

Sharing Practices and Actions for Making Best Use of Organizational Knowledge in Libraries
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From Local to Global: A Comparison of Hong Kong Library Association Mentoring Programme and International Librarians Network

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Abstract:

In today's world, sharing and connecting get easier every day with the rapid development of and ubiquitous access to the World Wide Web. It enables one to acquire information about their profession and connect with people any time any where. While celebrating this wide availability of information and connectivity, one-to-one personal sharing is not to be dismissed. Instead, we should make the best use of it in developing our profession. Both the Hong Kong Library Association Mentoring Programme and the International Librarians Network are newly launched mentoring programmes addressing the increasing demand for connecting and networking LIS professionals both locally and globally. This paper aims to compare these two mentoring programmes in terms of the successful factors of and learning support given to the Hong Kong LIS community, as well as the effectiveness of these personal sharing platforms. Their strengths, similarities, and impact to the LIS community will be discussed.

Keywords: Localization, globalization, Hong Kong Library Association Mentoring Programme, International Librarians Network.

Introduction

In today's world, sharing and connecting get easier every day with the rapid development of and ubiquitous access to the World Wide Web. It enables one to acquire information about their profession and connect with people any time any where. While celebrating this wide availability of information and connectivity, one-to-one personal sharing is not to be dismissed. Instead, we should make the best use of it in developing our profession. In Hong Kong, a city so well equipped with Internet access and devices, LIS professionals and students are offered opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge, and at the same time connect with practitioners locally and around the world. The Hong

Kong Library Association (HKLA) Mentoring Programme provides a platform for LIS students to personally speak to and learn from, as well as to build relationships with experienced LIS professionals locally. The one-to-one mentoring relationship is an invaluable channel for students (especially those without any work experience) to seek advice on career development and personal attainment from an experienced professional. The International Librarians Network (ILN) is another such programme that enables LIS practitioners to connect with one another around the globe. Using electronic communication channels such as social media, it allows LIS practitioners from different parts of the world to share with one another their experiences, local practices, industry news, etc. Both programmes promote sharing of personal knowledge and contribute to one's professional development and networking irrespective of their professional attainment. This paper firstly takes a quick overview of the HKLA Mentoring Programme and a brief look at the ILN. Their strengths, similarities, and impact to the LIS community will be discussed in terms of the successful factors of and learning support given to the Hong Kong LIS community, as well as the effectiveness of these personal sharing platforms.

HKLA Mentoring Programme: A Quick Overview

The HKLA Mentoring Programme offers a traditional mentorship structure, by pairing mentees (student members) with mentors (experienced LIS practitioners). The concept of the programme arose from the constantly increasing student membership numbers, which constitute 57.2% of the total HKLA membership. The president at the time, Li Haipeng, saw the need to support and serve this major portion of the community. With the goal of furthering the association's objective of providing members with an informal communication network and also motivated by the successful examples from the American Library Association (ALA) and the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), the HKLA mentoring pilot programme was launched in September 2013. (Li and Wong, 2015)

The programme aims to provide an opportunity for communication between members of the profession in Hong Kong in a more structured and long-term nature than other HKLA activities; to foster relationships between experienced librarians and those new to the field for the benefit and professional development of both groups; and to aid in the career development of student members. (Figure 1) The programme is administered by a volunteered based Standing Programme Committee responsible for logistical arrangement, promotion and assessment of the programme. To join the programme, mentee applicants must be student members of HKLA and current students of a recognized library or information science programme at the Bachelor degree level or above (HKLA Mentoring Programme, 2015). Mentors are mostly invited to take part through personal connections of and recommendations from the standing committee and the HKLA Council members.



Figure 1. HKLA Mentoring Programme webpage

The pilot programme was well received by mentee applicants. Taking into account the number of mentors joining this programme at the pilot stage, only 12 pairs of mentor-mentee were matched in the first year. A launch event was held in November 2013 where mentors and mentees met each other in

person for the first time. (Wong, 2013) A sharing session were held in June 2014. (Wong, 2014b) Individually, mentors and mentees kept regular contact, though mentees were encouraged to be proactive in upholding appropriate level of contact because mentors could only keep up so much with their duties and roles at work. (Wong, 2014a) Two surveys/evaluation reports were sent to mentees in the middle and end of the round, one of which was mentees' mandatory reports. The results of all these assessments were predominantly positive. Based on the feedback and comments received, the programme increased the number of pairs to 20 and held several more gatherings in the second year. (Li and Wong, 2015) It was indicated by the participants that this programme was beneficial to the LIS community in Hong Kong.

International Librarians Network: A Brief Look

ILN is a non-profit organization set up by several enthusiastic librarians in 2012 and in just a few years has developed into a truly international organizations with over 1,500 participants from 103 countries. (Dalby et al., 2015a) The purpose of setting up ILN is to connect librarians in different part of the world so that they can share and exchange experience and ideas from their home countries, which will eventually help improve their profession. (Figure 2) Traditionally, a mentoring relationship is built up by a mentor and a protégée (i.e. mentee). Usually, the mentor is more experience than the protégée and thus will help and advise the protégée in career planning and life pursuit. It is very common that this kind of partnership is a one way communication instead of interactive relationship. However, ILN adopts a peer mentoring model which means that “partners are not placed into established mentor/protégé roles, but rather are encouraged to view their partnership as a way to learn from each other; all are mentors and all are protégés.” (International Librarians Network, 2016a)



Figure 2. ILN homepage

The ILN is run entirely by volunteers from all over the world and is financially independent. It is governed by a management board, who provides strategic direction for the organization and is responsible for ensuring that the ILN is run well and in the best interests of our community. In terms of administration and management, the ILN is operated under the leadership of the ILN directors with the assistance of the ILN coordinators and consultants to match participants, support the partnerships, and manage the website. The ILN ambassadors are responsible for promoting the programme and providing advice to the ILN directors regarding the support required for the library and information profession in their home country. After joining the ILN mentoring programme, programme participants are encouraged to share their experiences, opinions and ideas to create an international network of librarians. One unique feature of the ILN is that programme participants will be matched across the broader as much as possible, i.e. programme participants from the same country will not be matched together. This arrangement will facilitate sharing experience from different backgrounds and cultures, and developing networks with international professionals. Programme participants can communicate with their partners using e-mails, social media or other tools that they feel comfortable. They also have to actively participate in the online discussions on the ILN website. Logistically, the ILN runs two rounds of the programme each year, each round running for four months. At the end of four months,

programme participants can either conclude their existing partnership, or continue it independently without further support from the ILN.

Comparison: Similarities and Strengths

▪ Similarities

Although the HKLA Mentoring Programme and ILN are different in scale and focus, they however share some similarities. First of all, both programmes are newly launched mentoring programme for the LIS community. HKLA Mentoring Programme is the first mentoring programme provided to LIS students and practitioners in Hong Kong. In the past, the opportunity for LIS students to meet and get to know experienced professionals is limited. This programme built a direct bridge between LIS students and experienced practitioners. ILN is also the first that offers LIS students and practitioners an online platform for communication and networking around the globe. The two rounds per year structure instead of the common one year round such as the HKLA Mentoring Programme gives flexibility to participants on the time to join. (International Librarians Network, 2016d) Another unique aspect of ILN is the diverse category of participants. ILN is not focusing on providing mentorship for a single LIS sector, and participants have the choice to choose what kind of peer mentor they prefer to interact with. It enables LIS students and practitioners at any position in any sector and with any level of experience to expand their networks beyond their workplace, LIS sector and even country.

Second, both programmes are run by volunteers. The Standing Programme Committee of HKLA Mentoring Programme consisted of a programme chairman, a committee secretary and an I.T. officer. They were responsible for creating documentation and marketing material, pairing participants, arranging activities, assessing the programme and maintaining the programme website. (Li and Wong, 2015) On the other hand, the ILN at the beginning defined three major roles i.e. Programme coordinators, Country coordinators and participants. Programme coordinators are similar to the standing committee of the HKLA Mentoring Programme in that they are responsible for general programme administrative tasks including matching participants, maintaining programme website and running online discussions. Country coordinators serve as participants' in-country contacts. The management roles in ILN are defined more clearly in later stage when a larger volunteers group emerges. Right now there are three directors in the management board, who are also the founders of ILN. Also, there are thirty ambassadors from Asia, Europe, Africa, North American and the Middle East, nine coordinators and consultants. (International Librarian Network, 2016e) The ILN also has volunteers responsible for financial, legal and risk, and technical consultations, as well as social media coordination. (Figure 3) The two programmes are maintained by volunteers who mostly have a full-time job, but are willing to use their own time and expertise to make contribution to the programmes.

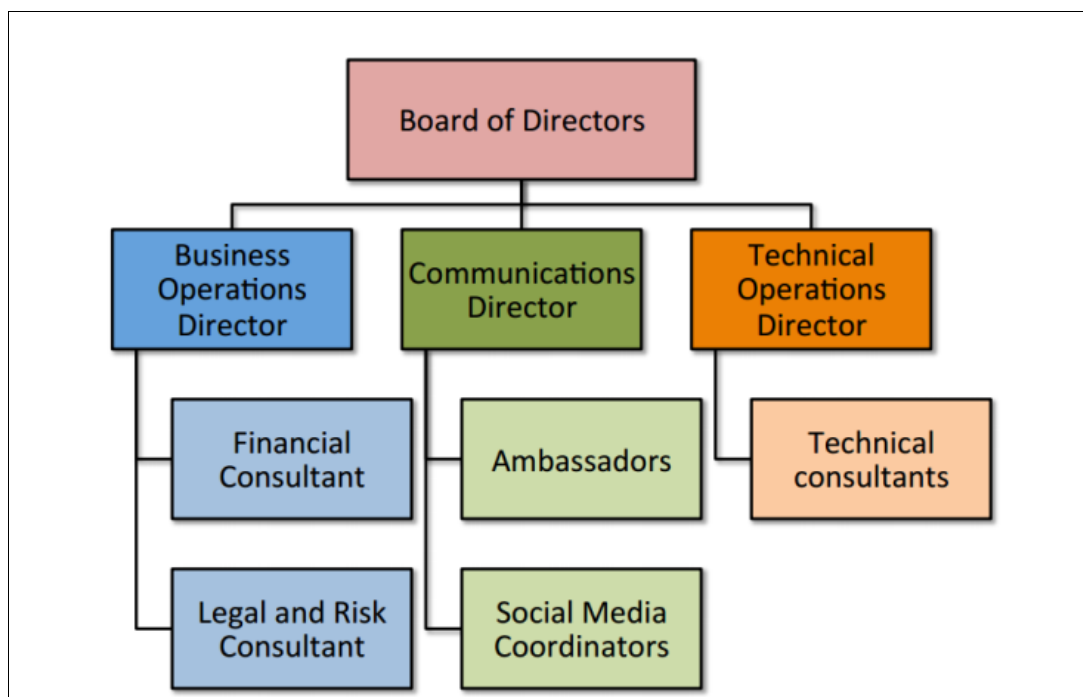


Figure 3. Organizational structure of ILN, extracted from Dalby et al. (2015b)

Lastly, both programmes are established based on a common goal to share experiences by connecting LIS professionals. The HKLA Mentoring Programme connects LIS students and experienced practitioners. Through mutual sharing between mentors and mentees, it is believed that the HKLA Mentoring Programme could enhance the professional development of both mentees and mentors, and could support Hong Kong LIS students' career development. (HKLA Mentoring Programme, 2015) ILN aims to allow participants who live and work in different countries to share ideas and experiences across the broader at no expense (Dalby et al., 2015a, International Librarians Network, 2016b). It is hoped that through providing an international digital platform and expanding one's international network, LIS practitioners could help each other, broaden their perspective on the profession, and learn about career opportunities through experiences sharing. (Dalby et al., 2015a) Despite the differences in scale and focus, they are both the bridge that links LIS professionals together to expand each other's knowledges and generate new ideas.

▪ Strengths

Apart from the fact that both the HKLA Mentoring Programme and ILN are new professional development programmes in LIS which are entirely run by volunteers, the success of both programmes can best be explained by the following three strengths. First of all, enthusiastic response from the participants is perhaps the most important reason for their success. The HKLA Mentoring Programme is created to support the growing number of student members. The pilot HKLA Mentoring Programme received a very high response that the mentee applications greatly surpassed the number of available mentors (Wong, 2013). Although many student members registered, the programme only had 12 mentors to fulfil the demand. Therefore, the pilot round could only have 12 pairs of mentor-mentee. However, the number of pairs increased to 20 in the second round that almost a double compared to the pilot (Li and Wong, 2015). In ILN, the pilot round in March-August 2013 had 92 participants and it quadrupled to 391 in the next round in September 2013-February 2014. In just two years from the pilot to the August-December 2015 round, ILN's participants have increased almost eight times as 770 more people joined (Figure 4). Both programmes provide new ways for LIS professionals to connect local and global LIS community. They offer unique opportunities to LIS students and practitioners to reach out, share with and learn from each other which accounts for the success of the programmes.

Round	Timeframe	Participants	Countries
Pilot	March-August 2013	92	18
Round 2013B	September 2013-February 2014	391	39
Round 2014A	March-June 2014	764	76
Round 2014B	September-December 2014	630	73
Round 2015A	March-June 2015	820	79
Round 2015B	August-December 2015	862	85

Figure 4. ILN participant survey: Participants statistics

The second strength of both programmes is their strategic and supportive leadership. Li Haipeng was the HKLA president in 2013 and 2014. After being elected to the presidency, he identified the lack of support for student members who constituted the majority of memberships (Li and Wong, 2015). These student members were studying degree programmes in order to become LIS professionals. Apart from annual events and activities such as the Hong Kong Library Education & Career Forum, Annual General Meeting, etc., there was insufficient networking and development opportunities for student members of HKLA (Hong Kong Library Association, 2016). Under the leadership of Li, the HKLA Council decided to kick off the HKLA Programme in November 2013. Li and some former HKLA Presidents served as the mentors during these two year. (Li and Wong, 2015) ILN is founded by Kate Byrne, Alyson Dalby and Clare McKenzie in August 2012 (Dalby et al., 2015a). They found connecting with library professionals worldwide is costly and the channel is limited. Therefore, they built the infrastructure of ILN and launched the pilot round in 2013. In the pilot year, they delivered 6 presentations throughout Australia, Latvia (Europe) and Singapore (Asia), and wrote a journal article about the programme (International Librarians Network, 2016f). They continued to promote the programme through similar ways in subsequent years. Their efforts in spreading the news about ILN increased the number of volunteers and participants. Having volunteer ambassadors to promote and micro-administer the programme also strengthened and helped ensure its sustainability. Recognizing their contribution made to the LIS community, Byrne, Dalby and McKenzie were named 2016 Movers & Shakers by *Library Journal*. (International Librarians Network, 2016c)

The third strength that the programmes have is the devotion and commitment of their volunteers. The HKLA Mentoring Programme was administered by the Standing Programme Committee. In order to further improve the programme, the committee conducted two surveys per round. In the interim evaluation during the pilot round, they addressed the comments from mentees. (Li and Wong, 2015) For example, mentees reflected they would like to have more regular activities (Wong, 2014a), the Committee responded by hosting an extra sharing session for mentors and mentees to gather round (Wong, 2014b). More suggestions were raised in the second round's mid-year meet-up, and the Committee was eager to investigate these potential improvements in the future (Chan, 2015). Mentees were satisfied with the support they received from the committee that 54.5% expressed highly satisfied and none were dissatisfied. (Figure 5) Through constantly evaluating and reviewing the programme, as well as being receptive and proactive towards suggestions, the committee members' dedication in improving the programme in order to make it a success can be easily seen. The ILN on the other hand has a larger group of volunteers and thus needs to have a larger organization management. According to Dalby et al. (2015a), the development stage has only programme coordinators and country coordinators. The founders served as programme coordinators and they were calling for country coordinators after the pilot was launched. By the end of the pilot round in August 2013, the response from the participants was so strong that 15 countries had representatives designated. By 2015, there

were 28 active country coordinators. As volunteers' number continues to grow, their roles and responsibility is more well-defined (Figure 3). Through the hard work of the volunteers, the ILN is able to reach and promote itself to the local as well as to the global communities. 22% of participants reported they heard about ILN through a friend or colleague, which is the second biggest channel (Figure 6). By increasing the number of participants, the volunteers group diversifies the pool of participant backgrounds. Without these volunteers who contribute to promoting the programme, it would be difficult for ILN's founders to have participants from 85 countries in just two years' time. (Figure 4) Strong support received from these devoted and committed volunteers is certainly a credit to the success of ILN.

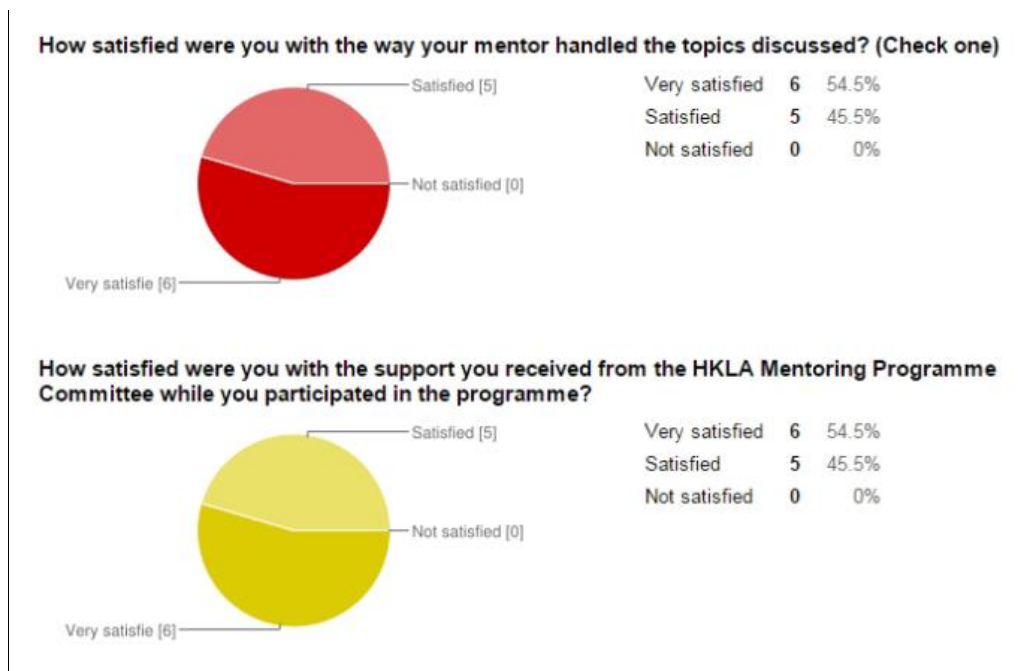


Figure 5. HKLA Mentoring Programme post-program survey, extracted from Li and Wong (2015)

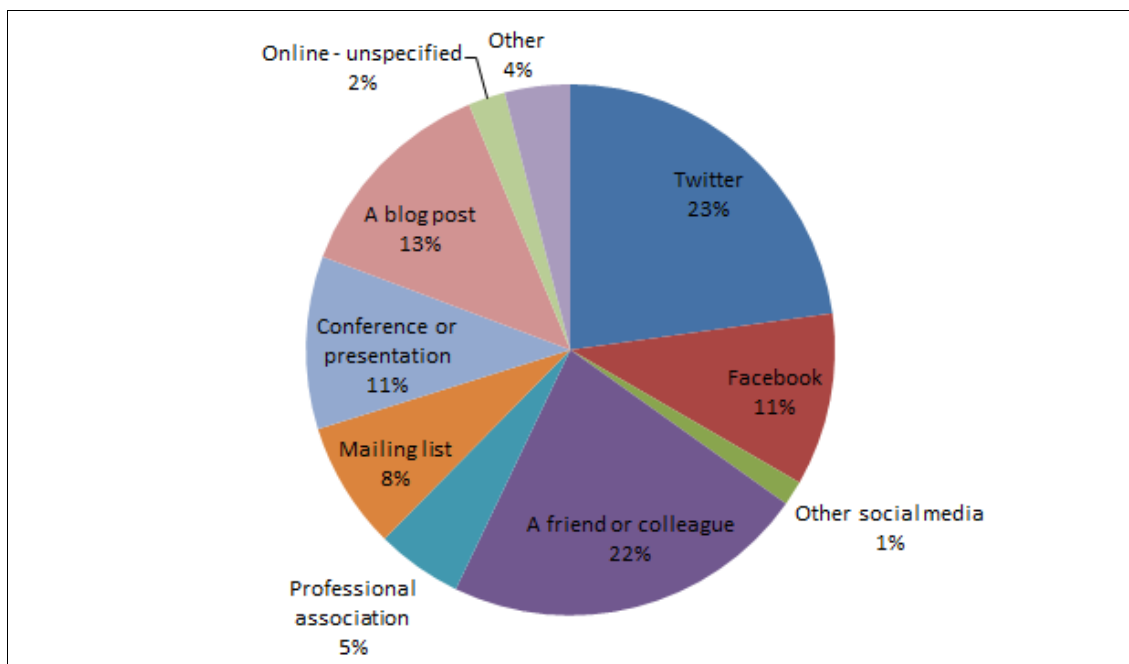


Figure 6. ILN participant survey: How participants heard about the ILN?

Impacts on the LIS Community: Personal Experiences and Observations

Based on the authors' personal experiences and observations, the HKLA Mentoring Programme and ILN have exerted a positive impact towards the LIS community in Hong Kong. Firstly, they provided collaboration opportunities among the members of the mentoring programmes. This paper is a perfect example to illustrate this point. The first author was a mentor in the HKLA Mentoring Programme and a Country Ambassador in ILN while the second author was a mentee in the HKLA Mentoring Programme and is an ILN participant. With common experiences in these two mentoring programmes, these two authors decided to collaboratively write this paper to share these two programmes with a wider audience and to reflect on their own experiences. Apart from co-authoring conference paper, there can be other ways and forms of collaboration such as conducting library surveys and research projects to engage participants of the programmes.

Secondly, these two programmes enhanced the exchange of professional information among members. In the HKLA Mentoring Programme, the sharing sessions and individual meetings facilitated information exchange among the LIS professionals. A mentee expressed that the learning was not merely from his/her mentor but from other participants during sharing sessions (Li and Wong, 2015). Another mentee stated he/she gained a better understanding towards library trends in collection development through the readings shared by his/her mentor (Wong, 2014a). It is through these sessions and personal meetings that enables information to be exchanged among participants. ILN, on the other hand, facilitates information flow to a greater extent due to the diversified background of the participants. However, personal communication is not the only mean that enhanced the information exchange, the ILN Blog is a common platform for all LIS professionals to share and learn new trends, work practices and ideas. The ILN blog consists of postcards and short articles submitted by the participants. One can learn more about other libraries and workplaces through the postcards, and about different aspects of the LIS field through the short articles (International Librarians Network, 2016g). ILN's programme and blog encourage exchange of ideas and knowledges through hosting a platform for global LIS professionals to disseminate and receive new information. Most participants expressed gain of wider awareness (Figure 7) after joining the programme.

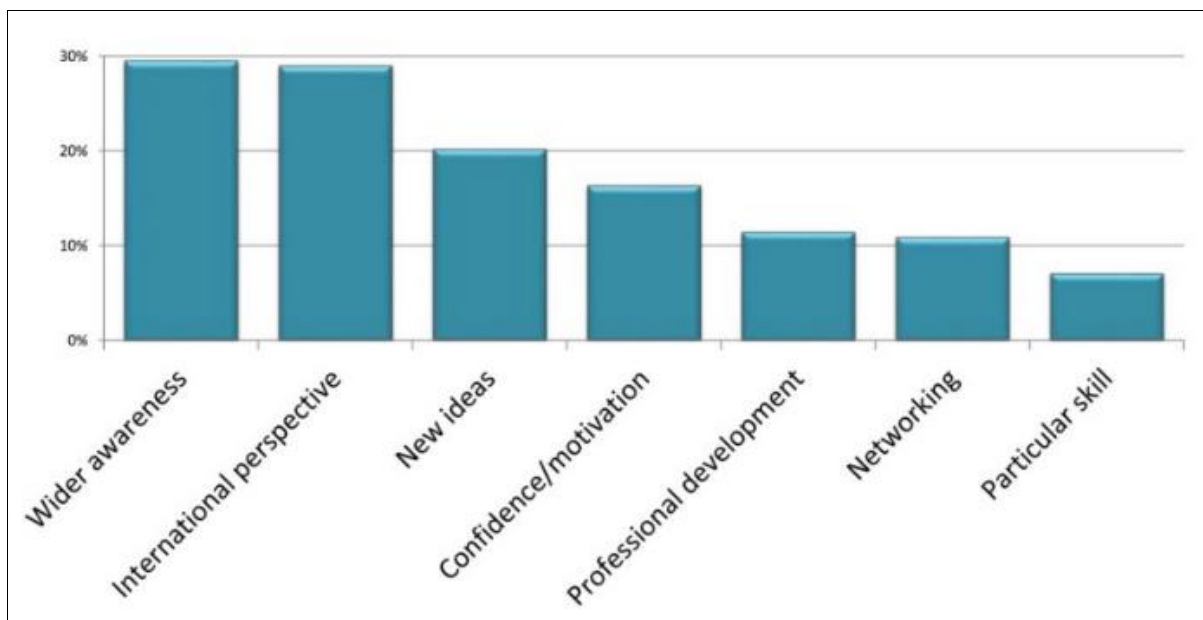


Figure 7. ILN participant survey: The impact of participation

Thirdly, both programmes supported professional development. In the pilot interim evaluation of HKLA Mentoring Programme (Wong, 2014a), mentees indicated that their mentors had advised them on job interview skills, improved their work attitudes and gave them a deeper insight about leadership.

A mentee mentioned specifically that he/she learnt to take the initiative and volunteered in different works. As a result, he/she acquired more opportunity to work with other senior colleagues on different projects and it expanded his/her professional knowledge and networks. In the second round's mid-year meet-up (Chan, 2015), mentors expressed the significance of developing good communication and interpersonal skills in the profession. These LIS knowledge, skills and advice would be difficult to obtain through traditional classroom learning environment. In ILN, slightly more than 10% of participants expressed the programme enhanced their professional development (Figure 7). Although the number is not rated as high in comparison to the other impacts brought by ILN, professional practices and information resources shared between peer mentors and through the ILN blog are undoubtedly contributors to the growth of participants' professional knowledge. If the pair shares similar work backgrounds, they could even gain broader understanding and perspective on similar tasks they encounter at work. Both programmes gave participants a space to freely share and receive new ideas, work experiences and practices. By connecting together, they enriched participants' professional knowledge and even influenced personal attributes in a way otherwise not possible.

Concluding Remark

The World Wide Web and other CIT technologies have enabled autonomy in information seeking and network connectivity. LIS professionals could improve their professional knowledge through self-motivated information seeking. But the learning is one-way and can only be done individually disregarding the great availability of information. The HKLA Mentoring Programme and ILN took advantages of the technological advancements and offered a one-to-one learning experience to the LIS community. While the HKLA Mentoring Programme connects LIS students with experienced library professionals in Hong Kong, the ILN connects general LIS professionals globally. The two programmes are found to share similarities in terms of their uniqueness, human resources and goal. With overwhelming interests in joining the programmes, strategic and supportive leaderships and devoted volunteers, they strengthened the programmes and brought positive impact to the LIS profession in Hong Kong by providing more collaboration opportunities, enhancing the exchange of professional knowledge, and supporting professional development of the participants.

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