remarked a Busselton interviewee.

Participants from Wanneroo and South Perth agreed with the literature (Robinson, 2011) that the integration of professions improves efficiency and generates new ideas and innovations, and also attested to prior reports of increases in the levels of staff motivation and staff satisfaction as they become familiar with and offer more services to visitors and the community (McPherson & Ganendran, 2010). Another advantage raised in the literature is that cross-trained teams can share the workload and also provide better coverage of duties when staff are on leave (Shine, 2007). This was confirmed by a York interviewee noting *"they can all pitch in to help when it is needed"*, and by a focus group member from Wanneroo, who stated, *"It is much better from a HR perspective if you've someone who can fill-in in multiple places"*.

The literature (for example, Deakin University, 2002) reports a merged professional body and/or association presents a common cultural voice in a community, and hence has increased impact and influence, delivers more powerful advocacy, achieves greater awareness, and ensures a bigger perspective. Examples include the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (<http://www.abm-utvikling.no>), and the Collections Council of Australia, which operated from 2004 to 2009.

The findings of the research are if professionals are able to work across domains they will increase their level of job security. This is particularly relevant to archivists, as future job prospects for this career are only rated as fair, and competition for positions will be strong (Government of the United States, 2012).

Disadvantageous outcomes of professional identity convergence

The research participants voiced concerns (as per the literature - Sayers, 2001) that staff from other domains will not be able to fulfil requirements of collection management for other areas of practice. Previous reports of professional integration (Gibson, Morris & Cleve, 2007) also point to the smaller converged team frequently experiencing reduced autonomy, power and presence, due to absorption by their more substantial counterparts. This was reflected by the survey data, with a respondent asking, “*Who are you now?*” and another believing “*it is quite possible my role would be downgraded to co-ordinator under another manager*”.

Other disadvantageous outcomes of the convergence of professions can be staff attrition and/or job losses. Marshall (2011) observes the formation of the Tasmanian Archives & Heritage Office from five previous archive, library and museum entities reduced staffing levels by 11%, and 7.7% of survey respondents predicted a “Decrease” in staff total.

Occasional conflicts in the missions and activities of partners were reported by research participants, and problems arose from [initial] role ambiguity. Gibson, Morris and Cleve (2007) advised small matters can trouble staff, such as having to share lounge areas and car-parks, and that clashes of wills and egos occur. A York interviewee reported “*infighting*”; by contrast a case study participant from Wanneroo noted “*personality issues have not been a problem*”.

Further analysis and discussion

The research data demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between the depth of interaction between the memory domains in a CMI and the magnitude of professional identity change. The literature, survey and case studies also reveal the pace of change, the effort and the training required is likely to vary according to factors such as the characteristics of the incumbent staff (note many collecting sector professionals are multi-qualified – Marty & Twidale, 2011).

Research participants were cautious about the likelihood of a single, overarching professional identity for the collecting sector, although one interviewee from Wanneroo remarked, “*That would be nice in an ideal world wouldn't it?*”

Positive indications of collecting professional interaction and subsequent identity convergence will include a reduction in silo'd attitudes, successful outcomes of joint projects, a greater ratio of cross-trained to specialised staff, and a greater proportion of staff fulfilling roles in more than one domain.

Conclusions

The evidence presented indicates the similarities and transferability of collecting sector core values, skills and practices, and suggests the formation of a composite identity is not insurmountable, and will not entail radical changes for archivists and their counterparts.

It is acknowledged that there will be always be some differences between the domains (including but not limited to functions, laws, items, access and circulation policies) and even at the final stage of convergence, it will be necessary for the different partners to perform some specialised tasks (Zorich, Waibel & Erway, 2008). However, a strengthening of the versatility and capacity of professionals will reinforce the relevance and value of information and cultural services.

Hence it is argued that maintaining domain silos undermines the potential control of the 21st century collecting sector climate, and that the evolution to a converged identity should be taken proactively. As the Society of American Archivists (2012, para. 2) summarised, “*We can free ourselves from the borders of the past and leverage opportunities, knowledge and experience beyond our specialisations and institutions*”.

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