

Curtin University
School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry
Libraries, Archives, Records and Information Science

**The impact of conference attendance
on Australian academic librarians and libraries**

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**This thesis is presented
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Human Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number MCCA-14-12.

Signature:

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Abstract

Conferences are highly regarded as a means of professional development in the profession of librarianship. The sheer number of conferences and the funding expended by libraries for conference attendance of staff are evidence of their perceived value to the profession. However, little is known about the impact of attending a conference and about factors that increase or decrease this impact. Although the literature, in library and information science (LIS) and other disciplines, reports that exposure to ideas, networking and increased motivation levels are the main reasons to attend conferences, qualitative studies investigating actual outcomes are rare. Researchers have applied specific lenses to investigate the topic, such as learning theories or financial and environmental models, but most used quantitative methodologies that prevent previously undiscovered insights from emerging. This research addresses this is gap.

This thesis reports on research that examined two research questions. The first relates to the impact of conference attendance on librarians and their libraries, in an Australian academic library context; the second to factors that influence that impact. Using qualitative methods, the study investigated the topic at four academic libraries by interviewing staff who had attended a conference soon after the event, and again six months later to track longer-term impact. Managers and administrative staff were also interviewed to gain insights into institutional expectations, policies and procedures. Documents relating to conference attendance used at the libraries added to the variety of collected data. In total, the findings of the study are based on 47 interviews and 19 documents. The researcher used qualitative coding techniques to analyse the data and produce themes answering the research questions.

The study found that conference attendance has a substantial impact on delegates and their organisations. Data analysis revealed three key themes of conference attendance impact; informational impact; social impact; and affective impact. The analysis also produced many sub-themes, two minor themes of conference attendance impact, and connections between the three key themes. All three key themes, the two minor themes and the majority of sub-themes were raised by librarians and managers of all four

participating libraries. Nine factors were also found to influence conference attendance impact: attending with colleagues; serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts; social media use; experience, role and attributes of attendee; taking responsibility and planning; time factor; alignment with strategy and budget; dissemination of ideas; and culture of ideas. The three key themes, their sub-themes, the two minor themes, and the influencing factors identified in the study represent original contributions to knowledge and translate to important implications for practice for delegates and their institutions.

This research adds significant knowledge about the impact of conference attendance in LIS and provides robust evidence for practitioners and managers to make a case to funding bodies for conference attendance. The detailed descriptions of impact and the influencing factors can be used to increase the impact of staff attending a conference. This thesis argues that the important contribution conference attendance makes is vital for Australian academic libraries, as they need to remain innovative and collaborative, as well as attract and retain motivated staff.

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1 Introduction

In October 2013, a staff member from Curtin University Library, an academic library in Perth, Western Australia, attended a conference organised by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). The conference, titled *ALIA's National Library and Information Technicians' Symposium 2013*, was held in Canberra over the course of three days and provided “a programme that will enrich the way libraries provide services in the technical age, generate discussion and promote new waves of thinking” (Gammage, 2013). In keeping with the standard format of these types of events, the conference contained keynote speakers, presentations and ample opportunities for delegates to network and be inspired by new ideas. At the time, makerspaces were emerging as an innovative service in libraries, and the staff member attended a presentation about the roles of library staff in creating and promoting makerspaces.

After returning to work at Curtin University Library, the staff member was asked to present an original idea at one of the library's planning days attended by senior management, and decided to discuss the idea of makerspaces at that meeting. The concept of incorporating a makerspace into the library was subsequently taken up by other enthusiastic staff who shared the idea with colleagues and managers. This idea also aligned with the library's strategy at the time, which focused on increasing community engagement, and eventually led to Curtin University Library establishing its own makerspace in 2015. Curtin University Library's makerspace has now been successfully operating since 2015, which is evidenced by its mention in the *NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Library Edition* (Adams Becker et al., 2017), and by research conducted by Wong and Partridge (2016).

This anecdotal evidence describes how an idea obtained at a conference can lead to change and innovation, and exemplifies the positive impact of conference attendance. Examples like these are easily located, as are personal accounts voicing enthusiasm about attending a conference and the perceived benefits of attendance. The numbers of conferences organised as well as numbers of attendees suggest further that in the profession of librarianship, there is general agreement that conferences are worthwhile events.

However, little is known about the impact of conference attendance and whether there are any factors which increase or decrease the benefits of staff attending conferences, in library and information science (LIS) and other disciplines. What sorts of benefits do practitioners attribute to their conference attendance? What kinds of ideas, knowledge or information do they return with, and what happens to them? Is networking at a conference an activity that has an impact on the delegate and their institution, and do practitioners return motivated and enthusiastic? Are there other, less obvious but equally important outcomes of attending conferences? Are there factors that influence conference attendance, and how do they interact? These and other related questions form the foundation of this research.

1.1 Scope and overview of research

This study investigates the impact of conference attendance on the attendee and their institution, within the profession of librarianship and in an Australian context. The researcher's previous work experience at an academic library influenced the decision to focus on academic libraries and their staff, and provided an appropriate scope to the research. The study design allowed the benefits of conference attendance to be investigated in a holistic, qualitative manner, and to gain insights into short-term and longer-term benefits to staff attending the conference and to their organisations. In addition, the project explores factors that influence conference attendance impact.

A comprehensive literature review on the topic of conferences, in LIS and other disciplines, reveals a large amount of commentary, opinion pieces and anecdotal evidence supporting the notion that conferences have many benefits, but a lack of high-quality research investigating the issue. The literature focuses on reasons to attend a conference and, to an extent, barriers that prevent conference attendance, but it lacks in-depth studies investigating the impact of conference attendance in its entirety. Researchers also fail to provide detailed explorations into factors that influence the impact conference attendance can have. Chapter Two discusses these gaps extensively, concluding that there is a need for detailed knowledge about how conference attendance impacts on delegates and their institutions, and how influencing factors interact with that impact. Based on the literature review's findings, the following two research questions were formulated:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

The study uses qualitative methodology, which is appropriate for an under-researched topic as it allowed an open-minded approach to data collection and provided insights into the perspectives of attendees. This research is an exploratory study, with the underlying paradigm of social constructivism informing methodological decisions, as well as underpinning data analysis and the presentation of findings.

Participants for this project were recruited from four academic libraries in Australia. Staff who had attended a conference were interviewed twice, and interviews with their managers provided further insights into policies and procedures concerning conference attendance at these libraries. The researcher also collected documents relating to conference attendance at the four institutions as additional data sources to investigate the research questions. This approach to data collection provided rich and detailed data, which was subsequently analysed using qualitative coding methods.

1.2 Definitions of key concepts

A number of terms are used throughout this thesis; they will be defined and described in the following section.

1.2.1 Conferences

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term conference as “an event, sometimes lasting a few days, at which there is a group of talks on a particular subject, or a meeting in which especially business matters are discussed formally” (Cambridge’s online dictionary, 2017). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides a similar definition: “conference: a formal meeting in which many people gather to talk about ideas or problems related to a particular topic (such as medicine or business) usually for several days” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, 2017). The common concepts in these definitions are the nature of conferences as events that last for a few days, and the fact that they represent an opportunity for people with common interests to discuss and share knowledge.

Severt, Wang, Chen and Breiter (2007) from the field of hospitality and tourism research, as well as Schmehl Hines (2014a) in LIS, agree with these concepts but add education, networking and communication with vendors to the characteristics that make conferences unique. Schmehl Hines writes: “conference: a gathering of individuals in a particular discipline, field, area of study, or area of topical interest, usually for the purposes of professional development, networking and/or exposure to relevant product vendors” (p. 13). For Severt et al. (2007) conferences are events that include “educational programming, networking activities, and an exhibition” (p. 399). ALIA organises conferences for its members and other interested parties on a regular basis. ALIA describes its motivation to do so as follows:

ALIA’s National Conferences, symposiums and summits ... provide professionals and interested supporters the opportunity to renew old ties, make new connections, keep abreast of the very latest in professional practice and research from across Australia and overseas, as well as to contribute to the body of knowledge and to the evolution of the profession. Of course they're a great way to meet with dozens of LIS suppliers to learn about the latest tools and options available.
(ALIA, n.d.-a)

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) offers a similar description of the rationale behind their annual conference, but also highlights the importance of the conference as a tool to facilitate communication between the association itself, libraries and vendors:

The IFLA World Library and Information Congress ... sets the international agenda for the profession and offers opportunities for networking and professional development to all delegates. It is an opportunity for the host country to showcase the status of libraries and information science in their country and region as well as to have their professionals experience international librarianship and international relations in a unique way. The congress also offers an international trade exhibition with over 80 exhibitors and an exhibition of approximately 1000 m². (IFLA, 2017)

In her doctoral thesis, Henczel (2016) investigates the impact of national library associations on their members, employing organisations and the librarianship profession. She describes how all major national associations in the English speaking world, specifically, the American Library Association (ALA), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in the United Kingdom (CILIP), the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa, (LIANZA), and ALIA organise conferences “on a regular basis, either annually or biennially. The conferences . . . are the main association activity that brings together members from multiple library sectors, industry partners and others who are interested” (p. 172). Henczel’s description of conferences echoes those discussed earlier and confirms that professional library associations outside of Australia value these forms of professional development.

Drawing on these explorations of the topic, the following points identify the essential elements used in this study to define the term *conferences*:

- Conferences bring together groups of people interested in the same field or discipline.
- Communication and discussion are significant components of the conference format; they occur on many different levels and between different groups attending the event.
- Conferences serve an educational purpose and are a professional development activity. They provide a platform to access new ideas and knowledge and facilitate social interaction between attendees.
- Conferences usually last one full day or longer and are often organised on a recurring basis.

Virtual conferences are also being organised in the profession of librarianship, for instance by professional organisations (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2019) or university departments (San José State University School of Information, n.d.). However, this research focuses on face-to-face events, as virtual conferences were deemed to lack social elements such as the provision for delegates to connect and discuss content in person.

The term *conference* is used throughout this thesis, although some authors discuss the same phenomenon using the terms *symposium*, *congress* or *convention* without providing definitions. People referred to as *attendees* or *delegates* in the thesis are defined as persons having registered for and attended a conference.

This thesis also occasionally uses the term *professional development*, which Fisher (1997) defines as encompassing “a wide range of educational opportunities - from annual conferences, to local or regional workshops, to self-paced instructional materials for individualized learning” (p. 321). As the literature review in Chapter Two illustrates, many authors have investigated the phenomenon of conference attendance alongside other activities that fall within the definition of professional development.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary entry quoted above refers to 1527 as the year of the first known use of the word *conference*. This date likely refers to a gathering of people from the religious group of Anabaptists in Schleithem in the Canon of Schaffhausen, Switzerland. The Anabaptists were at that time heavily persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants and used this event, which they referred to as a conference, to discuss and consolidate their shared beliefs and values (Bratcher, 2013). Oseman (1989) does not refer to the same year when writing about historical aspects of conferences but agrees that the concept has been in use for an extended period of time, stating that the first conferences were held in “ancient times” (p. 84).

The fact that practitioners of many different fields have used conferences to connect with like-minded peers and to discuss ideas for centuries highlights the importance of these events. The numbers of conferences that have been and are organised by various institutions worldwide also support this notion. Oseman finds two different phases in the history of conferences:

The first, dating from ancient times until the mid- to late 1830s, shows that conferences relating to science and technology (including the practical arts), were relatively few and far in between. The second phase began in the 1830s and shows a nearly exponential rise in the number of conferences held each year since then, continuing until the present time. (Oseman, 1989, p. 86)

In one of his papers discussing conferences, King (1961) writes that “three international conferences were held in 1853, over one hundred in 1909 and at least two thousand in 1953” (p. 70), and a PricewaterhouseCoopers study (2014) found that nearly 1.8 million meetings took place in the United States during the year 2009, involving an estimated 205 million participants. Although these figures are country-specific and it is difficult to obtain exact statistical data on the number of conferences organised each year, they indicate that conferences continue to be an essential activity for professional development relevant to many different professions. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the advancement of technologies that enable virtual conferences does not appear to have decreased the number of events significantly. This observation is supported for example by the annual conference register collated by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) (CAUL, 2018).

As Chapter Two demonstrates, the literature indicates an agreement that conferences are worthwhile activities, and few authors refer to them critically. Rundle (2014) and Bates (2014) question the effectiveness of conferences in distributing knowledge and encouraged discussion of this topic in their blog posts. Maitzen (2016), a scholar in English literature, raises similar concerns. In the United States, a group of librarians (Maynor & Halaychik, 2016) have organised conferences in a more interactive and unstructured format to address perceived disadvantages of traditional conferences, such as rigid presentation structures and lack of interactivity. Despite these concerns, the conference landscape in the Australian library and information sector is vibrant. ALIA organises a large annual conference, alternating between a conference called *Information Online* and the biennial general conference of the association. The Victorian Association for Library Automation (VALA) is another organisation hosting a well-attended biennial conference in Melbourne, and various other bodies organise similar events. CAUL lists 44 national and international conferences relevant to the library and information sector for the year 2018 in their conference register (CAUL, 2018).

These numbers suggest that Australian librarianship professionals attend and value conferences, which is supported by the findings of Hallam and Lee’s study (2008). Investigating the Australian library and information workforce, they found that about 28% of professional staff in Australian libraries attended formal training and development (which included conferences and workshops) either *very often* or *often* (p.

66). A survey conducted by ALIA showed agreement amongst members that providing opportunities for professional development is one of its most important activities (2014, p. 30), and Terrill (2014) writes that librarianship professionals participating in her research rated conferences either *very* or *somewhat important* compared to other professional development (p. 207). Writing more generally about the importance of professional development, Saravani (2013) argues that it is “widely recognised that effective staff change within the work environment requires professional development opportunities. . . . Professional development plays a definitive part in ensuring that skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics of competency are developed and maintained” (p. 5).

The number of Australian library staff who attend conferences further supports the argument that conferences are valued in librarianship. ALIA (n.d.-b) published its delegate list for the national conference held in 2016, and it showed that 418 staff working in the library and information sector attended the event. The IFLA conference held in the same year in Columbus in the United States attracted 49 Australian delegates (IFLA, 2016a), and the New Librarians Symposium, which targets new professionals in Australia, has an average of 280 attendees (Bradley, Dalby & Spencer, 2009). To provide some context to these numbers, the Australian Bureau of Statistics stated that in 2011, 7,343 Australians reported that their main job was in the libraries and archives industry (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In a study conducted by Kamm (1997), 73% of librarians and information professionals in the United States participating in her study referred to the “quality of meetings and conferences” (p. 298) as their main reason for joining ALA. It can therefore be concluded that professionals in the library and information sector place great importance on conferences as professional development activities. The number of conferences organised and the reported numbers of participants further indicate that conferences are held in high regard and perceived as beneficial.

1.2.2 Academic libraries and librarians

The Cambridge Dictionary defines *library* as a “building, room, or organization that has a collection, especially of books, for people to read or borrow, usually without payment” (Cambridge’s online dictionary, 2017). The entry found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary widens the scope of this definition: “Library: a) a place in which literary, musical, artistic, or reference materials (as books, manuscripts, recordings, or films) are

kept for use but not for sale or b) a collection of such materials” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, 2017). Both definitions refrain from making any reference to online materials, which now form a significant part of many libraries’ collections. In the university sector especially, a large part of library resources are now available online, be it in the form of ebooks, online databases or institutional repositories. Greer, Grover and Fowler (2007) support this notion when writing that “the librarian traditionally has concentrated on the organization and storage of books, journals, and other published information sources. However, advances in technology have changed the nature of the library and the library profession” (p. 12). The two definitions above however do not refer to library services. Contemporary libraries offer a comprehensive selection of services and programs that go beyond the traditional access to collections; concrete examples include story time sessions for infants in public libraries or information literacy programs run by state libraries.

The term *academic library* generally refers to a library providing access to collections and services to students and staff at a university or other institution providing tertiary education, and this thesis also employs this definition. Pressley (2009) describes academic libraries as follows:

Academic libraries share many traits with school libraries, but serve a more mature population with more complex research needs. Academic libraries serve a broad spectrum of institutions from community colleges to research universities. Academic librarians work with students on research projects in undergraduate to doctoral study in any number of disciplines. Academic libraries also serve faculty of the institution, aiding research in their fields of expertise. This means that academic libraries collect materials across a broad number of subjects, from introductory texts to scholarly communication intended for the research uses of the faculty. (Pressley, 2009, p. 26)

Curtin University Library’s 2013-2017 strategic plan contains the library’s vision statement, which aligns with Pressley’s description of the aims of academic libraries. It reads: “we will build connections that provide students and staff with information both in physical and online environments. By providing access to information resources and

services scholarly communities will be built as both physical and virtual places” (Curtin University, 2016, p. 1). The authors of this statement refer to the library as both a physical and online environment, which is consistent with the comment made earlier that libraries have outgrown definitions that focus solely on the library as a physical place.

Data concerning the number of academic libraries currently operating in Australia, numbers of accredited universities and data produced by CAUL (n.d.) confirms that every Australian university has a library. According to the Australian Government, Department of Education and Training (2016), there were a total of 41 accredited, public and private universities in Australia in 2016, and CAUL equally lists 41 academic libraries in Australia (CAUL, n.d.). These libraries collectively process 534,200 loans per year on average; they vary considerably in size though, with total staff numbers ranging between 20 and 259 (CAUL, n.d.). Furthermore, although data about academic libraries serving other tertiary institutions is not available, anecdotal evidence suggests the existence of other organisations in Australia providing library services to users obtaining vocational degrees or completing training courses.

Professional staff with an accredited tertiary degree working in an academic library are generally referred to as *academic librarians*. In Australia, ALIA accredits certain courses (Bachelor, Masters or Graduate Diploma degrees) from different institutions, which lead to the career of “librarian or information specialist” (ALIA, n.d.-c). Greer et al. (2007) provide the following general definition of *librarians* that is also applicable to practitioners in an academic environment:

The librarian is a professional who assesses the information needs of a clientele and selects the appropriate packaged resources to meet those needs. Maintaining this collection requires a large facility, furnishings, and staff to select and acquire the resources, organize them, and make them available for use by the library's public. (Greer et al., 2007, p. 13)

Academic libraries also employ paraprofessionals or library technicians. These staff generally have an LIS education gained from a vocational institution or training course and are hired to perform mostly technical roles. The third group of staff working in

academic libraries are library officers, also referred to as library assistants or clerks, who have completed high school and usually learn needed skills on the job (Pressley, 2009). The thesis uses the following terms in relation to the discipline, the profession and its employees:

- *library and information science (LIS)* – referring to the academic discipline and the scholarly practice of LIS
- *librarianship* – referring to the profession
- *library and information sector* – referring to the sector that employs practitioners
- *librarianship professionals* or *practitioners* – referring to employees of the sector, which include librarians, paraprofessionals and library officers as described above.

1.2.3 Impact

As this research investigated the impact of conference attendance, it is necessary to define this term. The Cambridge dictionary referred to earlier provides the following definition of the term *impact*: “to have a strong and often bad effect on (something or someone)” (Cambridge’s online dictionary, 2017), and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states: “impact: a powerful effect that something, especially something new, has on a situation or person” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, 2017). It is interesting to note the negative connotation the term is given in the first definition and the emphasis on impact usually being caused by something *new* in the second. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that both definitions are quite narrow in scope.

When consulting the literature in LIS and other disciplines, it becomes apparent that researchers use the term *impact* in studies that investigate outcomes, benefits or results of changes made in various contexts. However, LIS studies that provide a useful definition of impact could not be located. LIS researchers have investigated the impact of library services on users, using quantitative methods (Allison, 2015; Cherry, Rollins & Evans, 2013; Emmons & Wilkinson, 2011), or mixed method approaches (Fodale & Bates, 2011; Hulett et al., 2013). While these studies include no definition of impact, they use specific factors to measure it that suggest the authors’ understanding of the term.

Allison (2015) and Cherry et al. (2013) examine grade averages of students using library services to measure impact, while Emmons and Wilkinson (2011) use student retention rates, and Hulett et al. (2013) unit completion rates. Similarly, Henczel (2016) uses an ISO standard developed for the assessment of the impact of libraries and library services on users and societies at large, although her research investigates the impact of national library associations on their members, their institutions and the profession.

Other researchers in LIS studied the impact of specific factors on libraries or library staff, which mirrors the focus of this research. Copenhaver and Koclanes (2016) explored the effects of specific software on library services, using the number of reference queries to analyse the issue. Yang, Sidorko and Woo (2016) echo this methodology in their qualitative study about the impact of library leadership programs on practitioners in an Asian context. They employed a list of possible benefits drawn from the literature to establish potential outcomes of the program. These two studies consider impact to be measurable through set variables, which prevents the discovery of unanticipated insights and is therefore different from the approach taken in this research.

Two more studies in LIS focused on the impact of professional development programs on libraries and their staff; both of which employed an open, qualitative approach without predetermined characteristics of impact. Leong and Vaughan (2010) researched the outcomes of a specific professional development program initiated at their academic library. Stephens and Cheetham (2011) established the benefits of learning 2.0 programs (also known as the “23 things”) for library staff in their qualitative study; and view impact as any personal or institutional change (p. 1). The method employed in this study is similar to Leong and Vaughan (2010) and Stephens and Cheetham (2011), in that impact is understood to represent any outcome, change, benefit or disadvantage that librarians attribute to their conference attendance and that affects either library staff or their libraries. This wide definition of impact resulted in a research design that was sufficiently flexible to allow for previously undiscussed insights to be discovered. The study’s data collection was carried out to analyse the impact of conference attendance on academic libraries and librarians in a holistic, open-minded way to describe the phenomenon in its entirety, in the context in which it was experienced.

1.3 Significance of topic

Rapidly changing technologies are disrupting traditional library structures and services; therefore, libraries and library staff need to innovate and stay up-to-date to remain relevant. As Chad and Miller (2005) state: “the question of relevance is perhaps the biggest challenge facing libraries today. ... Inevitably, as the world advances, the library must also evolve and begin to deliver its services in the ways that its modern users expect” (pp. 4-5). The authors argue further that library services need innovation and change to continue providing useful services to their clients. Deiss (2004) also focuses on librarians using innovation as a means to success. She writes:

Creating services that add value for the customer takes precedence over all other drivers in determining organizational success in the twenty-first century. Libraries uniquely capable of anticipating and meeting customer needs in ways that mirror a changing world are the libraries that are deemed successful and, therefore, are able to attract resources and talent. It is evident from current environmental indicators that organizations need to utilize two tools skilfully in order to create customer value: innovation and strategy. (Deiss, 2004, p. 17)

Other authors who have emphasised the importance of innovation and access to ideas to sustain libraries are Coveney (2008), Strange (2008), Davis and Lundstrom (2011), Smith (2011), Corcoran and McGuinness (2014), Kermani and Solhdoost (2017) and Kummala Mustonen (2012). Another group of researchers (Henczel, 2016; Russell, Ames-Oliver, Fund, Proctor & Vannaman, 2003; Saarti & Juntunen, 2011; Wolff & Moser, 2009; Yeh & Walter, 2016) has similarly described the importance of networks and contacts for library and information professionals. Rubleske, Kaarst-Brown and Strobel (2010) focus on innovation and networks, stating that “a library’s ability to innovate remains crucial to its sustained success” (p. 1), and that “networking and cultivating relationships with representatives from other organisations” (p. 3) is crucial for library staff to keep aware of new developments. Balk, Kwant and Neudecker (2014) summarise the findings of their research with a checklist of factors that determine innovation capacity in libraries, with both “knowledge and organisational learning – gaining external knowledge” and “networking capacities” featuring in the list (p. 160).

As innovation and networks are evidently significant for libraries, the role conferences play in that regard becomes apparent. The deliberations in this chapter so far show that conferences are by definition events that expose attendees to new ideas and trends relevant to a specific group or field and that they act as platforms to facilitate the expansion of attendees' professional networks. As librarians operate in an environment that has undergone and will continue to undergo significant change, conferences will continue to be an important activity for librarians and libraries to remain relevant and innovative.

Conferences facilitate access to networks and innovative ideas. Also, researchers emphasise the importance of networks and innovation in the provision of excellent services to library clients. However, as the literature review in Chapter Two demonstrates, knowledge about conference attendance in general and knowledge about its potential impact is scarce. The outcomes of this research therefore represent a significant and much-needed contribution to LIS as they present three key themes of conference attendance impact, many sub-themes, two minor themes, and detail influencing factors. The findings presented in Chapter Four and discussed in Chapter Five expand existing knowledge, offer original contributions and will inform decision making concerning conference attendance. Practitioners will find arguments for the importance of conference attendance in the thesis. Library management are provided with a detailed account of the benefits of attendance, which will aid in maximising the impact of staff attending a conference. Conference organisers equally benefit, as they can use the findings to provide opportunities for delegates to maximise attendance impact. Although this research was conducted in the context of academic libraries, the study's findings are transferable and provide relevant and important considerations for other sectors and professions.

1.4 Overview of thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters: Chapter One - Introduction, Chapter Two - Literature Review, Chapter Three - Methodology, Chapter Four - Findings, Chapter Five - Discussion and Chapter Six - Conclusion. Following this first chapter, the literature review in Chapter Two builds on the research questions previously stated. It examines the current state of the literature on the topic of conferences and conference

attendance impact, and on research focusing on factors that influence the impact. The chapter examines studies investigating conferences in separate sections according to their primary research focus. The first area of focus discussed in the chapter is advice and recommendations, which typically features in commentary and opinion pieces. Virtual conferences, new technologies and their impact on conference attendees' experiences comprise a second area of focus, followed by studies that investigate barriers that prevent potential delegates from attending, and the reasons for conference attendance. Other sections describe research examining conference attendance impact using different lenses and approaches. The main section of the literature review discusses the few papers and studies that analyse the impact of conference attendance on delegates and organisations as well as influencing factors, which leads to an examination of the gaps identified in the literature.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical approach and methods of the study. The concepts of social constructivism and qualitative research are explored, followed by theoretical statements and advice issued by authors concerning data collection and data analysis. Next, the rationale and natural connection between the research questions and the theoretical approach are discussed. The second part of the chapter describes the research design of the study. It documents the pilot study, sample selection, approach to interviewing and collection of documents and concludes with a thorough account of the data analysis process.

Following the socio-constructivist paradigm that underpins this research, Chapter Four begins by providing context to the findings of the study with an overview of the participants, the libraries where they were employed at the time of the interviews, and the conferences they attended. It then focuses on the three key themes identified in relation to conference attendance impact (informational, social and affective impact), details sub-themes, explores the connections between the three key themes, and presents two minor themes of conference attendance impact. It also documents and examines nine factors that influence these different aspects of impact, demonstrates how the factors are linked to each other, and identifies the areas of conference attendance impact they influence.

Chapter Five places the findings into a broader context and assesses them with a focus on implications and connections to other important concepts in librarianship. It

examines the nature of conferences and explores their uniqueness, discusses the importance of the findings in the library and information sector and highlights shared responsibility for impact between attendees and their institutions. The chapter also addresses the research questions and documents the original contributions to knowledge the study has produced, and provides a conference attendance impact framework. In addition, future directions for research and limitations of this research are explored. Finally, Chapter Six gives an overview of the entire thesis and provides a review of the findings as well as a reflection on the research process. It ends with concluding considerations that relate to important arguments made throughout the thesis.

1.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter commenced with the story of how the idea of a makerspace obtained at a conference by a staff member had a lasting effect at Curtin University Library. It was presented as anecdotal evidence of the topic of this thesis – conference attendance impact in an Australian academic library setting. After introducing the topic, the chapter discussed how main concepts used in the study are understood. The researcher defined *conferences* as platforms for like-minded professionals to connect and communicate with each other, discuss common issues and share ideas. These events are often organised recurringly and usually last at least one full day. *Academic libraries* were defined as providers of access to information and services to students and staff of universities, both in a physical and online environment. The notion of *impact* and its possible definitions were the focus of another section of the chapter, with some applications of the concept in the literature found to be too narrow to reflect the approach taken in this study. In this research, the term *impact* is understood as any change occurring after conference attendance, in either the staff attending or the library they return to after the event. The chapter also clarified the scope of the research and positioned it in the Australian academic library sector. Furthermore, it identified the study's aim to investigate the impact of conference attendance and influencing factors in a qualitative and holistic manner.

Additionally, the chapter argued that the topic of this research is important and worthy of in-depth investigation. Practitioners sharing common interests have used and are

still using conferences as platforms to discuss knowledge and ideas, learn about new developments in their respective fields and build connections with each other. Numbers of conference attendees and numbers of conferences organised indicate that various disciplines and fields remain convinced that conferences deliver on their aims. The chapter discussed the fact that despite this, little is known about conference attendance impact, especially in LIS. Conferences provide access to knowledge and innovative ideas as well as contacts and possible collaborators, which in turn can lead to innovation and networks that aid institutions to maintain relevance. To compete in an increasingly complex information environment libraries need innovative practices, which provides a compelling rationale to investigate the phenomenon of conference attendance impact and corresponding influencing factors.

2 Literature Review

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the literature concerning conference attendance impact and related concepts, in library and information science (LIS) and other disciplines. It discusses and critically evaluates the existing body of literature, and demonstrates that the literature lacks high quality, in-depth studies on the topic; a gap that is addressed by this research.

The focus of the chapter is on conference attendance impact on delegates and institutions as well as influencing factors, as these concepts align with the study's research questions. The chapter also describes other related areas to provide an overview of different viewpoints researchers have taken to investigate this topic.

The chapter starts with sections discussing concepts relating to considerations before attending a conference: 2.1 advice and recommendations; 2.2 virtual conferences and technologies; 2.3 barriers to conference attendance; and 2.4 reasons for conference attendance. The main parts of the chapter (sections 2.5 & 2.6) present a detailed analysis of studies that have focused on conference attendance impact, and factors that influence this impact. Section 2.7 presents research that examines conference attendance impact using different lenses, such as bibliometric, economic, environmental or gender-related approaches. An overview of the chapter (section 2.8) reiterates the main points that have been discussed and includes statements from scholars supporting the notion that conference attendance impact and influencing factors are an under-researched topic that warrants further investigation.

2.1 Advice and recommendations

LIS authors give recommendations to library staff interested in attending conferences in commentary and opinion pieces. Miller (2002) provides ideas ranging from carrying business cards to making the most of vendor exhibitions, and Yucht (2011) explains how to take advantage of technologies available at conferences. Amoores and Barnett (2010), two Australian teacher librarians, advise to meet at least ten delegates per day, adding suggestions in relation to travelling to and from the event. Stuit and Thielen (2017)

propose that LIS students should host their own conference to familiarise themselves with the processes of attending and presenting. Other examples of papers providing similar guidance are Woolls (2003), Yucht (2005) or Abram (2008).

The literature also offers advice for librarians on how to choose relevant conferences (Ojala, 1999; Thull, 2014). Tysick (2002), as well as Tomaszewski and MacDonald (2009), emphasise the advantage for subject librarians to attend conferences outside of the profession of librarianship, which is also highlighted by Lyons (2007). Using both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse two different conferences, Lyons concludes that her study “establishes the importance for academic librarians with collection development responsibilities to attend academic conferences” (p. 186). James (2011) points to the responsibility of library staff themselves to “identify relevant and appropriate workshops, conferences, seminars” (p. 7).

The literature in other disciplines contains similar recommendations (Cutting, 1995; Davies, 2004; Knight, 2002; Perlmutter, 2008; Sousa & Clark, 2017). In a monograph edited by Ilsley (1985), researchers advise on how to increase the possible benefits of conference attendance. Other authors focus on the organisational side of conferences, for instance, Frankfurter and Lane (1993) and Finnerty (1993), offer advice to organising bodies on how to run specialist events, how to encourage discussions or give appropriate feedback to presenters.

Some opinion pieces and commentary, both in LIS and other disciplines, concentrate on how delegates present at conferences. Parang, Gammon and Gearty (1994) offer guidance to librarians on writing abstracts and enhancing presentation skills, and Brier and Lebbin (2009) provide advice on how to use PowerPoint when presenting. Driskill (2010) focuses on how engineers can create posters that capture the attention of delegates. Lastly, Bell and Shank (2006) add to the variety of recommendations to delegates in the literature with suggestions for presenting in a virtual conference setting.

2.2 Virtual conferences and technologies

In the context of conference attendance impact, it is important to explore virtual conferences to contrast them with face-to-face events which are the focus of this research. LIS authors have sought to understand the views of librarians on how virtual conferences compare to face-to-face events. Among them is the North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG, 2008), which found that 69.2% of participants preferred “in-person conferences” (p. 4); a result also echoed by Schmehl Hines (2014a). Librarians participating in Stewart’s study (2013) had a different opinion, with 59% of respondents answering in favour of virtual events. Events that simultaneously happen face-to-face and online balance advantages and disadvantages, an approach that Rundle (2014) describes as follows: “physical meetings have huge advantages, but these can be augmented by incorporating two-way digital communication into the design of the event” (p. 13).

Other LIS researchers have explored the relationship between technology use and conferences. Goodfellow and Graham (2007) used case studies to investigate the effect of librarians’ live-blogging from a conference. They describe blogging as a highly effective method to maximise the benefits of conferences. This mirrors the results of a similar study conducted in the field of medical science (Sethi, Desai & Jhaveri, 2010). Brier and Lebbin (2009) analysed the use of PowerPoint presentations at two specific library conferences in the United States, discovering a “mismatch between the typical PowerPoint slide primarily composed of text and the learning needs of the plurality of respondents” (p. 357).

In other disciplines, scholars have focused on the characteristics of virtual conferences versus face-to-face events. Johnson and Tremethick (2009) base their findings on an extensive review of the literature and identify the following main advantages of virtual conferences: time and cost-effectiveness, increased accessibility and increased participation. Carr (2016) and Parthasarathi et al. (2017) concur, with Carr writing that “increased interest in online conferences globally is largely driven by convenience of participation, savings in travel and accommodation costs, and ecological concerns” (p. 80). Several commentary and opinion pieces (Bell, 2011; Bell & Shank, 2006; Farkas, 2006) also highlight the same benefits. Regarding disadvantages of virtual conferences in comparison to face-to-face events, articles document the lack of opportunities for

personal, direct interaction during online events (Bell & Shank, 2006; Guterman, 2009; Johnson & Tremethick, 2009; Oester, Cigliano, Hind-Ozan & Parsons, 2017).

A multitude of studies in fields other than LIS have investigated the use of technologies in conference settings. Examples include Sumi and Mase (2002), who analysed the use of electronic devices provided to delegates, and McCarthy, Nguyen, McDonald, Soroczak and Rashid (2004) who studied augmented reality technologies and their uptake. Chapman and Aalsburg Wiessner (2008) show that online conference tools have the “capability to support engaged learning” (p. 8). Focusing on Twitter use during conferences, Anderson, Gleeson, Rissel, Wen and Bedford (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of all 748 tweets produced during a National Health Promotion Conference in Sydney, concluding that “the jury is still out on the usefulness of Twitter for conferences” (p. 145). Ross, Terras, Warwick and Welsh (2011) disagree, writing that using social media platforms such as Twitter expands the options for the conference community to communicate and participate in events.

2.3 Barriers to conference attendance

Authors have focused on barriers that can prevent conference attendance, either as the main focus of their studies, or featured among other research questions in broader investigations of the topic. It is important to note these barriers as they can prevent delegates attending conferences, and therefore limit occasions for conference attendance impact to eventuate. Table 1 illustrates the four main barriers to attend a conference as identified in the LIS literature: lack of funding; time constraints; awareness; and location of the event. In some cases, authors researched conferences in the broader context of professional development activities (PDAs), which is highlighted in the table.

Table 1: Barriers to conference attendance in LIS

Lack of funding	
Adomi, Alakpudia & Akporhonor, 2006	Lack of funding
NASIG, 2008	Travel and hotel costs

Pinkston, 2009	Participants had “not enough travel money to attend conferences” (p. 301)
Eke, 2011	“Lack of sponsorship” (p. 33)
Stewart, 2013	Cost named as an inhibiting factor
Australian Library and Information Association, ALIA, 2014	“Issues of affordability” is a barrier to PDA (p. 30)
Corcoran & McGuinness, 2014	Lack of funding is a barrier to PDA
Schmehl Hines, 2014a	Respondents report “lack of funding” (p. 5)
Terrill, 2014	“One significant barrier to conference attendance is mentioned repeatedly: cost” (p. 194)
Henczel, 2016	Cost prohibits attendance at large conferences
Time constraints	
NASIG, 2008	Conferences dates prevent attendance
ALIA, 2014	“Time constraints” is a barrier to PDA (p. 30)
Corcoran & McGuinness, 2014	Lack of time is the main barrier to PDA
Schmehl Hines, 2014a	Participants report “time away from job responsibilities” as preventing attendance (p. 5)
Awareness (lack of information about event)	
Adomi et al., 2006	Awareness named as a barrier
Eke, 2011	Lack of information about event prevented attendance
Location of event	
NASIG, 2008	Location named as a barrier
Stewart, 2013	Location stated as an important restricting factor

In addition, several commentary and opinion pieces anecdotally support lack of funding and time constraints as barriers to conference attendance (Alaimo, 2004; Bradley et al., 2009; Conklin, 2013; Davis & Lundstrom, 2011; Farkas, 2006). Turner (1986) adds an interesting viewpoint to the topic of barriers to conference attendance in her opinion piece “Conference angst”. She describes conferences as daunting and

intimidating events, especially for introverted participants. This is linked to factors that can influence the impact of conference attendance as discussed in section 2.6.

While Table 1 summarises the barriers to conference attendance discussed in LIS research and commentary, similar barriers are evident in other disciplines’ literature (Choi, 2013; Guterman, 2009; Ngamsom & Beck, 2000; Nicolson, 2017; Ramirez, Laing & Mair, 2013). Mair (2010) discovers in her study in convention and event tourism that access to funding matters to younger conference attendees; a notion supported by Lee and Min (2013a), who find that first time delegates were sensitive to the “value for money” aspect (p. 420). Mair, Lockstone-Binney and Whitelaw (2018) add that the financial barrier is specifically evident in the Australian academic context, as universities are facing increased budgetary constraints that impact on funding for professional development activities.

2.4 Reasons for conference attendance

The literature also focuses on reasons for attending a conference, with some authors exclusively investigating this topic, while others examine it in the context of larger research projects. Reasons for conference attendance highlight the expectations of attendees, which is important for this study as they can be compared to possible impacts of attendance. Table 2 summarises the reasons to attend conferences found in the LIS literature, which are grouped into four concepts: *information and ideas*; *networking*; *inspiration and invigoration*; and other reasons. These concepts reverberate throughout the literature, and are italicised in this chapter to increase recognition of the terms.

Table 2: Reasons for conference attendance in LIS

Reasons for attending: information and ideas	
Egholm, Johannsen & Moring, 1998	Keeping up-to-date and obtaining ideas
Adomi et al., 2006	“Keep pace with changes/developments in the LIS profession” (p. 191)
Hardesty & Sugarman, 2007	Staying aware of current developments

Vega & Connell, 2007	“General sessions” and “exhibits” (p. 51)
Anderson & Orsatti, 2008	Finding out about the “latest research in the field” (p. 6)
NASIG, 2008	“Programs offered” (p. 2)
Eke, 2011	“To learn about professional issues” (p. 32)
Schmehl Hines, 2014a	Conference sessions
Terrill, 2014	“Awareness of current trends and developments in the field” (p. 193)
Thull, 2014	“Exposure to new perspectives” (p. 21)
Reasons for attending: networking	
Egholm et al., 1998	Establishment and confirmation of personal network
Adomi et al., 2006	Meeting “old course mate/colleagues/to establish contacts” (p. 191)
Vega & Connell, 2007	Networking
Anderson & Orsatti, 2008	Respondents were “attracted to the conference because of people” (p. 12)
NASIG, 2008	“Opportunity to network with peers” (p. 2)
Eke, 2011	“To brainstorm with colleagues” and “to meet with elites in the profession” (p. 32)
Terrill, 2014	“Making professional connections” (p. 193)
Reasons for attending: inspiration and invigoration	
Vega & Connell, 2007	Professional rejuvenation
Other reasons for attending	
Egholm et al., 1998	“Specific duties - presenting a paper or committee work” (p. 52)
Adomi et al., 2006	“To maintain my skills base” (p. 191)

The four groups of reasons for conference attendance documented in Table 2 reflect the findings in the LIS literature, however *information and ideas* and *networking* are reasons also discussed in other disciplines. Compton (1966) investigated scientific communication associated with national conferences and finds that between 43% and 62% of participants (depending on the type of conference) were seeking specific

information at the event. The thesis by Price (1993) in the field of human resource management echoes these results, as does Severt et al. (2007) and Lee and Min (2013b) in the field of tourism management. Lee and Min (2013b) state that “attendees perceive opportunity for exchanging information and observing trends in their discipline as must-be requirements thereby treating said opportunity as one of the major offerings of a convention” (p. 289).

Occasionally findings from the literature combine the two reasons of *information and ideas* and *networking*, as delegates share ideas and gain new knowledge by interacting with other attendees. Eke’s reason for conference attendance “to brainstorm with colleagues” (2011, p. 32) is one example of this, and is therefore listed under both concepts in Table 2. Miller (2002) voices similar thoughts in a commentary piece, writing that networking at a conference can lead to delegates developing new ideas.

The concepts of *information and ideas* and *networking* as reasons to attend a conference have also been confirmed anecdotally by numerous opinion pieces in the LIS literature, and by authors’ comments whose research focused on other aspects of conferences (Alaimo, 2004; Bates, 2014; Brier & Lebbin, 2009; Clausen & Wormell, 2001; Farkas, 2006; Goodfellow & Graham, 2007; King, 1961; Rundle, 2014; Tomaszewski & MacDonald, 2009; Tysick, 2002; Ward, 2003). In other disciplines, numerous scholars similarly echo these reasons to attend conferences (Aalsburg Wiessner, Hatcher, Chapman & Storberg-Walker, 2008; Edelheim, Thomas, Åberg & Phi, 2018; Hatcher, Aalsburg Wiessner, Storberg Walker & Chapman, 2005; Johnson & Tremethick, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2004; Oester et al., 2017; Sharma, Parikh & Fordyce, 2016; Taylor, Bartindale, Vines & Olivier, 2014; Waite & Hume, 2017).

Writing from the viewpoint of conference organisers, Bradley et al. (2009) agree. Participating in the organising committee for a librarianship conference in Sydney, they aimed to give delegates an opportunity to “gain exposure to ideas, practices and perspectives” (p. 234). Regarding reasons for attendance that refer to *networking*, Bradley et al. add that the conference had the specific purpose to “start networking processes among new graduates and experienced industry professionals” (p. 232). As noted in Table 2, Vega and Connell (2007) are the only researchers who discuss *inspiration and invigoration* as reasons in their findings; 91% of their respondents referred to professional rejuvenation as a reason for conference attendance. However,

commentary and opinion pieces from various disciplines supports the idea of *inspiration and invigoration* as reasons for conference attendance, and are summarised in Table 3 below (LIS literature is highlighted as such):

Table 3: Anecdotal evidence of inspiration and invigoration as reasons for conference attendance

Author	Statement	LIS ?
Cutting, 1995	Advised delegates to “relax and enjoy the company and culture around the meeting” (p. 249)	
Alaimo, 2004	“Attending a conference is a great way to recharge your batteries” (p. 35)	LIS
England, 2003	“Becoming part of something bigger is the whole reason for the conference” (p. 16)	LIS
Ward, 2003	Conferences are an “invigorating experience” (p. 369)	LIS
Anderson & Orsatti, 2008	“Conferences renew, inform and inspire us” (p.2)	LIS
Rundle, 2014	“The keynote speaker’s purpose is not to deliver knowledge but to deliver energy – it is an emotional experience, not an intellectual one” (p. 12)	LIS
Taylor et al., 2014	“Delegates wish to be inspired and energised” (p. 1)	

Researchers external to LIS have also discussed other reasons for conference attendance. King (1961) for instance writes about “negotiation and policy formation”, as well as “status and ceremonial” as functions of conferences (p. 73). Cutting (1995) finds that scholars attended conferences to present and review their work. The doctoral thesis of Price (1993) confirms reasons relating to *information and ideas* and *networking*, but adds that delegates also attend conferences in order to influence the future direction of their association, to participate in policy development or to mentor younger members of their profession. Harrison (2010) conducted a literature review into reasons for conference attendance. Her findings echo those discussed in this chapter, in that “educational content, discovering new products and trends, and networking opportunities” (p. 264) are the reasons delegates most frequently refer to.

2.5 Conference attendance impact

2.5.1 Studies in Library and Information Science

As this research focuses on the impact of conference attendance on academic libraries and their staff, it is vital to investigate how LIS researchers have approached this topic. First, this section discusses the methodologies and findings of studies on the topic, and second, it critically examines the value of their contributions to the body of literature.

Three LIS authors have investigated conference attendance impact as part of a research project with a wider focus (Henczel, 2016; Ocholla, 1999; Palmer, 1996). In her doctoral thesis, Henczel (2016) explores the impact of national library associations on their members, interviewing 55 librarianship professionals from different countries and sectors. Although conferences are not the focus of her research, participants discuss them in the context of the benefits provided by membership in professional associations. When referring to the outcomes of conference attendance, Henczel's interviewees highlight the most significant impact as being *information and ideas*. They refer to coming back with "ideas in multiple formats" (p. 173) as well as an awareness of new developments and an extension of their views on librarianship. In addition, they state that networking enabled them to meet "new people with similar interests" and "facing similar challenges to themselves (p. 173). Henczel also documents how conferences can make delegates feel a "sense of community or belonging" to the profession (p. 174), and her participants discuss returning from the events with "increased motivation, feeling more positive about work and the profession, and feeling inspired and energised" (p. 174). Henczel (2016) also discovers that staff presenting at conferences can have an impact on the reputation of their organisation and create far-reaching benefits, as exemplified in the following quote:

Speaking at the national associating conference was considered beneficial to employing organisations, particularly when presentations highlighted innovation through projects, programs and services, providing an important form of promotion for the organisation. This contributed to the organisation's reputation within the profession and also beyond the profession, depending on the conference audience. Conference presentations led to employing

organisations being successful in securing projects and/or project funding. (p. 133)

Ocholla (1999) explores the information seeking behaviour of academics in South Africa. The 104 respondents to his survey were offered the following choices to explain how they generated new ideas: *thinking, brainstorming, conversation, reading, attending seminars and conferences* or *other*. The findings show that *attending seminars and conferences* are rated second (after *reading*) as methods of creating ideas. Furthermore, Ocholla finds that conferences were vital means delegates used to disseminate information. Investigating similar research questions, Palmer (1996) conducted a study of the cross-disciplinary research process, interviewing scholars using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The paper does not contain the number of participants nor does it make the research instrument available. Palmer finds that conferences provide delegates with a specific type of content; information that is “raw, not polished . . . with no deep ideas attached to it” (p. 172). According to the author, hearing about “pieces of data that people don’t quite know how to put together yet” (p. 173) offers a different kind of intellectual stimulation compared with content published in journals. Also, Palmer discusses conferences as a means for attendees to gather information: “The researchers rely on both formal and informal channels for gathering information, depending primarily on personal networks, conferences and the published literature” (p. 170). One of her participants stated that “maybe 85% of what is going on I just know by keeping in contact with people and by going to our own conferences” (p. 170). This statement also highlights the social benefits Palmer’s respondents attributed to their conference attendance, which for some delegates resulted in them feeling part of a “closely knit group” (p. 172).

Several studies undertaken by scholars in a Nigerian context have investigated conference attendance impact using similar, quantitative approaches (Adomi et al., 2006; Aramide & Ladipo, 2016; Eke, 2011; Saka & Haruna, 2013). Adomi et al. (2006) gave their 105 participants a list of possible benefits to choose from. Their findings revealed that 86% of participants agreed that their conference attendance had “improved productivity in my library/organization/institution”; 78% stated that they “have learnt new work skills” and 21% reported that the event had provided them with opportunities to “network with colleagues/made contacts” (p. 184). They concluded that conference attendance met the expectations of their participants and that librarians as well as their

organisation benefit from it. Aramide and Ladipo (2016) surveyed 133 attendees of school librarianship conferences, offering them a list of statements drawn from the literature. Although the statements developed for the survey are not well defined, for example, the distinction between “I have been deeply educated” and “I have learned a lot” (p. 27) is unclear, the results indicate that respondents believe learning about new things and networking are the most important outcomes of conference attendance. Eke (2011) explored the impact of a conference organised by the Nigerian Library Association on attendees and their libraries, by sending questionnaires to delegates. Respondents rated their agreement with statements referring to various possible benefits of conference attendance. The findings of Eke’s study indicate that the 185 participating librarians strongly agreed that they learned about “new occurrences” (assumedly new ideas) (p. 32), updated existing knowledge, learned how to serve their clients better, learned how to write scholarly papers and speak in public. Finally, Saka and Haruna (2013) examined the statistical relationship between staff development and job performance of academic librarians in Nigeria, with 34 librarians responding to their questionnaire. The authors claim in their findings that “there was significant relationship between seminars/conferences and job performance of staff [in] branch libraries” (p. 16). However, it remains unclear how job performance was measured or how participants understood the concept.

Willingham, Carder and Millson-Martula (2006) also investigated conference attendance impact in LIS. They wanted to test the following hypothesis (amongst others not relevant to this study): “*conference attendance typically has only medium impact on program development or improvement*” (p. 29), and report that 62% of the 132 respondents to their survey agreed with this statement. However, a lack of clarity and structure to their methodology, and the absence of their research instrument reduces the authority of their results. Perryman (2006) reviewed the study and remarks that possible false inflation of data, recall bias and “several unsupported statements” (p. 86) are issues that should have been addressed by the researchers.

As demonstrated in this review of the literature, authors agree on *information and ideas*, *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration* as reasons for conference attendance. However, only eight LIS studies investigated if these reasons correspond to impacts on the delegate and their institution. These eight studies vary greatly in their research approaches and in the quality of their findings, which is summarised in Table 4. The

column *Quality of methodology and reporting* highlights the unsystematic or problematic approaches to methodology and reporting applied in some of these studies.

Table 4: Summary of LIS research into conference attendance impact

Author	Focus of research	Participants	Quality of methodology and reporting	Qualitative approach
Henczel, 2016	National library associations	Librarians	Approach and discussion impeccable	Yes
Ocholla, 1999	Information seeking behaviour	Academics	Sound approach	No
Palmer, 1996	Research practices	Academics	No research instrument provided, number of participants unknown	Yes
Adomi et al., 2006	Conference attendance impact	Librarians	Sound approach	No
Aramide and Ladipo, 2016	Conference attendance impact	Librarians	Survey contained ambiguous expressions, debatable quality of outcomes	No
Eke, 2011	Conference attendance impact	Librarians	Sound approach	No
Saka and Haruna, 2013	Professional development activities	Librarians	Measurements and concepts used in survey unclear, debatable quality of outcomes	No
Willingham et al., 2006	Conferences	Librarians	Approach lacked structure and clarity, debatable quality of outcomes	No

As Table 4 shows, there is a paucity of high-quality empirical LIS research into the impact of conference attendance. Research has focused either on larger research questions – investigating conferences amongst other aspects – or surveyed practitioners

in professions other than librarianship such as academics. Some of the studies display structural methodological problems which raises concerns about the accuracy of their findings, while others employ a rigorous quantitative approach to data collection that prevents participants' voices from being explored. This results in a gap in the literature on the topic of conference attendance impact on librarians and libraries – which this research will address.

2.5.2 Studies in other disciplines

The LIS literature focusing on conference attendance impact is sparse and lacks studies producing high-quality findings. For this reason, the methods used by authors in other disciplines were examined to gain insights into possible approaches that could be employed. In the field of hospitality and tourism studies, a group of researchers affiliated with the University of Technology Sydney (Edwards, Foley & Malone, 2017; Edwards, Foley & Schlenker, 2011; Foley, Edwards & Schlenker, 2014; Foley, Schlenker, Edwards & Lewis-Smith, 2013) used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to study the outcomes of business events, which they define as conferences, conventions or business meetings. They initially used case studies to explore the topic (Foley et al., 2013) and then developed a survey that was sent to 13,200 delegates of five international congresses held in Sydney between 2009 and 2011 (Edwards et al., 2011). The study defines the following concepts as impacts: knowledge expansion; networking, relationships, and collaboration; fundraising and future research capacity; raising awareness and profiling; showcasing and destination reputation (Edwards et al., 2011). They also name different aspects within those core concepts, for instance broadening networks; better awareness and appreciation of international practices; enhanced teaching; career opportunities; appreciation of Australia; friendship; building of professional reputation; improved skills and relocation to conference destination to live and work (Edwards et al., 2011). The research distinguished between impacts visible during the conference, after the event and in the longer term. In their latest publication on the topic (Edwards et al., 2017) they develop the following aspects relating to concepts established in earlier papers:

- Within the concept of information and ideas, they refer to delegates returning with new ideas, a holistic understanding of the field, and experiencing “deep learning” (Edwards et al. 2017, p. 134). Participants in their study also shared ideas once they returned to their places of work.

- Regarding aspects of conference attendance that refer to *networking*, Edwards et al. (2017) discuss delegates establishing new relationships at the conference or deepening existing ones. Participants in the study expanded their networks and created like-minded communities.
- *Inspiration and invigoration* that are caused by attendance are referred to as motivators and described as “energy and momentum” (Edwards et al. 2017, p. 134), which can aid in developing delegates’ careers.

The papers published by the group also refer to other kinds of impacts. They state that conferences can facilitate “benefits to communities, industry sectors and economies” (Edwards et al. 2017, p. 135) by encouraging collaboration between sectors. The increased media coverage of topics discussed at bigger conferences can also lead to raised awareness of issues, which Edwards et al. (2017) argue can cause a change in general opinion.

A similar study was conducted by a group of researchers in the United States in the field of human resource management. The study used learning theories to investigate the impact of conference attendance, collecting data at the 2005 International Academy of Human Resource Development Conference (Aalsburg Wiessner et al., 2008; Chapman, Aalsburg Wiessner, Storberg-Walker & Hatcher, 2007; Chapman & Aalsburg Wiessner, 2008; Chapman et al., 2009; Hatcher et al., 2005; Storberg-Walker, Aalsburg Wiessner & Chapman, 2005). The research team gathered approximately one thousand surveys from about half of the delegates and analysed the data using qualitative methods. Their findings include activities in which delegates engage at conferences, for instance, understanding research in a new way, networking, making connections between theory and practice, learning about research design and reflections on presentations skills (Storberg-Walker et al., 2005; Aalsburg Wiessner et al., 2008). Given that data for the study was collected during the conference, participants could only speculate about actions they planned to take with content gathered or new contacts made. Basing their study on the same data, Haley, Aalsburg Wiessner and Robinson (2009) synthesised their colleagues’ results and documented different ways in which attendees reacted to new ideas acquired at the conference, for example acknowledging and contemplating the idea, or intending to act on content presented. Furthermore, the authors refer to the fact that delegates might not apply ideas from the conference as they are, but adapt them to their work environment. They conclude that

“during a conference it is difficult to determine whether there is any resulting action taken by the participants. A follow-up survey would be necessary to determine actual action steps” (p. 78).

The concepts of *information and ideas* and *networking* as impacts of conference attendance discussed by the research groups of Edwards et al. (2017) and Chapman et al. (2009) are echoed by other, smaller studies conducted to answer similar research questions (Choi, 2013; Jones & Hugman, 2010; Oester et al., 2017). In Australia, Jones and Hugman (2010) studied the short and longer-term benefits of conference attendance, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. They distributed questionnaires to delegates of the UniServe Science Conference and established that 75% of their participants (75 responses) shared ideas/knowledge gained at the conference with colleagues, and about 30% kept in touch with attendees they met. In addition, 15% of respondents referred to having collaborated with people they got to know at the event, and about half used ideas from the conference in their teaching. In the field of marine conservation, Oester et al. (2017) explored the impact of two conferences. Out of 100 participants in their study, 70% discussed having gained new ideas at the conference “to further their research” (p. 2). Furthermore, the survey’s respondents emphasised how vital new contacts made at the conference were to their careers. In her doctoral thesis, Choi (2013) reports similar findings to Jones and Hugman (2010) and Oester et al. (2017), but also describes the impact conferences can have in terms of feelings enabled by attendance. Choi (2013) conducted a quantitative study of factors that increase the perceived value of conferences for attendees. She sent a questionnaire to 370 faculty members who attended a conference in the United States and found that networking opportunities and an informative program led to delegates increasing their knowledge, as well as feeling accomplished and entertained.

Again studying conference attendance impact in a specific field, Waite and Hume (2017) researched the benefits for geography teachers in the United States, using a survey to evaluate outcomes of attendance compared to objectives of conference organisers. The 296 participants in their qualitative study returned from the event with new or clarified ideas, feedback on teaching methods and knowledge about new trends in the profession. The results of their study also reveal that networking was the biggest benefit that delegates attributed to their attendance, with “new colleagues and/or friendships” (p. 131) rated highest among the possible outcomes. However, the authors

acknowledge that the “harder question to answer is whether or not these connections go much beyond social interactions or result in meaningful professional collaborations or other benefits” (p. 133).

A further three studies confirm *information and ideas*, *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration* as concepts of conference attendance impact, but highlight that these concepts are often connected. A group of authors in the United States conducted a long-term quantitative study into scientific communication associated with national conferences in various disciplines, investigating 11 events from 1966 to 1968 (Compton, 1966; Garvey, Lin, Nelson & Tomita, 1972). Compton (1966) reports that most delegates (between 81% and 92%, depending on the conference) successfully obtain useful information at a conference. Garvey et al. (1972) focus on *networking* as a concept of attendance when discussing that almost all participants in their research had some interaction with other attendees about the work they presented, and over 25% stated having modified their current work after receiving feedback from other delegates. The same concept appears in a study conducted by Aiken (2006). His paper on the financial impact of conferences is discussed later in the chapter; however, 64% of participants in his sample speak about having changed the direction of their research due to an idea they became aware of during a conference. The research of Paisley and Parker (1968) is similarly important to that of Compton (1966) and Garvey et al. (1972) as it highlights the overlaps between different concepts of conference attendance impact. Paisley and Parker (1968) explored the exchange of information at a specific conference in the United States. They distributed a questionnaire to all delegates, and point to papers and informal conversations as vital sources of information for attendees. Examples of different types of content their participants acquired at the conference are information on other researchers' work or methods, and ideas for new projects. Also focusing on the fact that social interactions are often opportunities for delegates to access ideas and information, De Vries and Pieters (2007) examined the dialogue between practitioners and researchers at conferences by administering the same survey to 490 participants at 15 conferences in the Netherlands. They found that “conferences are valued to exchange contact information and therefore seem to be effective in relation to building and sustaining networks” and that “conferences are valued for social as well as cognitive outcomes” (p. 243).

Conference attendance impact has also been investigated using different lenses. The study by Ernst, Francis, Qazait and Dowdy (1991) is important to note as it focused on outcomes of conferences regarding feelings enabled by attendance. Working in the field of preventive medicine, Ernst et al. (1991) evaluate the impact of conference presentations on the optimism levels of the audience. They find that audiences “became more optimistic as a result of the presentations” (p. 210), but document that the levels of optimism did not change in the same manner for all presentations, with some speakers managing to make delegates feel more optimistic than others. Funk, Hu and Rauterberg (2013) add a different perspective with their quantitative research into the impact of social behaviour at a conference on citations to delegates’ papers after the event. Their findings are based on 343 participants and 213 papers and highlight how authors who socialised at the conference received higher numbers of citations to their papers. More recently, Casad, Chang and Pribbenow (2016) conducted a study on the effects of conference attendance on students belonging to a minority group. The 533 participants in their quantitative project spoke about *networking* as a concept of attendance impact, with 64% having made “at least one lasting contact” (p. 9). They also reported an increase of self-efficacy and research confidence, and a “sense of belonging in science” (p. 8), which emphasises the importance of feelings associated with conference attendance for this group of conference delegates.

2.5.3 Summary of literature on conference attendance impact

Table 5 shows the different concepts regarding conference attendance impact on delegates and their institutions that emerged from the literature review, both in LIS and other disciplines. Quantitative findings are summarised, quotes are deliberately shortened to increase the readability of the table, and the LIS literature is highlighted.

Table 5: Concepts of conference attendance impact in literature

Information and ideas		
Henczel, 2016	New ideas and viewpoints	LIS
Ocholla, 1999	New ideas and dissemination of information	LIS
Palmer, 1996	Conferences used to gather information	LIS
Aramide & Ladipo, 2016	Learning about new things	LIS

Eke, 2011	New ideas and updated knowledge	LIS
Edwards et al., 2017	Knowledge expansion, ideas are shared	
Storberg-Walker et al., 2005	Understanding research in new ways and reflecting on new concepts	
Choi, 2013	Increased knowledge	
Jones & Hugman, 2010	Ideas are shared and used	
Oester et al., 2017	Ideas that aided with research	
Waite & Hume, 2017	Different kinds of knowledge and ideas	
Compton, 1966	Information need filled	
Garvey et al., 1972	Feedback results in changed research	
Paisley & Parker, 1968	Different types of information	
De Vries & Pieters, 2007	Cognitive outcomes	
Networking		
Henczel, 2016	Meeting like-minded people	LIS
Palmer, 1996	Delegates shared research interests	LIS
Adomi et al., 2006	Conferences provided networking opportunities	LIS
Aramide & Ladipo, 2016	Participants networked, returned with new contacts and made friends	LIS
Edwards et al., 2017	New relationships, deepening of existing ones, creating like-minded communities	
Storberg-Walker et al., 2005	New relationships formed	
Jones & Hugman, 2010	Collaborated with delegates after the conference	
Oester et al., 2017	Attendees networked and made new connections	
Waite & Hume, 2017	Networking rated as most important benefit	
Garvey et al., 1972	Attendees networked	
De Vries & Pieters, 2007	Conferences valued for networking; networks were built and sustained	
Funk et al., 2013	If attendees networked, citations to their papers increased	

Casad at al., 2016	Attendees made at least one new contact	
Inspiration and invigoration		
Henczel, 2016	Feeling more motivated and positive about work	LIS
Palmer, 1996	Participants feel being part of a close-knit group	LIS
Edwards et al., 2017	“Energy and momentum” (Edwards et al. 2017, p. 134)	
Choi, 2013	Delegates felt accomplished and entertained	
Ernst et al., 1991	Attendees more optimistic as result of presentations	
Casad at al., 2016	Increased self-efficacy, confidence and a sense of belonging	
Other impact		
Henczel, 2016	Staff presenting led to increase in organisation’s reputation	LIS
Adomi et al., 2006	Attendance might improve productivity; new skills	LIS
Eke, 2011	Learning how to write scholarly papers and speak in public	LIS
Saka & Haruna, 2013	Attendance might increase job performance	LIS
Willingham et al., 2006	Attendance might cause impact on program development	LIS
Edwards et al., 2017	Raising awareness, increased reputation, new skills, benefits to communities and economies	
Waite & Hume, 2017	Physical material used in teaching	

The literature about conference attendance impact identifies three distinct concepts, as presented in Table 5. First, some studies discuss *information and ideas* as impact, in LIS and in other disciplines. This concept includes all accounts of transfer, distribution or exposure to ideas, information or knowledge at a conference and its effects. Second, the concept *networking*, encompasses instances of interactions during and after the conference. As was the case with reasons for conference attendance, the boundaries between *information and ideas* and *networking* as concepts of impact are fluid, a fact that a participant’s comment in Palmer’s study (1996) illustrates: “Normally, maybe 85% of what is going on I just know by keeping in contact with people” (p. 170).

Inspiration and invigoration as impacts of conference attendance is a third concept identified in the literature. Although Lee and Min's research (2013a) focused on other aspects of conferences, they summarise the elements relating to this concept succinctly: "emotional value is considered an essential assessment for conventions because attendees experience and cherish emotional and psychological benefits (e.g. they are excited and pleased to learn and exchange knowledge)" (p. 403). Mair (2014) conducted an extensive review of the literature on conferences and emphasises both the lack of studies about feelings enabled by conference attendance, and the need for more knowledge in this area. Authors also discuss other outcomes of conference attendance, such as increased reputation for the organisation, enhanced skill sets or benefits attributed to presenting at conferences.

The concepts of conference attendance impact as documented in Table 5 have also been confirmed anecdotally by opinion pieces (Bradley et al., 2009; England, 2003; Finlay, 2017; Nicolson, 2017). Bradley et al. (2009) discuss the benefits of volunteering at librarianship conferences in reference to acquiring transferable skills, which echoes the findings of Adomi et al. (2006) and Edwards et al. (2017). From a librarian's perspective, England (2003) describes how her attendance resulted in her "current wonderful job" (p. 15). Finlay (2017) attended an ALIA national conference as a library student and notes that she met new friends, reconnected with old acquaintances and learned new things. Nicolson (2017) used his notes and observations in conjunction with data from interviews conducted with delegates to investigate conferences in a neo-liberal sense. His monograph is more reflective essay than scholarly research, but his arguments align with other authors' findings, in that conferences provide opportunities to extend networks and increase knowledge.

2.6 Factors influencing conference attendance impact

In addition to investigating concepts of conference attendance impact, researchers have also studied factors that influence the impact of attending a conference. In LIS, Pors (2001) tested variables like gender, age or nationality regarding their influence on participants' satisfaction levels with a conference series organised by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Pors found that nationality influenced participants' satisfaction levels, with attendees from the UK and Australia being least

satisfied with the conference. He also remarks that “the evaluation of a professional conference can be heavily influenced by factors having nothing to do with the content of the conference” (pp. 245 - 246), giving the example of the effect of poor accommodation on satisfaction levels. In his conceptual paper, Murray (2007) explores how a learning model can be used to describe what librarians had learned at a conference. Murray recommends a range of activities like planning before the conference or meetings held afterwards to review notes and to establish how ideas from the conference can be related to institutional needs. He concludes that “how much we learn at library conferences therefore depends on the commitment – both of an institution’s representative at the conference as well as those who did not attend – to review, analyse, and possibly incorporate the information gathered into institutional activities” (p. 60).

In other disciplines, research projects have also focused on factors that influence conference attendance impact (Ahmad, Jarman, Kallies & Shapiro, 2017; Garvey et al., 1972; Haley et al., 2009; Peters, 1975; Waite & Hume, 2017). The research of Garvey et al. (1972) discussed earlier in this chapter highlights factors that influence the impact of attendance. They establish that, in general, conferences “clearly had greater impact on the work of attendees who were less experienced in a field” (p. 164), and that the information exchange behaviour varies considerably regarding delegates’ characteristics of age, experience or role. Presenting a paper also makes a difference to networking opportunities and results in receiving useful feedback. Although dated, the research of Peters (1975) in the field of human resource management is important to note as it focuses on specific characteristics of attendees and the influence they have on attendance impact. Peters (1975) investigated delegates who displayed great “meeting effectiveness”, with the term defined as “the ability to acquire information rapidly through informal conversations with others rather than as a part of the formal program” (p. 139). According to Peters, participants were more effective at conferences if they presented a paper, worked or researched in more than one country, viewed themselves as innovators or were highly accomplished academics. Haley et al. (2009) describe how the type and objectives of the conference, the personal learning style of the attendees, their reasons for attending the conference as well as their experience and attitude can influence outcomes of attendance. More recently, Ahmad et al. (2017) analysed how often researchers who presented at conferences in the field of medical surgery published in peer-reviewed journals following the event. The authors

discovered that frequently, delegates who had presented papers were able to publish their research in relevant journals, and attendees who delivered more than one presentation were more likely to be successful in their academic careers. Although the main focus of their study was the evaluation of conference outcomes compared to organisers' objectives, Waite and Hume (2017) also document that delegates' roles change their satisfaction levels.

Learning theories and their influence on conference attendance impact or experience have been explored by several studies (Henderson, Shurville & Fernstrom, 2009; Hilliard, 2006; Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011; Ravn & Elsborg, 2011; Wood, Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2017). Henderson et al. (2009) state in their conceptual paper that communities of practice need to constantly negotiate their values and identities, which is "facilitated by participation in small and specialist conferences which value the exploration of practices"(p. 153). The authors suggest strategies for conference organisers to maximise the impact of conferences, with recommendations ranging from revising the assessment culture of papers to building alliances with peer-reviewed journals and commercial publishers. Hilliard (2006) uses Wenger's (1998) model of Communities of Practice (CoPs) to assess how learning activities at conferences, and therefore their potential impact, could be enhanced. Her recommendations are aimed at conference organisers, and include flexibility regarding content, and focus on interactive delivery and applied learning. Hilliard argues that an application of the principles of CoPs to the organisation of a conference results in delegates continuing their learning between events, if the conferences in question are organised on a recurring basis. Louw and Zuber-Skerritt (2011) recommend that organisers should apply the principles of Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) to conference planning to create opportunities for knowledge creation. In addition, they introduce a model to assist researchers in converting their presentations to published journal articles. In 2017, Wood, Louw and Zuber-Skerritt returned to the original idea, this time outlining how Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) increased the impact of conference attendance on the postgraduate students participating in their study. Finally, Ravn (2007) describes the traditional conference format to be a "relic of academic teaching practices in 19th century Germany: the all-powerful professor speaks to an auditorium of obedient students" (p. 213), proposing ideas to improve the format. Based on these reflections, Ravn and Elsborg (2011) introduced different learning techniques into the structure of a specific conference and then investigated if they

increased delegates' learning; examples for interventions included breaking up long presentations or organising presentations like interviews. The authors conclude that the majority of changes made were "received well by the participants, they may be assumed to have contributed positively to participants' learning" (p. 8).

In the field of hospitality and tourism research, qualitative research approaches have been used to explore factors influencing conference attendance impact or delegates' experiences and perceptions of the event (Lee, 2008; Kim, Lee & Kim, 2012; Ryu & Lee, 2013). Lee (2008), in her Master's thesis, conducted a study on food quality as a factor affecting attendee satisfaction and behaviour. Her findings indicate that attendees' assessment of the quality of the food offered at the conference predicts their intention to return to the same conference. The study by Kim et al. (2012) examined the differences between first time and repeat conference attendees regarding their perception of the quality of the events. The authors establish that delegates who had attended the conference previously were more motivated by networking opportunities, whereas first-time attendees were more concerned with educational opportunities. Site environment factors (like catering or venue) are also significant for first-time delegates, but not for repeat attendees. Ryu and Lee (2013) focused on self-congruity, defined as "the match between self-image and generalized attendee image or convention image" (p. 30), to investigate its effect on attendees' evaluations. They discovered that if the conference projected an image aligning with the image delegates had of themselves (which corresponds to a high level of self-congruity), participants rated some factors like networking, social value of the conference or intention to attend the same conference again higher.

It is important to note that the depth and focus of the papers discussed in this section vary considerably. Some of the studies outline only the possibility of an influence on conference impact, such as Hilliard (2006), Henderson et al. (2009) and Ravn and Elsborg (2011). Others describe factors that affected how delegates respond to ideas encountered in a conference setting (Haley et al., 2009). Pors (2001), Lee (2008), Kim et al. (2012) and Ryu and Lee (2013) aim to establish which factors might have an influence on attendees' satisfaction levels, and other authors investigate learning models and their possible effects (Henderson et al., 2009; Hilliard, 2006; Murray, 2007; Louw & Zuber-Skeritt, 2011; Ravn & Elsborg, 2011). The studies provide a cluster of factors that can influence conference attendance and its possible impact. In addition,

they highlight that the topic cannot be investigated in isolation from delegates' circumstances and contexts. In summary, there is a gap in the LIS literature relating to exploration and explanation of factors influencing conference attendance impact. Table 6 summarises the accounts of influencing factors discussed in the chapter.

Table 6: Factors influencing conference attendance impact

LIS literature	
Pors, 2001	Nationality influences attendees' satisfaction levels
Murray, 2007	Attendees' and their colleagues' commitment to engaging with content
Other disciplines – general focus	
Garvey et al., 1972	Age, experience and role of attendee, presenting papers
Peters, 1975	Presenting papers, number of countries worked in, self-perception as innovators, academic accomplishment
Haley et al., 2009	Types and objectives of conference, personal learning style, experience and attitude, purpose for attending
Ahmad et al., 2017	Presenting at conference influences prospects of delegates publishing research
Waite & Hume, 2017	Role of delegates influences satisfaction levels
Other disciplines – focus on learning theories	
Hilliard, 2006	Interactive delivery of content influences learning experience
Henderson et al., 2009	Type of conference
Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011	Learning principles used in conference planning enhances learning outcomes
Ravn & Elsborg, 2011	Learning techniques used to deliver content influences learning outcomes
Other disciplines – hospitality and tourism research	
Lee, 2008	Quality of food influences intention of delegate to return
Kim et al., 2012	Experience (first-time versus repeat attendees)
Ryu & Lee, 2013	Self-congruity influences delegates' perception of event

2.7 Other approaches to conference impact analysis

In the previous sections, the chapter has analysed literature investigating the impact conference attendance has on delegates and their institutions, and factors that influence the impact. In contrast, researchers have also focused on conference impact in reference to conference proceedings and environmental factors, as well as using feminist lenses or financial considerations. This section discusses such work to provide a nuanced and complete account of the different approaches researchers have taken to investigate the issue. The literature on bibliometric approaches is discussed in more detail, as citation and publication impact studies are closely aligned to LIS.

2.7.1 Analysis of programs and proceedings

Research on conferences also focuses on the content of programs and the impact of proceedings. The two approaches are similar as both focus on the ideas in presentations and publications stemming from the events. The following section describes literature analysing the content of conference programs, and then discusses studies that used bibliometric approaches to investigate the impact of conference proceedings.

Coughlin and Snelson (1983) studied the presentations at the first ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) conference in 1978, finding that only 33% were scholarly, with all others being descriptive case studies or opinion papers. Anderson and Orsatti (2008) studied the role of a specific conference series (ISIC: “Information Seeking In Context”) in the information seeking activities of delegates. They analysed conference programs to identify core themes, with results showing that on most occasions the interests of participants aligned with content presented, which was often related to their work. However, the findings of the study do not appear to address the research question, which considered the information seeking behaviour of conference attendees. Buchanan, Goedeken and Herubel (1996) investigated proceedings of six conferences organised by the Association of American College and Research Libraries (ACRL). They document that a large part of contributions made to those proceedings stem from a relatively small number of “dominant institutions” (p. 2).

Taking a similar approach, Wilson (2010) conducted a content analysis of five years’ worth of librarianship conference sessions in Canada, finding that most presentations were aimed at all library sectors, but mostly targeted qualified librarians. Moreillon,

Cahill and McKee (2012) set out to establish if the programs of twelve librarianship conferences align and/or promote the five roles of school librarians as identified by the American Association of School Librarians. Their results show that most sessions focused merely on one of the roles (teacher) and that one role (instructional partner) was non-existent in most of the conference programs. In his study from 2013, Conklin analysed the program of the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Ecological Society of America (ESA) to investigate common trends in the fields of ecology and librarianship, concluding that 20% of sessions and 76% of workshop themes at the conference corresponds to current trends in the profession of librarianship.

The literature also includes studies researching the impact and importance of conference proceedings using bibliometric analysis, in LIS (Clausen & Wormell, 2001; Drott, 1995; Lisée, Larivière & Archambault, 2008; Osorio & Solomon, 2017) and in other disciplines (Michels & Fu, 2014; Rahm, 2008). Clausen and Wormell (2001) analysed the output of the International Online Information Meetings (IOLIM) conferences from 1977-1999 regarding official publications of the conference (calls for papers, lists of participants, programs and proceedings) and citations to the conference proceedings. According to their findings, the list of authors who cited the proceedings included “several well-recognised and famous researchers in the field” (p. 165), which, they argue, means that the conference has “had some impact on the leading research front lines” (p.165). However, Clausen and Wormell do not define “well-recognised and famous”, nor the exact nature of the impact. They aimed to explore the distribution of ideas created at the conferences, and concede that analysing proceedings might not be an ideal method to track ideas, as “poor indexing of LIS literature in the databases ... was a hindrance to the identification of novel ideas and innovations (possibly) originating from the IOLIM conferences” (p. 168).

Drott (1995) combined citation analysis of papers from the proceedings of a conference organised by the American Society of Information Science with an examination of articles published in a journal of the same organisation, and found that conference papers are a lot less likely to lead to journal articles than earlier research had suggested. Lisée et al. (2008) measured both the importance of conference proceedings in comparison to other literature as well as their ageing characteristics. They find that proceedings generally have a limited scientific impact, representing only 1.7% of citations in the natural sciences and engineering, and 2.5% in the social sciences and

humanities. In the field of computer sciences, however, they account for almost 20% of all citations. The authors also establish that conference proceedings become obsolete faster than cited scientific literature generally.

Similarly, Osorio and Solomon (2017) investigated submissions to a conference series targeted at engineering librarians in the United States, using descriptive analysis of papers published in the conference proceedings. They observed that limited co-authorship, “decreased collaboration with professionals outside librarianship”, that submitted papers lacked “international collaborations” (p. 14) and noted a “major focus on information literacy” (p. 14). Authors in other disciplines have investigated similar research questions, for example, Rahm (2008), who compared the scientific impact of conference versus journal publications in the field of computer science, and Michels and Fu (2014), who provide a systematic analysis of coverage and usage of conference proceedings across many fields. In addition, some opinion pieces contain personal reflections on content presented at conferences targeted at librarianship professionals and other disciplines (Grant, 2010; Landsberger & Holt, 2003; McLean, 2008; O’Regan & Alturkman, 2010).

2.7.2 Economic and financial approaches

When considering the impact of conferences, researchers have also taken a commercial viewpoint (Aiken, 2006; Bradley et al., 2009; Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis & Mules, 2000; Grado, Strauss & Lord, 1997; Schmehl Hines, 2014b). Papers focus on the financial impact on conference organisers, or entire communities and economies. In LIS, Bradley et al. (2009) find that ALIA expects its conferences to provide a budget surplus for the association. Moreover, they claim that “conferences are for most associations a major source of income and subsidize other activities” (p. 241), but provide no clear evidence to support that statement. Schmehl Hines (2014b) explored the role of American professional librarianship associations in organising conferences. More than half of the participants in her study, 39 library association members in leadership positions, cite fund-raising as a top goal of the conferences they organised and agree that they are financially beneficial.

Aiken (2006) attempted to measure the quantitative value of a specific conference series in the United States. More than half of his participants indicated that “since the meeting they had used something they learned at the conference that had saved time

and/or money, or accelerated reaching a research goal” (p. 54). Based on estimates provided in the surveys, Aiken suggests that 20 to 30 million USD in research funds is “diverted to more effective use each year because of information learned at our conferences” (p. 55). However, the lack of the survey instrument and the need for participants to quantify savings which is prone to guesswork reduces the reliability of his findings. Using a similar approach, Grado et al. (1997) analysed the impact of conferences in a specific region in the United States, finding that the total sales benefits of the events for the region were 163.3 million US dollars. The authors state that “conferences and conventions were a major contributor to the regional economic impacts from travel and tourism” (p. 19). Dwyer et al. (2000) propose a framework to analyse cost and other benefits to governments who host conferences, and Edwards et al. (2017) point out that the merit of conferences should be evaluated in terms of their financial contributions as they can be profitable for host cities.

2.7.3 Environmental impact

As conferences attendance can require delegates to travel to distant destinations, authors have researched the impact conference attendance has on the environment (Callister & Griffiths, 2007; Fois, Cuenca-Lombraña, Fristoe, Fenu & Bacchetta, 2016; Guterman, 2009; Høyer & Naess, 2001; Høyer, 2009; Oester et al., 2017; Roberts & Godlee, 2007). Some papers provide concrete advice to delegates and event organisers to alleviate the negative impact on the environment. Callister and Griffiths (2007) calculated the environmental footprint of a specific medical conference in the United States to be 10,799 tons and encourage attendees to make a donation to offset the emissions caused by the event. Guterman (2009) suggests that organisations should develop standards for hosting “greener conferences” (p. 1170), and Fois et al. (2016) advise travelling by trains to address the issue. Oester et al. (2017) repeat the environmental concerns raised by others in this context. Medical practitioners Roberts and Godlee (2007) state that it is “ironic that doctors, for whom protecting health is a primary responsibility, contribute to global warming through unnecessary attendances at international conferences” (p. 324). Their findings provide examples of the estimated carbon footprint of specific conferences. Høyer and Naess (2001), and Høyer (2009) agree that practitioners ought to question their attendance at conferences if it involves travelling long distances, especially if similar gains can be achieved by attending online meetings.

2.7.4 Gender approach

In recent years, a feminist lens has been applied to study conferences and their impact, agreeing that gender influences delegates' experiences and the benefits they attribute to their attendance (Settles & O'Connor, 2014; Biggs, Hawley & Biernat, 2018; Mair & Frew, 2016; Walters, 2018). Settles and O'Connor (2014) have surveyed conference delegates in the United States and conclude that women find conferences more uncivil, sexist and non-inclusive than men. They frame conferences as vital aspects of academic careers, but reflect on the difference gender makes in harnessing their advantages. Using the same approach, Mair and Frew (2016) studied conference attendance in an Australian setting, and agree that female delegates face particular issues. Walters (2018) finds that gender inequality manifests itself at conferences in certain areas – namely keynote speakers and membership on committees. She encourages conference organisers to address this issue by making equal gender representation a goal for future events. Biggs et al. (2018) agree that gender has an influence on conference attendance impact, and make suggestions on how to address the issue. The findings of their quantitative study of 329 presenters at three academic conferences in the United States also indicate that women who feel silenced and unwelcome at the conference are more likely to think about leaving their academic careers.

2.8 Overview of the literature

As shown in this chapter, the literature on conferences in LIS and other disciplines investigates similar concepts. In LIS, a focus on the academic library sector is evident; however specific references to conference attendance in other library sectors such as public or special libraries are notably absent. Overall, the treatment of the topic in the literature gives the impression that conferences are highly regarded, and reasons to attend are well documented. However, conferences in general, and conference attendance impact and influencing factors specifically are under-researched, with no agreement on certain aspects or models explaining the phenomenon. Throughout the literature, authors support the notion of this gap, with the earliest statement made in 1968 (Paisley & Parker), and the most recent in 2018 (Biggs et al.; Edelheim et al.). Researchers also acknowledge that further research is required and Table 7 compiles the descriptions of conferences as an under-researched topic. Henczel's statement

(2016) is particularly important, as her recently published LIS PhD thesis is set in an Australian context.

Table 7: Conferences as an under-researched topic

LIS literature	
Drott, 1995	“Many authors . . . have proposed possible functions for conferences and conference presentations. Yet there has been little research to illuminate these possibilities” (p. 302)
Clausen & Wormell, 2001	In the literature, “conferences have mainly been treated with regard to their proceedings” (p. 157)
Lyons, 2007	“Although it is quite common to find general reports from events or detailed results from specific meetings and workshops, there is very little literature directed at the conference circuit as a topic <i>per se</i> ” (p. 181)
Harrison, 2010	“The majority of the literature dealing with conferences in the library field is event specific; that is, it consists of reviews and recapitulations of a particular conference” (p. 264)
Eke, 2011	“A literature review on the impact of conference attendance on professional development identified few articles” (p. 27)
Moreillon et al., 2012	“A review of research on library and information science revealed few studies related to conferences” (p. 3)
Schmehl Hines, 2014a	“Most literature regarding conference attendance is proscriptive, including tips on how to make the most of the experience or how to get involved” (p. 2)
Henczel, 2016	“There is a lack of studies that focus on the benefits of conference participation and on the impact of conference participation” (p. 172)
Literature of other disciplines	
Paisley & Parker, 1968	“The role of scientific conventions in the information system of science has been studied very little” (p. 65)
Rose, 1992	“Research in this area is amazingly sparse” (p. 10)
Price, 1993	“No major studies have investigated the importance [of conferences] from the perspective of the attendee. Where references do exist . . . they rarely are of an empirical nature” (p. 2)
McCarthy et al., 2004	The authors refer to academic conferences as a “space that has not been well studied” (p. 46)
Jones & Hugman, 2010	“Little was reported on the importance of the outcomes of a conference and how it had benefitted the practice of the delegates” (p. 61)

Ravn & Elsborg, 2011	“Various forums for learning have been studied extensively: the classroom, the kindergarten, the shop floor, the office, the training and development program – but apparently not the conference” (p. 2)
Settles & O'Connor, 2014	Conferences are an “understudied yet consequential extension of the academic/professional workplace” (p. 72)
Mair, 2014	“Our understanding of the complexities of conferences and conventions remains somewhat limited, and the body of knowledge associated with these events leaves much room for improvement” (p. 1)
Casad et al., 2016	The “benefits of attending and presenting research at professional conferences” are an “understudied aspect” in the literature (p. 2)
Nicolson, 2017	“There appears to have been little empirical examination of conference [sic] in the social sciences” (p. 11), and there is a “lack of research examining the impact of academic conferences” (p. 64)
Biggs et al., 2018	“Academic conferences, as the powerful socializing contexts they are, have not been the target of much empirical research” (p. 405)
Edelheim et al., 2018	“Very little research exists analysing what takes place at conferences, why people attend them in the first place, and essentially what the conference does to delegates as participants” (p. 94)

The aim of this thesis is to fill the gap relating to knowledge about conference attendance impact and influencing factors. It employs an open, qualitative approach that allows previously unknown insights to emerge. This is an important aspect of this doctoral research, because previous studies have mostly applied quantitative, restrictive methodologies. The use of a qualitative approach to investigate the topic is supported by the study of Neves, Lavis and Ranson (2012). Neves et al. analysed 44 studies evaluating conferences, finding that researchers either used immediate indicators (participant satisfaction rates), prospective indicators (intention to act or intention to return) or follow-up indicators (publication rates or policy changes) to measure possible benefits of conferences. All 44 studies in their sample used predetermined factors and quantitative analysis to examine conference impact. In addition, only one Masters and two doctoral theses (Choi, 2013; Lee, 2008; Price, 1993) investigated conferences, which further confirms the notion of an under-researched field and emphasises the importance of this research.

2.9 Summary of chapter

Chapter Two provided a thematic and critical exploration of the literature examining conferences in LIS and in other disciplines. It focused specifically on conference attendance impact and related influencing factors, but also highlighted other aspects scholars have considered worthy of investigation. The chapter identified a gap in the LIS literature examining conference attendance impact and factors that can influence this impact.

Scholars offer advice concerning conferences and discuss virtual events and technologies, describing the social advantages of face-to-face events. Conference proceedings have also been a focus of research and studies have applied bibliometric, economic, environmental, and gender-related lenses to their investigations. Barriers to conference attendance and reasons to attend are also a focus of papers in LIS and other disciplines. Lack of funding, time constraints, awareness and location of events can prevent conference attendance. Reasons to attend conferences can be grouped into three main concepts: *information and ideas*; *networking*; and *inspiration and invigoration*.

In reference to empirical studies focusing on conference attendance impact in LIS, the literature is scarce and lacks clarity in terms of methodological approaches. Concepts of conference attendance impact that researchers have explored mirror the main reasons to attend – most impact is either related to *information and ideas*; *networking*; or *inspiration and invigoration*. Conference attendance impact can manifest itself in the form of *information and ideas* that delegates obtain at the event. Authors talk about the expansion of knowledge, different kinds of ideas, and a few investigate further how ideas are shared and used after the event. The term *networking* is used throughout the literature and there is agreement that delegates network at conferences, make new contacts and renew existing relationships. However, detailed accounts of the concepts of *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration* as impact on attendees or their institutions based on methodologically sound research projects are lacking. The literature gives a sense of overlap among the three major concepts of impact, but this aspect remains largely unexplored. Authors also raise other minor benefits of attendance such as increased skill sets or increased reputation.

This chapter has also focused on research that has explored factors that can influence the impact of conference attendance, influence delegates' experiences at the events or their learning. These factors relate to attendees and their characteristics (such as nationality, commitment to learning, age, experience, role or self-perception), while others relate to the conference itself (form, type and objectives of the event, delivery of content and quality of food). LIS literature focusing on influencing factors is rare, and other disciplines mostly investigate the issue with a limited focus, such as learning theories, or delegates' satisfaction levels in the hospitality and tourism field.

This research addresses the lack of high-quality studies on the topic of conference attendance and influencing factors in LIS, by building on previous studies, and providing a richer, open and systematic investigation of the topic. Oseman (1989) wrote: "The concept of value is therefore of relevance to all – how much is a conference worth? The measures of value may differ, but in the end boils down to: how much is it worth paying to attend and what will [delegates] get out of it" (p. vii). This statement summarises the incentive to research conference attendance impact, and emphasises the importance of this study in providing valuable new knowledge to the profession.

3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the research questions and the theoretical framework that informed the research approach taken in this study. In addition, it describes how the chosen paradigm provided the best foundation for exploring the research questions and how it aligns with the researcher's epistemological and ontological beliefs. The second part of the chapter focuses on the research design of the study, detailing the data collection and data analysis phases of the research. The pilot study conducted as part of the research is documented, and the chapter delineates how the researcher chose the participating libraries, conducted the semi-structured interviews and collected documents. It concludes with an explanation of data analysis that leads to the study's findings as detailed in Chapter Four.

3.1 Theoretical Approach

3.1.1 Research questions

As the literature review in Chapter Two has revealed, previous studies researching conference attendance impact focus on specific elements of impact and most use predetermined factors to evaluate outcomes. The current literature lacks research that comprehensively investigates the impact of conference attendance. For this reason, further knowledge is needed in library and information science (LIS) about both the impact on attendees and on their institutions, as well as factors that influence this impact. Also, no previous research project has been designed to allow new insights to emerge. Consequently, the following two research questions were formulated to investigate the phenomenon of conference attendance impact in the profession of librarianship:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

3.1.2 Social constructivism

Paradigms are a foundation of philosophical beliefs and values on which research rests. Cecez-Kecmanovic and Kennan (2013) define the term paradigm as a “broad framework or perspective of a group of theorists who share ontological and epistemological assumptions, adopt a similar logic of scientific explanations and share a common attitude towards ethics and place of values in research” (p. 118). The importance for research to reveal and discuss underlying paradigms is emphasised widely (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mason, 2002; Punch, 1998; Walliman, 2011). Walliman (2011) writes that “research is about acquiring knowledge . . . to build up a picture of the world around us, and even within us. It is fairly obvious then, that we should hold a view on what knowledge is” (p. 15). Assessing the importance of paradigms in LIS, Dick (1999) states: “significant for LIS professionals and researchers is the observation that the intentional or unconscious espousal of an epistemological position holds definite implications for how they practice their profession and conduct scientific research” (p. 307). Bradley (1993) echoes this position and encourages LIS scholars to openly discuss what they know and how they have acquired that knowledge.

An investigation into paradigms discussed in the literature reveals that social constructivism is the framework that aligns most closely with the beliefs and values of the researcher. It is also appropriate for the topic of the study and the research questions. Social constructivism specifies that knowledge cannot be “discovered” as such as it does not exist outside the minds of humans, who have constructed it. This constructed knowledge is inevitably linked to historical, social and cultural norms in which it has been created, and cannot be understood without considering the circumstances and contexts of its creators (Schwandt, 2007). Schwandt emphasises the importance of seeking to comprehend “how social actors recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances” (p. 2) when researching within a socio-constructivist paradigm.

Creswell (2013) discusses four philosophical beliefs linked to social constructivism, which are similar to descriptions by Cecez-Kecmanovic and Kennan (2013) and Walliman (2011). He defines the ontological elements of the paradigm as “multiple realities” that are “constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with

others”, and epistemological beliefs as realities that are “co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (p. 36). He further argues that axiological beliefs correspond to values that need to be negotiated between all participating parties. Finally, Creswell (2013) describes the fourth philosophical belief as the “use of inductive methods of emergent ideas obtained through methods such as interviewing, observing, and analysis of texts” (p. 36). These are methodological beliefs within the paradigm of social constructivism.

Authors use various terms in the literature to refer to the same or similar paradigms. Often, the term *interpretivism* is applied to philosophical beliefs that other scholars label social constructivism. Cecez-Kecmanovic and Kennan (2013) detail that “interpretivism is related to social constructivism”, and that the “boundaries among research paradigms are not always clear-cut” (p. 120). They define interpretivism as being based on “subjectivist and relativist assumptions: social reality exists as part of human experience and is socially constructed; any characteristics of an object that can be known result from human subjective and inter-subjective meaning-making and interpretation” (p. 121). Walliman (2011) uses the term *relativism* to refer to the same research approach and specifies that it can be referred to as “interpretivism, idealism, constructivism or even constructionism” (p. 21), and Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen (2005) introduce the term *collectivism*. In this thesis, the term social constructivism is used throughout the chapters as it appears to be the most commonly used term in the literature.

In the context of this research, Creswell’s deliberations (2013) and the characteristics of a socio-constructivist paradigm translate to an understanding that there is not just one *truth* about conference attendance impact in an Australian academic library context that could be *discovered* in this research. In other words, as many truths about the research topic exist as there were participants in the study. Participants in this study brought their worldviews, values, experiences and circumstances to the data. They constructed a reality of conference attendance impact with the researcher that can only be considered *true* in the specific context of this research. Basing the research on a socio-constructivist paradigm also resulted in the study investigating the topic from different angles, using methods that allowed the different parties involved to express their views in an open dialogue with the researcher. Characteristics of the socio-constructivist paradigm and how they relate to various aspects of this study are further

discussed in section 3.2.3, which details the researcher's experience with conferences, and in Chapter Four, section 4.1., which describes the participants, their libraries and the conferences they attended.

In taking a socio-constructivist approach to this study, any knowledge about conference attendance impact and influencing factors is a shared understanding of the phenomenon between the participants and the researcher. This view is supported by Lincoln and Guba (2013), who state that “interpretivism proposes a relativist world of multiple realities that are constructed and co-constructed by the mind(s) and required to be studied as a whole” (p. 88). Creswell (2013) writes that the goal of research in social constructivism is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation” (p. 25). Further, he argues that social constructivism is a worldview that leads the researcher to “look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (p. 24). These assumptions were taken into account when constructing the study’s research instruments, and when analysing and coding the data.

3.1.3 Qualitative research approach

Referring to the connection between underlying paradigms and qualitative versus quantitative approaches, Cecez-Kecmanovic and Kennan (2013) write that “research methods can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Research methods are not directly linked to research paradigms, but are more or less affiliated with them” (p. 117). Other authors support the notion of an affiliation, or close correlation between social constructivism and a qualitative research approach. Bradley (1993) states that “many qualitative issues and practices arise within the context of the inescapable interpretive activity of all humans including researchers” (p. 433). Mason (2002) concurs that qualitative research is “grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted” (p. 3).

As already noted in the discussion of social constructivism, authors emphasise the importance of participants’ views when describing this paradigm’s foundations. Punch (1998) highlights the relationship between qualitative research approaches and stakeholders’ views when considering qualitative methods to be “the best way we have of getting the insider’s perspective” (p. 243). Gorman and Clayton (2005) voice a similar

opinion when suggesting that one purpose of qualitative research is to understand the participants' perspectives.

Another element of social constructivism is the notion of multiple realities and knowledge being closely linked to the context in which it has been created. White and Marsh (2006) associate this with qualitative methods when stating that "qualitative content analysis focuses on creating a picture of a given phenomenon that is always embedded within a particular context, not on describing reality objectively" (p. 38). Bradley (1993) refers to this same idea when writing that LIS researchers need to understand that the reality they are capturing and describing is complex, and inseparable from the individuals that live this reality.

A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study and its research questions for three reasons. First, qualitative methods are valuable when investigating topics that have not attracted considerable previous research, which is the case for conference attendance impact as discussed in Chapter Two. Gorman and Clayton (2005) note that qualitative approaches "provide broader insights . . . into so far unexamined areas of information work" (p. 24). Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe qualitative methods as suitable for "research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified" (p. 46).

Second, conferences are forums where information is shared between delegates, which aligns with Connaway and Powell's statement (2010) that qualitative methods are well suited to investigate "information-interaction concerns" (p. 210). Gorman and Clayton (2005) discuss how a qualitative approach is "ideally placed to understand the process of events", and to investigate "how ideas become actions" (p.6). This corresponds to the nature of conferences as events, and the research questions for this study.

Third, Marshall and Rossman (2006) recommend qualitative methodologies to scholars who aim to understand complex social phenomena. This is applicable to conferences as they are events which involve the interactions and experiences of many different actors. These authors also describe how these methods are appropriate for "research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organisations" (p. 46). Likewise, this aligns with conference impact as a process in an organisation that funds attendance and has policies in place to assure it is a valuable investment.

In the early stages of the research, the researcher considered using a theoretical model to investigate conference attendance impact qualitatively. Henczel's doctoral research (2016) uses a model delineating characteristics of impact to investigate the impact of professional associations in the profession of librarianship. Based on the research questions, the following models were identified as possible elements of the research design:

- Models from the field of knowledge management, which consider the origins, qualities and distribution of knowledge, often in an organisational context (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Augier & Knudsen, 2004; Nonaka, Krogh & Voelpel, 2006).
- Theories that could assist in exploring social conference attendance impact, for example, viewing conference attendees as communities of practice (Henderson et al., 2009; Hilliard, 2006; Wenger 1998), or the theory of strong and weak network links (Jack, 2005; Tiwana, 2008).
- Models from fields that are similar to librarianship and focus on professional development activities. Harland and Kinder (1997), for instance, produced a model describing the impact of professional development activities on teachers and their students.
- Theories from the field of organisational behaviour that focus on organisational culture or staff attitudes and behaviours (McShane et al., 2014).

Ultimately, a decision was made to take a purely qualitative, open approach, as the models and theories outlined above focus either on one aspect of conference attendance only (for example the informational or social characteristics), investigate the topic from the perspective of a specific profession, or consider conferences as one of many activities for professional development.

3.1.4 Theory of data collection

After establishing the suitability of a qualitative approach for this research, the literature was consulted for guidance on qualitative research design and data collection methods. It became apparent that there is no common set of recommended approaches, which is reflected by Bradley (1993) who states: "in much qualitative

research, structures and strategies are viewed as suggestive and tentative rather than directive and rigid” (p. 434). Mason (2002) argues that the responsibility of qualitative research design remains with the researcher: “any alignment you have with a position will influence your strategy, but it is not a blueprint for it nor is it detailed or fluid enough to be translated readily into an everyday working strategy” (p. 54). This section discusses recommendations identified in the literature on aspects of qualitative research design and data collection. It begins with the researcher’s comments about the benefits of conducting a pilot study.

According to Mason (2002), all qualitative research projects should contain “plans for a pilot study, including its aims, rationale, design, and details of how it will be reviewed or analysed so that its products feed into the project as a whole” (p. 45). This advice was embraced in devising a data collection plan for this study which included a pilot study phase. Gorman and Clayton (2005) write that a pilot study allows researchers to test methodologies and identify inherent problems. Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that “the use of a pilot can lend credence to the researcher’s claim that he can conduct such a study”, and that the “inclusion of a description of a pilot study or initial observation can strengthen” a proposal (p. 51). Mason (2002) focuses on how pilot studies provide opportunities to practice and gain valuable experience with the research process. She describes interviewing as a specific skill that is developed over time, and suggests using data generated in a pilot study to extend data analysis skills.

After conducting a pilot study, researchers need to make decisions regarding sample selection. Mason (2002) argues that “sampling and selection - appropriately conceived and executed - are vitally important strategic elements of qualitative research” (p. 120). Charmaz (2010) points to the importance of sampling when providing evidence, writing that “credibility increases when the researcher has conducted a thorough study. Providing ample evidence for your claims allows the reader to form an independent assessment – and to *agree with you*” (p. 16, emphasis in original). The literature stresses the importance of a connection between the research question and the sample (Bradley, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mason, 2002). Bradley (1993) states that “in purposeful sampling, members of the sample are deliberately chosen based on criteria that have relevance to the research question rather than criteria of randomness of selection” (p. 440). Although Mason’s focus (2002) is on theoretical and not purposeful sampling, she agrees with Bradley: “Theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to

study on the basis of their relevance to your research question, your theoretical position and analytical framework, your analytical practice and most importantly the argument or explanation you are developing” (p. 124). Marshall and Rossman (2006) advise that sampling should ensure “a high probability that a rich mix of many of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and/or structures that may be a part of the research question will be present” (p. 54).

In qualitative research, a sample does not necessarily need to be representative of the entire population as it generally would in quantitative research. This was an important consideration for this study, where all librarians employed at an Australian academic library who had attended a conference were part of the relevant population. Mason (2002) writes the following comment in this regard:

A strategic relationship between sample and wider universe can take a variety of forms. The aim is to produce, through sampling, a relevant range of contexts or phenomena, which will enable you to make strategic and possibly cross-contextual comparisons, and hence build a well-founded argument. In this version, then, the sample is designed to encapsulate a relevant range in relation to the wider universe, but not to represent it directly. This might mean a range of experiences, characteristics, processes, types, categories, cases or examples, and so on. (p. 124)

Mason’s (2002) reference to samples generating data that facilitate comparisons across different contexts was important to this study. It informed the decision to focus on a smaller number of academic libraries, which allowed for an examination of their organisational cultures and processes. As most research projects have limited time and resources available, researchers need to consider practical matters regarding study design. In this context the literature uses the terms opportunistic or convenience sampling (Connaway & Powell, 2010; Gorman & Clayton, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In reference to what sample size is appropriate in a qualitative study, authors provide no consensus; the responsibility and decision lie with the researcher. Westbrook (2010), in Connaway and Powell, points out that the emphasis in qualitative research is to understand reality, not to generalise results as in quantitative studies. Qualitative researchers collect rich data that allows them to investigate their topic

holistically and with all its facets. For this reason a representative sample is not a key requirement.

The responsibility for sampling choices lies with the researcher and needs to be suitable for the nature and purpose of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Mason (2002) point out that it is important to be clear about this process and to explain and detail it in the published results. Marshall and Rossman (2006) write: “the research design should include a rationale for the selection of a certain setting in an organization or the selection of a certain group of people as subjects in the research” (p. 54). Continuing this idea, Mason (2002) states: “*sampling* from a wider universe implies that selections other than the ones you have made would have been possible, and this means you need to have and to demonstrate a clear sense of the rationale for your choices (p. 122, emphasis in original).

Referring to data collection methods, many authors offer general recommendations on the process. For example, Marshall and Rossman (2006) state: “In qualitative research, the general research question or topic, related literature, significance, and research design are interrelated, each one building on the others” (p. 26). Mason (2002) writes that the theoretical paradigm informing the study also influences data collection and that interviews correspond well to the principles of social constructivism:

What is distinctive about interpretive approaches, however, is that they see people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources. Interpretivism . . . can happily support a study which uses interview methods for example, where the aim is to explore people’s individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, social norms, and so on Other data sources are possible according to this approach, for example, texts or objects, but what an interpretivist would want to get out of these would be what they say about or how they are constituted in people’s individual or collective meanings. (p. 56)

In addition, Mason (2002) provides examples of the kind of data sources that qualitative researchers generally employ: “*people, organizations, texts, settings, objects and events* are possible data sources” (p. 52, emphasis in original). Bradley (1993) similarly

recommends “observation, interviewing, and collecting or gaining access to documents, artefacts, or environments” as data sources. She adds that qualitative researchers can use multiple data sources to gain different perspectives on their topic.

The literature identifies semi-structured interviews as a suitable method of data collection in qualitative research. Ayres (2008) provides the following definition of this method:

The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. The researcher has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews, but in contrast to structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, there is no fixed range of responses to each question. (p. 81)

The literature also explores the connections between social constructivism and the use of semi-structured interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) discusses how researchers choose interviews because they align with their ontological position, which “suggests that people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore” (p. 63). In their paper describing interviewing strategies, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) define interviews as “co-authored conversations-in-context” (p. 270). They write that interviews are socially constructed between researcher and participants, which is important in social constructivism as earlier discussed. Creswell (2013) concurs that interviews are well suited to a socio-constructivist study, and indicates that questions should be “broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, ..., the more open-ended the questioning, the better as the researcher listens carefully to what people say” (p. 25).

Using interviews as a data collection method is beneficial to a study for many reasons. Gorman and Clayton (2005) list immediacy, mutual exploration, investigation of causation and personal contact and speed as the main advantages. Mason (2002) identifies interviews as “one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative

research” (p. 63). Continuing this idea, Gorman and Clayton (2005) state that interviews provide “detailed, in-depth information from subjects who know a great deal about their personal perceptions of events” (p. 41). For this reason interviews are well suited to study the phenomenon of conference attendance impact and influencing factors.

Ayres (2008) recommends developing a written interview schedule containing questions in advance when undertaking semi-structured interviews. He advises that the schedule may be detailed with “carefully worded questions” (p. 812), which corresponds with the approach selected in this study. Furthermore, Ayres discusses how employing a semi-structured approach to interviewing leaves the decision on how closely to follow the interview schedule to the researcher – who can decide on occasion to add questions for clarification, omit them or ask them in a different order. Kvale (1996) affirms the advantage of commencing interviews with broad questions, saying they “may yield spontaneous, rich, descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenomena investigated” (p. 133). This can also give more flexibility to the researcher, as not all questions need to be asked depending on interviewees’ responses.

Circumstances may not allow interviews to be conducted face-to-face, and is a factor that was relevant in undertaking this research. Commenting on phone interviews Hanna (2012) writes: “practical benefits of scheduling the interview and freedom to shift times at the last minute were suggested as advantageous due to the often busy lives of research participants” (p. 240). Holstein and Gubrium (2003) refer to “economic, time and location constraints of the project” (p. 176) as reasons to conduct interviews over the phone.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method to investigate conferences is supported by studies and commentary or opinion pieces on this topic. Choi (2013) refers to her choice of using questionnaires as a limitation of her thesis, writing that “future research might use a combination of data collection methods, including qualitative studies, i.e. in-depth open-ended interviews or direct observations” (p. 146). Oseman (1989) agrees, stating that in a conference impact analysis “an alternative to a written questionnaire would be to conduct structured interviews” (p. 33). Aalsburg Wiessner et al. (2008) argue that methods that allow for data collection after the conference would be valuable because they could provide a

“focus on holistic insights that occur for participants when they have time to step back and reflect on conference learning experiences that impact their scholarship and practice” (p. 381). Haley et al. (2009) support the decision to collect data after delegates return to work pointing out that “during a conference it is difficult to determine whether there is any resulting action taken by the participants” (p. 78). Moreillon et al. (2012) agree, and identify interviews as valuable methods when investigating conferences. They suggest that the delegates interviewed can “provide access to their insiders’ perspectives on the quality of session offered and on the types of professional development provided by networking and serving in leadership positions” (p. 13). This statement also links the suitability of using interviews to the socio-constructivist approach, which values giving participants an opportunity to express their views.

The qualitative researcher has other tools available to collect relevant data, and indeed the use of multiple data sources is common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Walliman, 2011). According to Mason (2002) “sometimes, documents are used to verify or contextualize or clarify” other data (p. 108). She highlights documents as valuable data sources that are highly regarded by scholars as they add context to data gathered with other techniques. Describing the different kinds of documents a researcher can collect, Walliman (2011) states that some texts “are recorded very close to the events or phenomena, whilst others may be remote and highly edited interpretations” (p. 73). He then defines organisational records as secondary data, referring to them as “written documentary sources” (p. 79). Analysing the use of documents as data in LIS, White and Marsh (2006) comment: “the texts used in LIS studies . . . vary significantly. Some are generated in connection with the immediate research project; other texts occur naturally in the conduct of normal activities and independent of the research project” (p. 28). Mason (2002) echoes this when writing “some documents exist already, prior to the act of research upon them. Others can be generated for or through the research process” (p. 103).

The literature discusses the importance of ethical considerations guiding the entire research process. Guidelines have been produced to help researchers to conduct their studies in the most ethical way possible. Mason (2002) states that researchers “need to be clear about operating a moral research practice at every stage of the research process” (p. 79), and that scholars should consider ethical, moral and political issues as part of their research design. Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001) offer more specific

advice regarding the importance of anonymity and informed consent. Connaway and Powell (2010) similarly concur that participant confidentiality is a significant matter that needs to be considered carefully when conducting qualitative research in LIS.

3.1.5 Theory of data analysis

There are significant differences between approaches to data analysis in qualitative and quantitative research. The following section delineates the advice found in the literature regarding data analysis in qualitative research. To begin data analysis, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) suggest transcribing interviews, writing that “the transcription of audiotaped interviews as a method for making data available in textual form for subsequent coding and analysis is widespread in qualitative research” (p. 267). They recommend researchers should focus “on the trustworthiness of transcripts as research data by examining how faithfully they reproduce the oral (tape) record, while also being mindful of the limitations of these media to portray the full flavor of the interview” (p. 271). In addition, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) note that listening to audiotaped interviews while reviewing interview transcripts may be used as a strategy to improve transcription quality. Considering the different kinds of textual data often gathered in qualitative studies, Mason (2002) states that occasionally “interpretive elements of text-based documents - for example factors relevant to or speaking of their context, production and consumptions” (p. 115) may be used for data analysis. She also points out that the decision of what exactly is considered to be data lies with the researcher; a statement that Wetherell et al. (2001) also support.

An important stage when preparing for data analysis is the decision about the kinds of tools to use, as a variety of different software and programs are available. One example of data analysis software is NVivo, which White and Marsh (2006) describe as an “annotation and searching aid” (p. 36). Depending on the number of transcripts, analysis can be “tedious and benefits enormously from the use of computers for a variety of tasks” (p. 40). This idea is supported by Mason (2002) who recommends “computer aided qualitative data analysis” (p. 151) using appropriate software packages. Recommendations in the literature regarding data analysis software affirmed the decision to use NVivo for qualitative data analysis in this study.

Ritchie and Spencer (2002) provide an overview of data analysis and specify that it is “essentially about detection, and the tasks of defining, categorizing, theorizing,

explaining, exploring and mapping are fundamental to the analyst's role" (p.5). Marshall and Rossman (2006) offer a similar description of the process, stating: "each phase of data analysis entails *data reduction* as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks and *interpretation* as the researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study" (p. 114, emphasis in original). Although Bradley's statement (1993) that "there are no firm rules or procedures for qualitative analysis" (p. 443) was confirmed when consulting the literature, authors nonetheless agree on the technique of coding as a well-documented option. Coding is understood as "constructing or documenting a version of what you think the data mean or represent" (Mason, 2002, p. 149), and is also referred to as categorising or assigning nodes. Other authors provide similar definitions, for instance White and Marsh (2006) who describe it as "the researcher reading through the data and scrutinizing them closely to identify concepts and patterns" (p. 34), or Ritchie and Spencer (2002), who refer to codes as a "distilled summary of the respondent's views or experiences" (p. 15).

The literature frequently defines coding as a two-stage process; the first stage being initial coding followed by a second stage that focuses on categorisation, interpretation and further exploration of codes. The initial stage of coding is generally described as "breaking down the data into smaller pieces by identifying meaningful units" (Bradley, 1993, p. 443). Connaway and Powell (2010) recommend looking at the data line-by-line and establishing which codes can be used to summarise what the participant attempted to convey in that line. At the end of this first stage, the researcher is expected to have produced "a fairly complex set of both unrelated and interrelated categories and subcategories" (Mason, 2002, p. 151), which leads to the second stage of coding.

In the second stage of coding, all codes need to be examined and refined, as "the analyst needs to build up a picture of the data as a whole, by considering the range of attitudes and experiences for each issue or theme" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p. 13). Mason (2002) advises that at this stage, the researcher may also want to compare data references under each code, as well as compare codes to other codes. Connaway and Powell (2010) offer similar recommendations when writing about selective coding, which they define as "an effort to focus on refining particularly striking coding categories" (p. 226).

The second stage continues with the researcher grouping codes “together in categories, and developing relationships among the categories in such a way that patterns in the data are made clear” (Bradley, 1993, p. 445). Connaway and Powell (2010) describe a similar approach, writing that the codes are assigned to categories according to their content, with the categories evolving from merely descriptive to analytic and conceptual. When the merging, categorising and analysing of codes and categories does not produce any new insights, the end of the second stage of coding has occurred. Connaway and Powell (2010) add that researchers are then rewarded with the final results, as “after all the data are finally coded, analysis gradually reveals a framework of patterns and contrasts” (p. 228).

In reference to approaching data differently depending on their source (for example collected documents versus interviews), Mason (2002) offers the following advice that was taken into consideration in this study during data analysis:

Documents, whether visual or textual, are constructed in particular contexts, by particular people, with particular purposes, and with consequences – intended and unintended. You may wish to investigate why they were prepared, made or displayed, by whom, for whom, under what conditions, according to what rules and conventions. You may wish to know what they have been used for, where they have been kept and so on. (p. 110)

In addition, Mason (2002) writes that during data analysis, researchers need to consider “what kinds of phenomena the categories are supposed to represent or constitute instances or expressions of” (p. 154), as well as “thinking carefully about how the indexing categories represent instances of ontological phenomena” (p. 154). During coding the researcher needs to be aware at all times of what kind of knowledge or empirical evidence they are creating, which corresponds to the socio-constructivist paradigm discussed earlier in this chapter.

The question of validity is closely linked to the nature of statements researchers can make after qualitative data analysis. Bradley (1993) writes that “all researchers are concerned about the link between the abstractions they posit and their observations of the empirical world that form the basis of these abstractions” (p. 436), which is why

scholars discuss questions of reliability or validity when examining research. Mason (2002) highlights the importance of distinguishing between reliability, a term mostly associated with quantitative research, and validity: “given the concerns about the appropriateness of measures of reliability of method, qualitative researchers tend to prefer to focus their interest and efforts on what they see as the more sophisticated and meaningful concept of validity” (p. 188). Qualitative research data should be based on “conceptual and ontological clarity” (p. 188), and a high-quality study needs to succeed in translating data into meaningful and relevant research findings. Marshall and Rossman (2006) echo these statements when writing that “the strength of a qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or describe a setting, a process, a social group, or a pattern of interaction, will be its validity (p. 72).

Several authors consider the use of multiple techniques to be the most effective method to increase a study’s validity (Connaway & Powell, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Gorman & Clayton, 2005). Gorman and Clayton (2005) recommend conducting an extensive literature review, while triangulation is another technique suggested to increase the validity of findings in a qualitative study (Bradley, 1993; Connaway & Powell, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Gorman & Clayton, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Specific approaches to achieving a high level of triangulation in a study include using multiple data sources or methods as well as diversity of participants and sites. The literature points to intra-coder reliability as another technique to increase the validity of findings, and refers to the practice of a researcher re-coding text when only a single person is conducting a study. According to Connaway and Powell (2010), when comparing the codes from the first to the second round of analysis, researchers should strive to achieve a similarity rate of at least 85%.

Scholars also describe disclosing the role of the researcher as a vital part of a qualitative study (Charmaz, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Mason, 2002; Wetherell et al., 2001). They stress the importance of the researcher considering their position in relation to the study, especially when framing a study in social constructivism and using a qualitative approach. Bradley (1993) writes that “for the researcher, clarifying his or her own preunderstanding is an important early step in the design of qualitative research” (p. 438). She defines preunderstanding as: “the fusion of knowledge, training, experience, interpretation, and ways of thinking and articulating that individuals bring to any situation. The preunderstanding of the researcher can be viewed as the sum of what

the researcher brings to the inquiry” (p. 434). In addition, the literature provides guidelines concerning how researchers might refer to their prior experiences, circumstances and roles in relation to their study. Creswell (2013) advises scholars to “convey their background, how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study” (p. 47). Charmaz (2010) writes that “to learn participants’ meanings, we need to be reflexive about our own. To understand meanings, we need to bracket our internalized views of reality and rationality” (p. 9). Connaway and Powell (2010) concur, identifying “watching for and noting the impact of researchers’ bias, perspective and expectations” (p. 232) as an important strategy to increase validation.

3.2 Research Design

This chapter has detailed the socio-constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodological approaches to research. It discussed how the two are linked and focused on theoretical deliberations in the literature concerning data collection and data analysis. The following section describes how the researcher applied these theoretical principles to this study’s research design. After a description of participants and data collection methods, the section documents the pilot study and its outcomes. Next it explains the approach to sample selection, semi-structured interviews and the collection of documents. Finally, the chapter focuses on analysis techniques applied to the data.

3.2.1 Participants and data collection methods

To investigate the phenomenon of conference attendance impact and influencing factors comprehensively and establish a manageable project scope, it was decided to undertake data collection at four academic libraries. It was anticipated that this approach would provide sufficient rich data to analyse individual libraries’ approaches to conferences, as well as the opportunity for cross-contextual comparison between the four libraries. The researcher employed interviewing and document collection methods at these libraries to gather data relevant to the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with librarians who had attended a conference, as soon as practicable after they had returned to work. The same

participants were then interviewed again six months later, which allowed the researcher to follow up on points they made during the first conversation, an approach that is consistent with what Walliman (2011) described as “track development” (p. 99). The period of six months was based arbitrarily on the personal experience of the researcher. It was anticipated that this period of time was appropriate to investigate the impact of attendance, and provide sufficient time for participants to reflect on their conference experience and follow their libraries’ policies and procedures regarding conference attendance. A similar timeframe was used by Waite and Hume (2017), which they believed would give delegates “time to reflect and incorporate new knowledge, skills, and resources” (p. 129).

Interviews were also conducted with the direct line managers of participating librarians, as their perspectives on the topic were expected to be different from their staff. This decision was informed by the writings of Gorman and Clayton (2005), who state that “various researchers have noted that the perspectives of managers and staff can at times vary considerably” (p. 128). Conducting interviews with direct line managers provided an opportunity to collect data about their views on the libraries’ expectations of conference attendance impacts.

In addition to librarians and managers, one person per library was interviewed in relation to administrative matters. Data from these interviews were used to highlight policies and procedures at the libraries and to provide important context to statements from the other interviews. Section 3.2.4 provides details on how the interviews schedules were developed.

To provide background and an organisational perspective to data collected in the interviews, the four libraries were asked to share documents concerning conference attendance with the researcher. The combination of data from the different interviews and documents ensured that the phenomenon of conference attendance impact and influencing factors were explored from a range of perspectives, and provided opportunities for different parties involved in the process to express their views. In addition, the multiple avenues of data collection also provided triangulation to support the validity of results. Table 8 lists the different data collection methods and the rationale for their inclusion.

Table 8: Data collection methods

Impact of conference attendance and influencing factors				
Method				
Interviews with librarians first round	Interviews with librarians second round	Interviews with managers	Interviews with administrative staff	Collection of documents
provided data related to				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on librarians – short-term • Impact on library - short-term • Influencing factors • Context: participants, conferences attended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on librarians – longer-term • Impact on library - longer-term • Influencing factors • Follow up on points made in first round interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on library • Influencing factors • Institutional expectations and views • Institutional policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional expectations and views • Institutional policies and procedures • Context: libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional expectations and views • Institutional policies and procedures • Context: libraries

Ethical considerations played an important role during the data collection phase of the study. The ethical approach employed was based on suggestions from the literature, as discussed previously in the chapter, and on Curtin University’s ethics guidelines. The researcher carefully considered the impact this study might have on participants and their libraries. Ethics approval level C for low-risk research was applied for and approved by Curtin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. The university librarians at the four libraries were asked to provide written permissions to undertake the study at their institutions. Participants were supplied with an information sheet and consent form (Appendix A) and were given the opportunity to raise any questions regarding these documents before the first interview. All interviewees provided consent to participate in the study, and were informed that they could withdraw from taking part in the research at any time. The interviews were organised in a way that ensured as little disruption as possible to the libraries and their staff. The researcher took care to protect the privacy and identity of all interviewees and organisations. Identifying information about the study’s participants has not been included in this thesis, and pseudonyms and codes were used in the analysis of the results. All collected data was

stored securely on a personal computer and regularly backed up. Printed information relating to the research was stored in a secure filing cabinet.

3.2.2 Pilot Study

Following Gorman and Clayton’s advice (2005) that a pilot study should be undertaken at a “neutral location that will not be used in the actual fieldwork” (p. 98), the researcher invited librarians not currently working in the academic library sector to participate in this phase of the research. Preparation for the pilot study began in May 2013, when a decision was made to approach librarians attending the conference organised by IFLA in August 2013 in Singapore. An invitation to participate was emailed to the West Australian Information Network (WAIN) email distribution list and simultaneously shared on Twitter. Five interviews with librarians, three second-round interviews and two interviews with managers were conducted, bringing the total number of interviews conducted for the pilot study to ten. All participants were from non-academic library sectors and located in Australia, except for one librarian from New Zealand. Table 9 summarises the outcomes of the pilot study. The elements tested were drawn from Gorman and Clayton’s (2005) list of variables that are commonly tested in a pilot study.

Table 9: Outcomes of pilot study

Element tested	Outcomes
Data collection method: Interviews	Interview schedule was found to produce useful data; minor changes were made to some questions to increase clarity.
Documents provided to participants	Participants reported that consent forms and information sheets were clear and informative.
Timeframe	Interviews lasted the anticipated amount of time.
Interviewing skills	The researcher’s interviewing skills increased with practice, listening to the recorded interviews provided feedback in terms of using prompts.
Equipment	Phone interviews using Internet and Skype were able to be conducted and recorded without difficulty.
Data analysis	Transcripts were loaded into NVivo and analysed, which provided experience with the use of the software and with qualitative data analysis.

Gorman and Clayton (2005) suggest that participants should be made aware that they are part of a pilot study and asked to comment on the research process. Following this recommendation resulted in all participants giving very positive feedback. The data gathered during the pilot study proved to be of such quality and depth that it was analysed, and the findings were subsequently published in a journal article (Dumbell, 2017).

3.2.3 Sample selection

Purposeful sampling methods were employed for the main study of this research to select a relevant sample. To answer the research questions, academic libraries were required for data collection. In August 2014, the researcher sent an email to all Australian university librarians inviting them to participate in the research. Of the 39 libraries contacted, 22 responded that they were willing to participate, indicating a wide interest in the topic of conference attendance impact. Next, the interested university librarians were asked to estimate how many staff were likely to attend a conference over the following 18 months. This resulted in a list of eleven libraries that were planning to support sufficient staff members to attend conferences, which collectively would provide an adequate number of potential interviewees for the study. Different criteria to allow for a range of views in the data were then employed to determine the four libraries that were selected to participate in the study. The criteria employed included:

- Libraries situated in different states and territories of Australia were selected to ensure a diversity of locations. Most Australian librarianship conferences are held in the eastern states. For example, in 2018, approximately 40 conferences and events relevant to the profession of librarianship were held, with only one of these in Perth, but twelve in Melbourne (CAUL, 2018). It was therefore decided to include one academic library from Western Australia, as anecdotal evidence suggests that distance makes a difference regarding numbers of staff being able to attend conferences, and higher costs associated with travel to attendance conferences may impact on the library's internal policies and procedures.
- Data about Australian university libraries publicly available from the CAUL website (CAUL, 2009) was used to ensure that the libraries in the sample were diverse according to the number of student enrolments.

- Publicly available information on the universities' websites allowed variation of the libraries and their parent organisations in terms of access to networks, establishment in the university sector and reputation.

Further details about the four libraries selected for the study can be found in Chapter Four, section 4.1.2. The four libraries included in the sample were then contacted, and asked to provide details of library staff who were attending a conference in the following 18 months and who were willing to participate in the study. To simplify the decision for each library about which staff to approach, the researcher supplied definitions of *librarians* and *conferences*. The way in which these definitions were developed is discussed below.

Definition of “librarians”

After analysing the pilot study's findings, it was decided that all library staff would be included in the study sample, irrespective of their level of employment or qualification. Although the title of this thesis and the research questions refer to investigating the impact of conference attendance on *librarians*, they also include the impact on *libraries* as a whole. Consequently it could be argued that any staff member attending a conference could potentially have an impact on their institution. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the sample would consist of qualified staff working in librarian positions in most cases, as very few non-qualified staff receive funding for conference attendance. Furthermore, as discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, the socio-constructivist paradigm underpinning this study also stipulates the inclusion of a wide range of views in research, which provided additional justification to include all library staff as potential participants.

To ensure participants had experienced a conference in entirety, the libraries were asked to limit the selection of potential participants to library staff who had attended a whole conference, rather than part of a conference on a shared conference registration. Self-funded or partially self-funded library staff were also able to participate. Recognising that being funded to attend a conference may influence the staff member's expectations, participants were given an opportunity to reflect on this during the interview.

Definition of “conferences”

To ensure the participants and the researcher shared a common understanding of the concept *conference*, a definition of this term was sent to all four libraries. The conference library staff attended needed to be a “traditional” format, which included keynotes, presentations, different program streams and opportunities for socialising. The event had to last at least one full day but could be in any location (e.g. local, national or international). The focus of the conference did not have to be specifically library related, but the researcher excluded vendor conferences or pure trade exhibitions as their objectives were deemed to be too different from a traditional conference format. Workshops, unconferences or other professional development activities that focus on teaching new skills were also excluded for the same reason. In addition, library staff who had attended virtual or online conferences were not able to participate in the study because such events were considered to lack the social component that traditional face-to-face conferences provide.

Only library staff who attended an event that fulfilled the specifications outlined above were able to participate in the study. The researcher had no input into how potential participants were approached at the four libraries. An administrative person at each library was sent the definitions and subsequently provided contact details of interested participants to the researcher.

Most of the managers interviewed for the study were the direct line managers of library staff interviewed as this made it easier to establish which managers to approach, although some managers were from other organisational units due to staff movements. This did not affect the quality of data collected, as managers were not asked to comment on an individual staff member’s conference attendance.

At three of the four libraries, the person who was the main contact was also the staff member who was interviewed about administrative matters relating to conference attendance. At Library A, one of the librarians participating was also the person interviewed as an administrative contact. At Library D, the University Librarian was interviewed twice; once in their role as a manager, and a second time regarding administrative matters. These instances are highlighted by an asterisk in the table below to avoid confusion regarding total figures. Due to extended periods of leave, one

librarian at Library C was only interviewed once. Table 10 details how many participants were interviewed and in which role during the data collection phase of the study.

Table 10: Number of participants in the study

Institution	Library staff 1 st round	Library staff 2 nd round	Managers	Admin staff	Total of participants	Total of interviews
A	3	3	3	1	6 *	10
B	4	4	3	1	8	12
C	6	5	3	1	10	15
D	3	3	3	1	6 *	10
Totals	16	15	12	4	30	47

On average, the librarians were interviewed 24 days after they had returned from a conference. Although the researcher attempted to speak to participants as soon as practicable after their attendance, most interviews could not be scheduled sooner due to a range of reasons including personal leave, work or other commitments. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the second round of interviews was planned six months after the first. In most cases, the researcher managed to organise the interviews within seven months. In one instance, the second interview was conducted exactly six months after the first, and two participants were interviewed eight months after the initial interview.

Consistent with the qualitative nature of this study, it is important to clarify the researcher's position within the parameters of the research. The researcher:

- worked several years in an Australian academic library, and during this time attended three conferences, one locally and two interstate, being fully funded by the library for all three events.
- co-presented a paper at one of those conferences.
- had been exposed to policies and procedures the library had in place concerning conferences as well as informal discussions amongst staff.
- as a team leader, mentored other colleagues to apply for conference attendance.

- had some existing knowledge of the libraries chosen for the study, in regard to their reputation, location and size.
- did not know any participants before the study.

In accordance with the study's socio-constructivist approach, it is acknowledged that a completely objective approach to the topic was therefore not possible and that the researcher's experiences, beliefs and values regarding conferences and their potential impact may have influenced the study.

3.2.4 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data relevant to the research questions. They allowed participants to voice their own thoughts, share their conference experiences and discuss the benefits they attributed to their attendance. A semi-structured interview design provided opportunities for interviewees and the researcher to interact and co-construct data for the study. It allowed for spontaneous conversations about anything the participants wanted to discuss, and to also be guided by a list of pre-determined questions and prompts.

Concepts identified in the literature relating to conference attendance impact, factors influencing conference attendance, and the research questions were used to guide the creation of questions for the four different interview schedules (library staff first round, library staff second round, managers and administrative staff). Occasionally, the researcher's own experience attending conferences and working in an academic library also inspired a question. The full list of questions including prompts and alternative wording can be found in Appendix B. All questions were carefully checked for their alignment with the research questions, following Gorman and Clayton's advice (2005).

3.2.4.1 Interviews with library staff

At the beginning of the first round of interviews with library staff, a number of demographic questions relating to gender, age and years of experience in the profession were asked to gain an overview of the participants (Questions A1-A3). These were followed by open-ended questions to give participants the opportunity to explore the topic using their own interpretations and preferences:

- A4: What are the first 3 words that come into your mind when you think about the conference you have just been to?
- A5: What was the best thing that happened to you at the conference?
- A6: What was the reason for going to this conference?

The interview schedule then contained more detailed questions focusing on participants' attendance, with most concepts derived from the literature review. These questions were designed to gather data on possible factors that can influence the impact of conference attendance:

- A7: Was this your first conference?
- A8: Did the library fund all of the conference?
- A9: Did you present a paper/poster/session?
- A10: Were you involved in organising the conference?
- A11: Did you attend the whole conference?
- A12: Did you go with a colleague/colleagues from work?
- A13: Did you use social media during the conference?
- A14: Can you think of anything we have not discussed so far that had an influence on your conference experience?

The researcher included the question concerning attending with colleagues (A12) following anecdotal evidence which suggested that delegates preferred to attend a conference with someone familiar from their own place of work. Questions A8 (self-funded versus library-funded) and A11 (did participants attend the entire conference) were asked to explore whether these factors might change delegates' experience of the event. The remainder of the questions in the interview schedule gave participants the opportunity to talk about *information and ideas*, *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration* as impacts of their conference attendance and other benefits that had not been raised in the answers to the open-ended questions. They were again based on the concepts explored in the literature. Again, this section began and concluded with an open-ended question (A15, A23):

- A15: What did you bring back from the conference?
- A16: Did you find out about new ideas, gain new information?

- A17: Did you gain any new skills?
- A18: How was the networking?
- A19: On a scale from 1-10, where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 10 is “extremely motivated” can you tell me how motivated you were in your job before the conference? How motivated are you now? Is the rise/fall in your motivation level directly linked to the conference?
- A20: Can you talk about what feelings you associate with this conference?
- A21: Did you bring back materials?
- A22: Did your conference attendance change the way the library handles things?
- A23: Are there any other outcomes of your conference attendance you can think of?

The question A19 was designed to gain more specific data about motivation levels, on the basis that levels of motivation might be difficult to express. This resulted in a baseline figure which participants could refer to during the second interview and made it easier for them to express their views on motivation resulting from their attendance. Therefore, quantitative data resulting from the question was not analysed, but acted as a conversation starter and benchmark that facilitated discussions. In the last part of the interview, library staff were asked about their library’s processes and procedures, and whether the library’s expectations concerning conference attendance were clearly articulated. At the end of the interview, participants were able to raise any concepts not covered by the schedule:

- A24: What does the library require you to do now that you have returned from the conference?
- A25: Do you think your library made it clear to you what their expectations are in terms of you attending this conference?
- A26: Do you have any other thoughts in regards to your conference attendance you would like to share?

The complete interview schedule used in the first round of interviews with library staff can be found in Appendix B, which includes alternative wording and prompts that were used in some instances. The full interview schedule for the second round of interviews with library staff is also in Appendix B. It followed a similar pattern to the first,

beginning with open-ended questions about conference attendance impact and possible influencing factors:

- B1: Now that a little time has passed since the conference, what would you say the biggest impact of the conference has been on you?
- B2: What would you say the biggest impact of your conference attendance has been on your library?
- B3: Do you think there is anything the library could have done to increase the impact of your conference attendance?

Next, questions relating to specific outcomes of conference attendance as discussed in the first interview were asked (B4-B9). They covered ideas, contacts and materials participants obtained at the conference. The researcher provided the interviewees with examples they gave during the first interview (if there were any) to trigger their memories and asked them to reflect on what happened to these. Participants rated their current motivation level (B8), followed by question B9: *Can you tell me more about how you rated your motivation before the conference, immediately afterwards and now?* Occasionally, answers given at the first interview were followed up during the second, with the aim being to clarify information or gather more data on a particular topic. The schedule also contained a question relating to organisational requirements (B11: *You talked about a few things that the library required you do to after the conference <give examples from first interview> Can you tell me how that went?*), and finished with two open-ended questions:

- B12: If you were in charge of the library, and there would be no limits in terms of money or time, what would you do about conferences, about the whole process concerning conferences?
- B13: Do you have any other thoughts in regard to your conference attendance you would like to share?

3.2.4.2 Interviews with managers

The interviews with managers focused primarily on their expectations regarding staff conference attendance. Managers were asked to express their views generally and to avoid referring to a specific staff member. Again, open-ended questions allowed them to raise concepts they perceived to be relevant:

- C1: What are your expectations in terms of your staff attending a conference?
- C2: How do you think conferences rate in comparison to other professional development activities?
- C3: What do you think staff generally bring back from a conference?

Questions C4-C10 followed the same concepts discussed during interviews with library staff. They were based on the literature review, and covered managers' expectations about *information and ideas*, *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration*, materials delegates returned with and increased skill sets. Question C6 encouraged managers to talk about the means available to staff to share and develop new ideas. Managers were also asked to reflect on conference attendance generally, and were given the opportunity to raise matters important to them:

- C11: What do you expect the impact of conferences attendance of your staff to be on your library?
- C12: How do you think that impact could be increased?
- C13: Are there any other outcomes of conference attendance you can think of?

The remaining questions referred to institutional requirements and follow-up discussions. They also provided managers with an opportunity to reflect on social media use and add their own thoughts (C14-C17).

3.2.4.3 Interviews with administrative staff

The interviews with administrative staff were envisaged to produce data about the library's perspective on staff conference attendance. The researcher wanted to learn as much as possible about the process of a staff member attending a conference at the library, from finding out that a particular conference was taking place to staff returning to work. Administrative staff were asked to supply any relevant documents before the interview, which gave the researcher the opportunity to discuss the documents with the interviewees. The interviews consisted of a range of open-ended and closed questions:

- D1: Can you talk me through the entire process of someone attending a conference at your institution?
- D2: Has this process changed in the last few years, and if yes, why and how?

- D3: Is there a lot of interest amongst staff to attend a conference?
- D4: Are there any restrictions as to who gets to attend a conference?
- D5: Are there processes/procedures in place that occur after the attendee has returned from the conference?
- D6: Can you talk to me about expectations the library has in terms of conferences?
- D7: Can you talk to me about funding and budgets in regards to conferences?

The interview finished with a clarification of information in the documents that were provided before the interview (if considered necessary) and provided an opportunity for interviewees to raise additional thoughts (D9). Appendix B contains the complete interview schedule with the exact wording of the questions including prompts and alternative phrasing of questions.

In line with the socio-constructivist paradigm underpinning the study, specific terms used in the questions (such as *impact*, *ideas*, *knowledge*) were not defined, leaving it up to the participants to answer the questions guided by their worldviews, beliefs and values. Although the interview schedules contained detailed questions and prompts, all participants were asked the same questions, and they decided how much or little information they wanted to provide in response. Occasionally, follow-up questions that were not part of the schedule were asked to gain more insight when participants raised particularly interesting or unexpected concepts, or when there was a sense that they were discussing something they considered important. Some interviewees talked extensively about certain concepts during the open-ended questions at the beginning of the interview, and it was therefore unnecessary to ask the questions relating to these concepts later in the interview.

As one of the participating libraries was in Western Australia where the researcher is also based, some interviews took place face-to-face. However, the majority of participants were interviewed over the phone as they were located in other states or territories of Australia. The application iTalk on the researcher's iPhone was used to record the face-to-face interviews. After the interviews, the researcher downloaded the files onto a laptop. The interviews conducted over the phone were recorded in the same manner, with the Internet application Skype used to call the participants. Hanna (2012)

reported having encountered some difficulties using Skype during data collection for a doctoral thesis, however fortunately, this did not occur in this study. There were only a few minor problems that were resolved by switching off the video functionality and relying on audio only during an interview.

3.2.5 Collection of documents

As previously described, the researcher interviewed one administrative staff member from each library to gain an understanding of the process of conference attendance. The four staff members were asked before the interview and again prompted during the interview to forward any documents outlining policies or procedures they were able to share. This resulted in a total of 19 documents. Library B and C provided six documents, Library A, five documents and Library C, two documents to the amount of data collected. The documents included application forms that staff had to submit to management to be funded to attend a conference, guidelines about the process, and feedback and evaluation forms that focused on capturing information post-event. Collecting these documents as another data source was an important step in triangulating the data. It also provided the researcher with a different perspective on processes concerning conference attendance at each library, and created a shared understanding between the researcher and the interviewees about the documents referred to during the interviews.

3.2.6 Data analysis

Data collection for this study resulted in 47 interviews: 16 interviews with library staff, 15 second-round interviews with the same participants, 12 interviews with managers and four with administrative staff. To prepare the data for analysis, all interviews were transcribed by a transcription service, which involved uploading the audio files to a password protected website and retrieving the transcripts in Microsoft Word format. As the focus of the study was the content of the participants' interviews and not linguistics, the transcription service was asked to produce conversational, not verbatim style transcripts. Non-verbal long pauses and sounds such as laughing were transcribed.

The researcher listened to all recordings while reading the transcripts to enhance the quality of the transcripts. This process resulted in minor editing, mostly to correct industry-specific terms. *Information Online*, to give one example, is the name of a well-known librarianship conference, but was transcribed as *information online*. Terms like

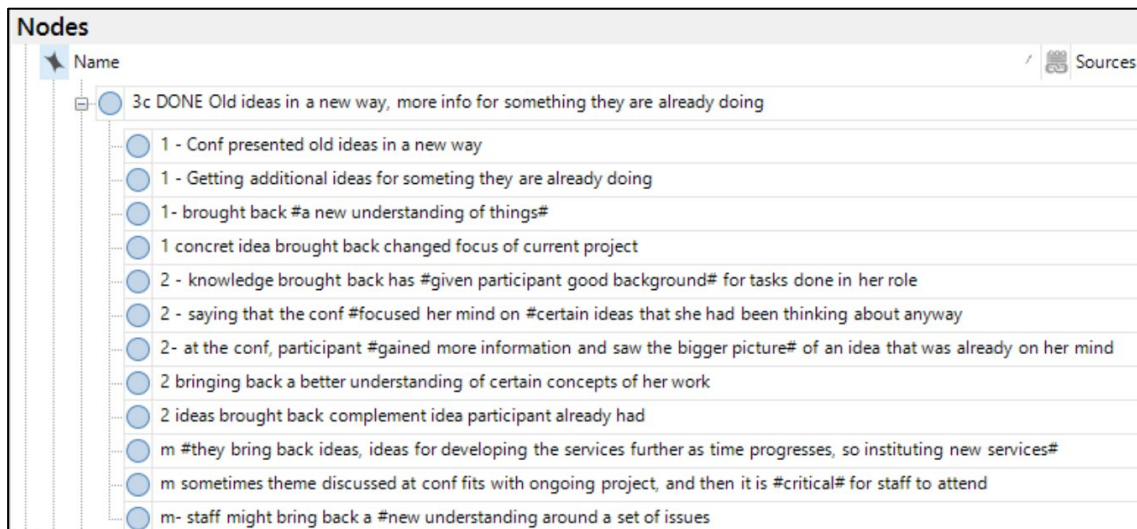
you know and *sort of* that did not add to the content communicated by the participants were deleted to enhance readability.

One of the challenges of any qualitative study within a socio-constructivist paradigm is understanding and incorporating the participants' points of view. In this context, Bradley (1993) recommends the sharing of transcripts with participants to provide them with an opportunity to clarify their views and opinions. Following this advice, all transcripts were emailed to interviewees for feedback after they had been edited. Most participants reported that the documents were a satisfactory reflection of the contents of the interviews; two made suggestions for minor revisions which the researcher took into account.

The data coding was performed using the software package NVivo, with data from the transcripts and the collected documents being treated in the same manner. The researcher kept an open mind when coding and captured all the data in codes, irrespective of whether it seemed relevant, useful to the topic or connected to other, already established codes. Following advice from Mason (2002), it was not deemed important when or in answer to which question participants raised a particular concept. This means for example that statements about networking with known delegates were coded under the code *networking – known delegates*, even if the interviewee talked about this when answering question A17: *Did you gain any new skills?*

Using this method the researcher produced an initial 1849 codes from the transcripts and the collected documents in the first stage of coding. They were annotated with the prefix *1-* if they came from a first round interview with library staff, *2-* if they came from the second round, *m-* for codes coming from managers' interviews, *a-* for codes from interviews with administrative staff and *d-* if they originated from one of the collected documents. The codes were either direct quotes from the interviews (marked with a #) or the researcher's own words paraphrasing the interviewee's statement. Where possible, direct quotes were used in the codes to stay close to the data and allow the participants' voices to emerge. Figure 1 is a screenshot from one of the nodes in NVivo; it illustrates the workflow the researcher used to mark the data collection method and direct quotes.

Figure 1: Coding workflow in NVivo



An initial sorting exercise resulted in seven broad themes:

1. Describing conferences
2. Intellectual impact
3. Social dimension of impact
4. Emotional impact
5. Other impact
6. Influencing factors
7. Other

Sometimes statements spanned two themes (key themes, minor themes or sub-themes), as participants, for instance, referred to an idea they returned with, but also to the fact that they acquired the idea while talking to another delegate. If this was the case, the statements were coded twice under two different themes. The themes were then subdivided into sub-themes if more than one distinct theme was identified, with some containing up to three levels of sub-themes. Occasionally, themes were annotated with memos, which the researcher used to clarify and define their content and to note an overlap or possible relation to other codes. Finally, codes in the *Other*-category were added to existing themes or disregarded, and some themes were merged if they appeared to belong to the same overall theme. For example, coding produced 18 initial themes for *Influencing factors*, which were refined and merged to reflect the nine influencing factors discussed in this thesis (refer to Chapter Four, section 4.3). Figure 2

is a screenshot taken from NVivo after data analysis was completed. It shows a selection of codes after the researcher completed the categorisation, interpretation and exploration of all initial codes. When writing this thesis, some of the themes were renamed, for instance, *intellectual impact* became *informational impact* as the latter term was deemed to be more specific.

Figure 2: Finalised codes in NVivo

Name	Sources
01 INTELLECTUAL IMPACT	0
1 What happens at and after confs re ideas and knowledge	0
2 What sort of knowledge-ideas are brought back	0
3 What happens to ideas and knowledge brought back	0
1 DONE they get used and applied	0
2 DONE they get shared, merge and transform	0
3 DONE they might be useful at a later stage	0
1 - ideas brought back can act as #seeds for thought#	1

The themes and sub-themes were also analysed to established whether a topic had been predominantly raised by one data collection method (interviews with library staff first round, interviews with library staff second round, managers, administrative staff, collected documents), or by participants of just one, or predominantly one, institution (Library A, B, C or D). In addition, the researcher analysed all themes and sub-themes using the following demographic characteristics and factors, to explore whether specific groups of participants raised certain themes:

- Age of interviewees and years spent working as librarianship professionals
- First-time conference attendees versus seasoned delegates
- Participants who had presented papers at the conference
- Library staff who attended the conference with colleagues and those attending by themselves
- Participants who had used social media during the conference

Wetherell et al. (2001) support this approach, writing that “background information may also serve to define the data” (p. 26). In line with the qualitative approach to analysis in this study, these characteristics and factors were not meant to reflect direct connection or causality (for example, stating that all participants of a certain age group will experience a certain benefit of conference attendance). Instead these were used to develop explanations of how different variables can have an effect in different contexts.

Six months after the initial coding of the transcripts commenced, the researcher conducted an intra-coder reliability test, which consisted of re-coding one transcript and comparing the initial codes with the ones produced during this test. A rate of 92% was achieved, which exceeds levels set by Connaway and Powell (2010). They suggest that intra-coder reliability should be at least 85% in the case of a single researcher conducting the study.

3.3 Summary of chapter

Chapter Three restated the research questions that guided this study, which investigates the impact of conference attendance on librarians and libraries in an Australian academic context, and on factors that influence that impact. The chapter documented the socio-constructivist paradigm and its principles and identified how it aligns with the worldviews and values of the researcher. It also discussed how the literature provides guidance for studies grounded in this paradigm. Knowledge is seen as co-constructed between the researcher and participants during the research process and is considered to be relevant and true within the study’s specific circumstances and contexts.

The chapter also focused on qualitative methodologies and their advantages to the study. First, they align with the underlying assumptions and principles of social constructivism. Second, qualitative approaches suit the exploration of under-researched areas. Finally, there is ample evidence that qualitative approaches are beneficial when investigating complex phenomena such as events and processes.

The research process for this study was then described. It commenced with a pilot study, which facilitated the testing of methodological approaches, communication with

participants, timeframes and equipment. It also increased the researcher's familiarity and experience with the research instruments. The sample selected for the study produced data relevant to the research questions and the variety of participants and libraries allowed for cross-contextual comparisons during data analysis.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews and collection of documents as data collection methods. The chapter highlighted how these are well suited to the study's connection with social constructivism, its qualitative research approach and the research questions. Using this method allowed the collection of detailed, in-depth information about the topic. Investigating conference benefits with interviewing methods is also supported by scholars who have examined similar topics. Documents about conferences as another data source were also gathered at all four libraries; the chapter noted that the use of multiple data sources is common in qualitative research studies.

The chapter discussed the technique of coding to analyse data in a theoretical and practical sense. In this study, coding was conducted in two stages. The first stage of coding produced a multitude of codes, which the researcher categorised and assigned to hierarchies and relationships during the second phase of coding. Background information was used to examine further correlations and influences in the data, and an inter-coder reliability test was conducted to ensure coding quality.

The validity of the study's findings was increased by the use of different methods throughout data collection and analysis. The study used an extensive literature review, multiple data sources and diversity of participants and sites to increase triangulation. The researcher also disclosed her role and clarified previous experiences and understanding of the topic, and described how data collection and analysis were conducted with ethical considerations in mind.

4 Findings

The qualitative approach to data collection in this research produced rich, diverse and extensive data. The data were analysed using coding techniques to answer the study's research questions:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

This chapter discusses the findings of data analysis. The findings consist of three key themes and their sub-themes (as discussed in sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2 & 4.2.3), connections between the three key themes (section 4.2.4), two minor conference attendance themes (section 4.2.5) and nine influencing factors (section 4.3).

In keeping with the socio-constructivist paradigm that guided the research, direct quotes are used to emphasise that all themes are based on a shared understanding between the researcher and the participants. Quotes are attributed to participants and documents using abbreviations. For example, *ALib1* refers to the first librarian interviewed from Library A, *BMan3* to the third manager from Library B, and *CDoc1* to the first document collected at Library C. Single words spoken by interviewees are displayed in italic font in the text, but they are not referenced to increase the chapter's readability. No distinction is made in regard to data from the first round of interviews with library staff and the second, as the participants discussed the same themes during both interviews. The terms *participants* and *librarians* are used interchangeably to avoid repetition; however the term *managers* is used exclusively in reference to this participant group to ensure clarity.

In the first part of the chapter, the participants, their institutions and the conferences they attended are described. This provides context for the second section of the chapter, which presents the three key themes and sub-themes of conference attendance impact that were identified: informational; social; and affective. Two minor themes of conference attendance impact are also detailed. The chapter then reports on nine

factors that were identified to influence conference attendance impact. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the different data sources used in the study and a section demonstrating how the findings answer the study’s research questions.

4.1 Context of findings

4.1.1 Participants

The researcher interviewed 16 librarians, 12 managers and four administrative staff for this study. To identify demographic factors that potentially influence the impact of conference attendance, data was gathered from the librarians relating to gender, age, and years of work experience as librarianship professionals. These data were not collected from managers or administrative staff. Table 11 provides an overview of the librarians in regard to these demographic factors.

Table 11: Gender, age and work experience of librarians

Gender (total: 16 librarians)	
Female	13 librarians
Male	3 librarians
Age	
26 - 35	5 librarians
36 - 45	5 librarians
46 - 55	3 librarians
56 - 65	3 librarians
Years of work experience in librarianship	
< 5	2 librarians
5 - 16	5 librarians
> 16	9 librarians

In addition to the factors presented in Table 11, data analysis revealed that 15 participants had previously attended other conferences before participating in the study, and only one librarian was attending a conference for the first time. All librarians

were fully funded by their place of employment to attend the conference, and attended the entire conference (although one participant had missed the first half day of the event). None of the participants were involved in organising the event, and only one librarian presented a paper at the conference. Two librarians attended by themselves, and 14 librarians attended the event with colleagues from the same library.

As discussed in Chapter Three, contacts at the four libraries were asked to approach all library staff who had attended a conference to find potential participants for the study. The demographic data presented earlier show that the research sample consisted of 16 qualified librarians. At the time interviews were conducted 14 out of the 16 participants were employed as librarians. Two participants, although qualified librarians, were working as a library officer and a library assistant, positions that do not require a formal qualification in librarianship. Initially all library staff were invited to participate (refer to Chapter Three, section 3.2.3), and accordingly, the term *library staff* has been used in the thesis to refer to this group of interviewees. As the final sample consisted only of librarians and their managers, the term *librarians* is used from this point forward in the thesis.

All participating library staff were approached before they attended the conference to organise the first interview, and the researcher aimed to interview each participant as soon as practicable after they had returned to work. The average number of days that passed between the conference and the first interview was 24 days, with the shortest period being two weeks and the longest 31 days. The second round of interviews on average occurred seven months after the first interview had taken place.

4.1.2 Libraries and parent institutions

In Chapter Three an explanation was provided about how the libraries were selected in reference to their size, location and reputation of their parent institutions (refer to Chapter Three, section 3.2.3). This section describes the libraries and their parent institutions to provide context to the study's findings.

The four libraries that participated in the study were situated in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Three libraries were located in major Australian capital cities, and one library was part of a regionally-based institution. One university was affiliated with a group of universities with the highest student numbers

in Australia; one was in a group reporting the lowest student numbers, and the remaining two universities report average student numbers.

One of the universities was part of an organisation called the Group of Eight (Go8), which consists of the largest and oldest universities in Australia. These universities are generally research-intensive and amongst the highest rated Australian institutions in international rankings. In addition, these universities generally receive a large part of funding available to academic institutions; for example, 73% of Australian competitive grants in 2016 according to their website (Group of Eight Australia, n.d.). One university was a private institution, and the remaining two belonged to the network of Innovative Research Universities (IRU) or the Australian Technology Network (ATN). These networks generally consist of less prestigious, and younger institutions. In the initial stages of the research, the libraries were asked to predict how many staff were likely to attend a conference in the 18 months between July 2014 and December 2015. The estimates given ranged from nine to 35 staff, which reflects their differences regarding size and staffing numbers.

4.1.3 Policies and procedures at the libraries

The interviews with administrative staff and the collected documents provided a picture of how the four libraries handle conference attendance. They highlighted policies and procedures, current thinking and administrative issues, which this section describes to provide context to the findings presented later in the chapter. Occasionally, data collected from interviews with librarians or managers also contained references to procedural matters, in which case they are included in this section and highlighted as such.

Library A had a staff member dedicated to professional development, who was interviewed as an administrative staff member. The entire process of staff attending a conference at Library A had been in place *for over ten years* [AAdmin] and had been *refined* over this time.

The library budget contained a separate line item for professional development activities, including conference support. This budget had not increased for some years and was described as *tight* by both librarians and managers. One of the documents collected at Library A alerts staff that partial funding only may be allocated to staff

wanting to attend a conference, and the administrative staff member confirmed that insufficient funds were available to fund all applications for conference support.

AAdmin described how they *keep an eye out for conferences coming up* [AAdmin] and encouraged staff from all levels to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) to attend. Applications were assessed, to ensure that the conference was suited *to the level and role of the staff member* [AAdmin]. The University Librarian made a final decision on who was supported to attend a conference.

All staff at Library A were expected to do a presentation after they returned from the conference, which was referred to in some of the analysed documents [ADoc1, ADoc3, ADoc4]. Data analysis revealed that the direct line manager decided whether a report needed to be written in addition to the presentation, and reports were distributed at the discretion of the University Librarian. As well as the presentation and potentially a report, staff also had to complete an evaluation form, which was sent to administrative staff and the University Librarian.

Library B had a budget to cover all forms of professional development, including conferences, study support, training and consultants, with about 30% of that budget being expended on conferences. BAdmin mentioned that study support was prioritised during the allocation process of the budget, resulting in reduced opportunities for staff to attend conferences: *there are lots of staff who could potentially benefit but the budget's just not there really* [BAdmin]. In contrast, librarians thought that their institution was generous in terms of supporting professional development [BLib2, BLib3, BLib4]. BLib1 reported that in the past, only managers were able to receive full funding to attend conferences. This process then changed to include funding for lower level staff; however, BLib4 voiced the concern that staff in lower level positions are rarely made aware of this opportunity.

The process for gaining conference attendance support had not changed for eight years at Library B, with BAdmin noting *"it is a very stable process"*. Conferences were advertised on the staff blog, which is the library's official communication channel. The decision as to whether a staff member is supported to attend a conference is jointly made by the direct line manager, the librarian responsible for organising professional development and the associate director. The direct line manager decided what kind of

follow up the staff member will undertake once back at work. Generally, the options included a presentation to the team, a presentation to all staff or a report. In the case of a written report, it was distributed on a shared drive and published in the library's newsletter. Form BDoc2 specifies that the reporting option agreed on must be completed within two months of the staff member returning from the conference.

Library C had a budget for conferences that was approximately 6.5% of the non-salary budget. CAdmin indicated that generally, they receive more applications for conference attendance than the budget can accommodate, and described how the library tries to consider which staff would benefit most from attending. There are no restrictions regarding level or qualifications in regard to access to funding. Presenting a paper at the conference is not a requirement to be fully funded, though CMan3 stated that staff presenting were automatically funded by the library.

The procedures at Library C were introduced about two years before the interviews for this study. At that time, the library identified a gap in the follow-up process concerning conferences, which resulted in a review of the process and various new forms being introduced. Conference attendance is first discussed as part of professional planning and review sessions that direct line managers conduct with their staff. Following these discussions, the staff member completes an application form [CDoc4], which is passed on to the manager and the University Librarian for approval.

In conjunction with the application process, the staff member and their manager agreed on appropriate report-back activities, which could include a presentation to staff; a presentation to a specific team; a report; or an article for the library's newsletter. In addition, a feedback form [CDoc2] encouraged staff to reflect on and communicate their *take-aways*. The direct line manager, deputy University Librarian and University Librarian all had access to the form, which provided them with an opportunity to gauge whether ideas gathered at the conference are relevant to any current projects or strategic plans. The take-aways were recorded in a document available to all staff.

Library D had a budget dedicated to different kinds of professional development opportunities, with about 70% of that budget being spent on conferences. The administrative person at this library referred to the funds available as *limited*, saying that *funds are in fairly short supply relative to demand* [DAdmin] and added that staff

have to *wait their turn* [DAdmin] to attend conferences. They estimated that approximately half of the conference attendance EoIs were rejected due to budget restrictions, and added that EoIs were appraised according to the *perception of value of attendance to the library and the individual* [DAdmin], as well as previous funding received by the applicant. For interstate conferences that involved travel and accommodation costs, only applications from higher level staff were considered; lower level staff including library technicians were encouraged to attend local conferences.

The process and procedures concerning conference attendance at Library D had remained unchanged for many years before the interviews were undertaken. At regular intervals, the University Librarian asked all managers to inquire about the kinds of professional development activities their staff were planning. If staff expressed an interest in going to a conference, they submitted an EoI to their manager, which in turn was discussed by senior management. Once conference attendance had been approved, staff needed to complete an application form [DDoc1], which dealt with administrative matters such as costs and leave arrangements. Staff were requested to make materials from the conference available on the library's shared drive upon their return and present to other staff during a report-back session. DMan3 described this as a *key expectation* and said that it was generally organised *within a month of returning from the conference*.

4.1.4 Conferences

The following section describes the conferences the librarians attended and referred to during the interviews. It also features the participants' descriptions of these events. These accounts do not represent impact of conference attendance as explored in a later part of the chapter but provide context to other findings.

4.1.4.1 Conferences attended by participants

Table 12 provides information about the different conferences the participants of this study attended and subsequently discussed during the interviews.

Table 12: Conferences attended by participants

Conference and number of participants attending	Time and location	Conference organisers and aims
ALLA Conference 1 participant	10 - 12 September 2014, Adelaide	Annual conference organised by The Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA). It targets law librarians, legal information professionals and publishers. (ALLA, 2017)
ALIA National Conference 6 participants	15 - 19 September 2014, Melbourne	Biennial event organised by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). The event is aimed at "all Library and Information professionals, from all sectors and from all areas of Australia and the international community". (ALIA, 2017)
LIANZA conference 1 participant	12 - 15 October 2014, Auckland	Biennial event organised by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA). Their conferences are "the largest gathering of library and information professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand bringing together over 500 delegates from New Zealand and around the world". (LIANZA, n.d.)
ALIA Information Online 6 participants	2 - 5 February 2015, Sydney	Biennial ALIA conference focusing on the online information environment, with aims and target audience similar to the ALIA National Conference.
THETA conference 1 participant	10 - 13 May 2015, Gold Coast, Australia	Biennial conference organised by The Higher Education Technology Agenda (THETA), which is marketed at "a comprehensive range of practitioners and senior decision makers across the whole spectrum of Information Technology, Teaching and Learning, Library and Knowledge Management in tertiary education". (THETA, n.d.)
New Librarians Symposium 7 (NLS 7) 1 participant	24 - 26 July 2015, Sydney	Biennial event organised by ALIA. "ALIA's NLS is a low-cost, high-value 3-day event of speaker sessions and workshops geared towards students and new Library and Information Sector professionals but open to everyone". (NLS, n.d.)

National library associations in Australia and New Zealand organised all but one conference the participants had attended. These conferences target all members of the library profession, and law librarians specifically in the case of the ALLA conference.

The exception was the conference run by THETA, which is aimed a wider audience external to librarianship and is more international in its scope. Most participants (12 out of 16) attended either the ALIA National Conference in 2014 or ALIA Information Online in 2015. These events are the largest conferences organised for the library profession in Australia. They are heavily advertised and contain content that is relevant to a wide audience. The scale of these events means there is the potential for delegates to be exposed to a diverse program, and is likely to include content that is of relevance to academic libraries. Furthermore, these events provide delegates with opportunities to meet and network with many other professionals working in similar contexts.

4.1.4.2 Description of conferences by participants

The data contained general descriptions of conferences and participants' experiences as delegates. In this section, this data are drawn together, as they provide background information and give a sense of participants' opinions regarding the conferences they attended, and such events in general. Most of the descriptions emerged when analysing data from interviews with librarians, but occasionally managers also discussed their views on conferences in a broader sense. The findings presented in the first part of the section were drawn from an analysis of answers to a specific question (Question A4, see below). The second part of this section reports on descriptions of conferences found in different parts of the interview data.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the different terms librarians used to describe the conferences. The terms come from the first open-ended question of the first interview (Question A4: *What are the first three words that come into your mind when you think about the conference you have just been to?*). It is useful to analyse the answers to this question separately as they illustrate which ideas first came to mind when participants thought of conferences, without being asked about certain aspects by the researcher. The frequency of terms used by librarians is indicated by font size in the word cloud in Figure 3. The colour of each term indicates whether it relates to information, new ideas and learning (red), networking (blue), positive or negative descriptions of the conference (green), or other terms (black).

Figure 3: Description of conferences by participants



Figure 3 highlights the three distinct aspects librarians thought of when asked to describe the conference they had just attended. These include aspects relating to information and ideas; aspects relating to networking and the social component of the conference; and aspects describing the conference in emotional or affective terms. All participants referred to at least one of these three aspects in their answers, and participant's references to these three aspects were evenly distributed in terms of frequency. The terms *Google* and *collections* were coded as *new ideas and learning*, as they were used by two participants to describe particular ideas presented at the conference. Five participants (ALib₁, ALib₃, CLib₁, CLib₃, CLib₄) used the actual term *networking*, with others using alternative terms to refer to the social aspect of conferences. One participant explained that in her opinion, the conference had attracted only a very uniform group of attendees, which they described with the term *socially sterile*. Participants also used positive or negative adjectives to describe how the conference made them feel. The negative terms focused on the length of the event and the extensive program.

Data analysis revealed that data from answers to some of the other open-ended questions also supported the aspects reported in Figure 3. Also, the managers used similar positive terms to describe conferences, with the data containing words like *fun*, *happy*, *relaxed*, *great*, *enjoyable*, *fantastic*, *productive*, or *valuable*, indicating that they considered conferences to be enjoyable events. BLib₃ described conferences in general

as *wonderful experiences if you are motivated and prepared to take it all in*. Negative terms used to describe the conference seldom featured in the interview data, although a few librarians referred to the event as *tiring, exhausting* and *occasionally boring*. One participant perceived the networking activities, especially with vendors, as *forced* and reported that they made them feel *drained*, with another stating they occasionally felt lonely and isolated.

In addition to these three groups of descriptions, participants described how the conference provided them with the time necessary to reflect on current practices at their workplace. ALib1 explained how attendees can *absorb knowledge in comfort*, and CLib6 stated that at the conference, they felt they had *time away from work to think about what is going on back at work*. The following extract from an interview summarises this aspect succinctly:

My job in the library is as an operational manager, so I am dealing with a lot of the day-to-day activities. So sometimes it's hard to sit back and think strategically, or think long enough to really grasp some of the ideas that are floating around. [BLib4]

Participants also drew attention to conferences being unique compared to other professional development activities, because they provide a means to access knowledge in different ways, for example, compared to reading library and information science (LIS) journals. One librarian thought that the conference allowed them to engage with the information more deeply, while another commented they would not have received the same *seeds for thought* [DLib1] by just reading.

Several librarians perceived the location of the conference as a positive aspect. DLib4 thought that the conference was in a *nice city to visit*, DLib1 linked having a *real conference experience* to the fact that the conference was interstate, and BLib4 commented that it was *kind of fun just to go to Sydney*. According to another participant, attending a conference in a different city was advantageous because there are fewer family obligations that need one's attention. The effect conference location can have is illustrated in the following statement:

To be away from your normal workplace and your normal home. And travelling to a conference, whether it's interstate or overseas, it's always a lot more exciting and engaging than attending a conference close to home. [BLib4]

Participants were also asked to talk about the reasons for their conference attendance. Eight of the librarians (ALib2, BLib1, BLib2, BLib3, CLib2, CLib3, CLib4, CLib5) stated access to new information and ideas as their main reason for attending the conference, with one participant describing succinctly that they attended the conference because it provided them with *exposure to what is going on in the library world* [BLib1]. Others remarked on the location of the event as a reason for attendance, frequently describing how it is easier to receive funding if the conference is in the same city as their place of work. Participants also reported networking, available funds and presenting a paper as reasons for attending.

4.2 Conference attendance impact

The following section discusses the three key themes of conference attendance impact identified in data analysis:

- informational impact, which relates to information and ideas returned with and any action taken with that content;
- social impact, which encompasses all notions of meeting delegates, networking, gathering contacts and making use of them once back at work; and
- affective impact, which refers to feelings related to attendance.

The term *content* is used in the following sections for ideas and information that the delegates brought back to the workplace after attending the conference. Each section notes which data set the findings relate to – either by referring to librarians and managers in the text or by the abbreviations (such as ALib1, BManz, CDoc2, DAdmin) that accompany direct quotes. Data analysis revealed that all three key themes and two minor themes, all sub-themes apart from two, and all influencing factors apart from one, were raised in the first and the second interview with librarians, with codes from

the second interview complementing those derived from the first. Section 4.4 in this chapter discusses this point in greater detail.

4.2.1 Conference attendance impact: informational

Librarians perceived information and ideas as major elements of the impact they attributed to their conference attendance. As discussed in section 4.1.4.2, many referred to information and ideas when they were asked about their views on conferences in the first open-ended question of the interviews. Managers also highlighted the importance of informational impact of conference attendance. This section describes the terms *information*, *ideas* and *knowledge* and their use by participants. Next, it details the different kinds of content librarians discussed. Finally, the section describes what actions participants took after being exposed to content at the conference.

The researcher provided no definition to distinguish between *information* and *ideas* during the interviews. The participants used both of these terms, and the term *knowledge* when referring to content that was not immediately acted upon. However, AMan₃ did not use any of these terms, instead stating that staff obtain either *general awareness* or *very specific things that they can implement*. DLib₁ thought that ideas from the conference were difficult to describe and define, referring to them as *all sorts of scribbly intersecting things*, and adding that *it will take a while to put them into compartments*. This and the following chapters use the term *content* to encompass all instances of information, ideas or knowledge that originated at the conference. Where practical, the participants' exact words are used

4.2.1.1 Types of content

All librarians were asked to speak about content they returned with (Question A16a: *Did you find out about new ideas, gain new information?*). All participants provided concrete examples of information and ideas they gained from the conference. Librarians referred to information gained from presentations, library tours, vendor exhibitions and keynote presentations. Three librarians (CLib₂, CLib₃, CLib₆) discussed having obtained ideas on how to expand existing services at the library and ideas relating to current projects. Information about new products from vendors was another direct reference to this sub-theme (DLib₂). Managers (AMan₁, CMan₃, DMan₁) also provided concrete examples of occasions when conference attendance of their staff

resulted in new ideas. One participant stated that the knowledge they brought back to the workplace denoted the best aspect of the conference for them.

A third of the managers placed great emphasis on conferences facilitating the exchange of information and ideas, without specifying particular kinds of content they were referring to:

- AMan₁ felt that staff should return to work with innovative ideas, stating that they would be disappointed if that was not the case. They added that their *leading expectation* around conferences were *insights and possible applications of the conference material*.
- AMan₃ spoke about staff gaining background knowledge and a *broader understanding of the context they work in* when asked about their expectations of staff returning from a conference. They also hoped that when staff returned, *they will have learnt some things that they can apply to their daily work*.
- BMan₁ described how conferences allow *the flow of ideas within the profession and back to the library*.
- BMan₂ stated that *the main purpose of a conference was making people aware of what's going on within the profession, what's actually happening in libraries*.

An analysis of all instances where participants remarked on the kinds of content brought back to the workplace revealed three distinct types: original and unconventional content; perspective on established ideas; and affirmative content.

Original and unconventional content - *thinking outside the box*

Participants considered that their conference attendance had exposed them to content that is new, original and occasionally unconventional. For example, DLib₂ described having returned with knowledge about other libraries that are *doing stuff at the cutting edge*, and DMan₂ thought that the conference might result in the library *trying a few things differently* due to the *fresh ideas* their staff had gained at the event. Three librarians (BLib₂, DLib₁, DLib₂) stated that their conference attendance challenged their thinking, or encouraged them to *think outside the box*. One librarian linked the sub-theme of new content encountered at the conference to being away from work:

You can sometimes get caught up in your day-to-day routine of how you do things and all of a sudden you can see people are doing things successfully but differently, and you think oh, why can't we do that as well. [BLib4]

Managers (AMan2, CMan2, DMan2) also voiced their expectations that staff gather *cutting edge, refreshing* or *innovative* ideas at the conference to enhance processes already in place at the libraries or to initiate new processes.

Perspective on established ideas – the bigger picture

Another sub-theme strongly represented in the data was gaining access to content that provides perspective to delegates' views. Some librarians (ALib2, BLib1, BLib3, BLib4, CLib1, CLib6, DLib1) used terms such as *bigger picture, broadening* and *expanding horizons* to describe the kinds of information they gained at the conference. BLib4 stated that the conference gave them *a bigger world view than just the one library I'm at*, and another librarian noted that new perspectives from the conference allowed them to critically assess their library. Similarly, other participants remarked on the fact that the conference had provided them with a *new understanding of things* [BLib3], or gave them background knowledge relevant to their positions. Several interviewees (ALib1, BLib3, BLib4, CLib4, CLib5) used information they obtained at a conference to focus their minds or to see the bigger picture concerning ideas they had already been contemplating.

Managers (BMan2, BMan3, CMan1, DMan1, DMan3) echoed these views, describing conferences as events that broaden staff's horizons by exposing them to the latest trends in the profession and providing new perspectives. In the words of one manager, the main value of a conference is its ability to *change people's views and perspectives* [DMan3].

The following statement from an administrative staff member summarises the effect conferences can have in widening attendees' horizons:

I think conferences have a different impact in the sense that sometimes you send someone to a conference and it just wakes up a

half asleep person or someone who's junior who hasn't yet discovered there is a world outside their 'do what you're told'. [BAdmin]

Affirmative content – *benchmarking*

A third type of content participants returned with that featured in the data is affirmative content. The researcher found that content gained at conferences about other libraries' foci, projects and visions allowed library staff to compare their institution to others in the same industry. The following statements were coded under this sub-theme:

- BLib1 described conference attendance as a means to gain confirmation that *what you are doing is good*.
- DLib1 thought that information from the conference confirmed that they *are moving in the right direction*. They added that it was comforting *to know that problems you face others face too*.
- BLib3 similarly stated that *the conference helped me situate where I am and where our library is in the directions that libraries are taking*.
- BLib4 said they used the conference to keep up-to-date with what other libraries are doing.

These comparisons to other organisations can be described as a benchmarking exercise, and data analysis revealed concrete examples of this. For example, one librarian, was able to assess the library's progress with their makerspace using information obtained from the conference. CLib6 learned about instances of successful teamwork at the conference, which confirmed their view that their library could improve in that area. The same participant also reflected on the lack of communication concerning innovative projects at their library:

A lot of the things that we heard about at the conference, we are already doing or have been doing for a long time, they were presenting them as new ideas. . . . It did make me think, 'well, how are we promoting ourselves', and, 'How are we actually putting ourselves out there so it is known that we're doing all these things?'

Not necessarily only to other libraries, but even just to our university and clients at our library. [CLib6]

Content that allowed for inter-library comparisons also featured substantially in the managers' interviews:

- AMan2 stated that *we are in a community of libraries and need to get some feedback of what we are doing.*
- DMan2 remarked that conferences are *a kind of an impetus for re-evaluating where we stand on things.*
- DMan1 described how conference attendance of staff enhanced and reinforced what their library was already focusing on, and allowed staff to *get a sense of where our university is situated amongst other institutions.*
- BMan3 stated that at a conference, *you can learn from what other libraries are doing, if they are honest about their failures and things that did not work and you are working on similar things.*
- BMan1 said that *conferences are important to keep the library connected with the library world in general.*
- CMan1 made the following statement which summarises the sub-theme of affirmative content:

[Conferences are] part of benchmarking our library against other institutions worldwide, not just within Australia. So a lot of our conferences are attended by librarians from other parts of the world, even when they're Australian conferences. So it's broadening horizons and at the same giving us a benchmark to measure ourselves against.

[CMan1]

4.2.1.2 Actions taken with content

The previous section has discussed participants' descriptions of the kinds of content they obtained at the conference. Data analysis revealed different actions taken with these ideas: content is used and applied; and content is shared and communicated. Occasionally, interviewees did not refer to any concrete action but considered that ideas obtained at the conference may be useful in the longer term.

Content is used and applied

Several librarians (ALib₁, ALib₂, BLib₂, BLib₄, CLib₄, CLib₅, DLib₁) referred to concrete examples of implementing ideas or using information. Some participants discussed this point during the first interview while others mentioned this in the second interview. Examples coded under this sub-theme ranged from updating teaching methods used in information literacy classes, to changing display cabinets, purchasing databases, informing current projects and entirely new initiatives. One librarian described how the information and ideas they returned with aided them in changing jobs. Another librarian mentioned feeling more confident to act in a management position due to knowledge gained from the conference. This finding provides an example of the connection between the key themes of informational impact and affective impact of conference attendance, which is discussed in section 4.2.3.

Managers also described how content from the conference resulted in projects, with one manager estimating that about 20% of ideas from conferences inspire new initiatives. Two other managers noted that smaller ideas concerning daily practices at the library had more potential for being implemented immediately, with one stating: *I guess sometimes there are things that we can quickly act on easily that don't require a lot of extra work* [CMan₃].

In addition, the data included descriptions of how information gathered might change shape and be implemented in a different form. DLib₁ explained how learning about the idea of makerspaces inspired them to organise a making activity (origami) at an orientation event at their library. DLib₂ thought that the idea of making a whiteboard and markers available to users to gauge their opinions was useful, pointing out that it could be applied in many different ways. BLib₄ remarked that it can be hard to know where *one idea begins and the other ends*. The sub-theme of ideas changing shape is articulated succinctly in the following statement:

Knowledge, as long as it doesn't date too quickly, can be used later on for something, so you can apply that idea to something else in a different context. So the context may change. And of course then once the context changes the idea will shift as well. [CLib₂]

When discussing the implementation of ideas from the conference or the use of information, participants appeared positive and happy about the accomplishment. Therefore this sub-theme is linked to the key theme of affective conference attendance impact (refer to section 4.2.3) and to the overlap between informational and affective impacts (refer to section 4.2.4.1).

Content is shared and communicated

Data analysis revealed that another action taken with information and ideas from the conference was sharing with colleagues and communicating them within the library. Some managers (AMan₁, AMan₃, DMan₂, DMan₃) had explicit expectations that their staff would share content from the conference. One manager remarked that they expected staff to share what they learned, even if the library did not openly encourage them to do so.

Some librarians (BLib₂, BLib₃, CLib₁, CLib₃, DLib₄) reported having shared information and ideas gained from the conference. For one participant, sharing meant that other staff members were able to benefit from their attendance, while another described how their colleagues showed interest in what they learned. BLib₃ spoke about having used content they returned with *to add value to discussions* at meetings, and referred to the outcome of sharing ideas as a *ripple effect*.

In addition, participants mentioned different means they used to share content obtained at the conference:

- DLib₁ sent videos and emails back to colleagues while still at the conference, and also distributed paper copies of conference presentations in the staff room.
- CLib₃ and CLib₅ discussed ideas with staff once back at work, both informally and more formally at meetings or during presentations.
- CLib₆ spoke about pointing interested colleagues to online presentations and abstracts of papers.

DMan₃ highlighted the importance of capturing and sharing ideas in order to narrow them down to the *sticky ideas* that aligned with the library's current circumstances. One manager described how content from a conference, which is shared and communicated, can eventually facilitate significant changes in libraries:

There's kind of this softening process that a conference serves, so, ideas [are brought back] and then start to filter through into the general consciousness of the library, . . . where somebody says 'Oh, you know, that wouldn't be a bad thing to try' and it gets talked about for quite a long period of time. And then, when the idea is quite different from what people have been used to, like a roving reference service with no service point . . . over a period of time when the circumstances create themselves, everybody by that stage, they know about it. So, from a conference, somebody might talk about the idea, it filters into conversations and down the track it may actually become a reality. [BMan2]

Sharing and communicating of content is facilitated by activities such as presentations to colleagues that libraries require of staff who attended a conference. This sub-theme is therefore connected to the influencing factor *Dissemination of ideas*, which is described in section 4.3.8.

Future potential of content

On average there was a period of 24 days between the participants' conference attendance and the first interview taking place. This duration provided sufficient time for participants to be able to discuss ideas being implemented during the first interview. Data from the second interview, conducted on average seven months later, also provided references to actions taken with ideas from the conference. In addition, data analysis revealed that both interviews contained discussions of ideas that had not yet resulted in any action, but held potential for future use.

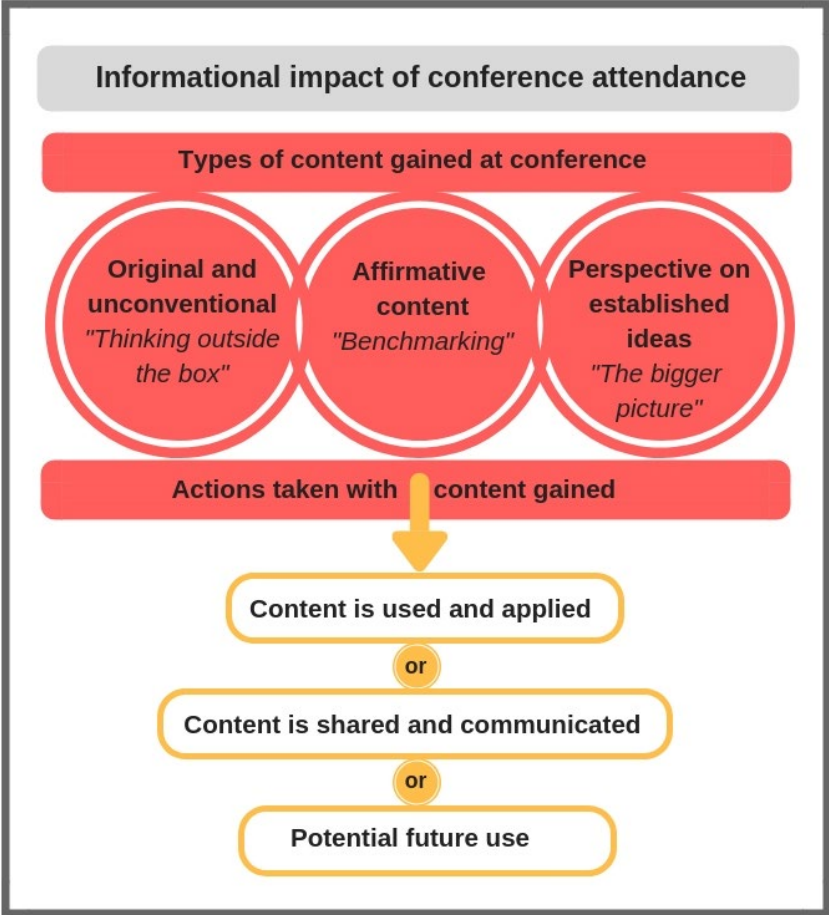
According to the librarians BLib₁, BLib₂ and DLib₄, the extent of action taken with ideas at the time of the interviews did not reflect on the quality of the content obtained; it highlighted the need for time and opportunities for these ideas to become valuable and applicable in the context of the library. DLib₂ described this as follows: *they are good ideas, they don't just go away*, and others noted that some ideas take time *to filter through the system* [CLib₂] or to *act as seeds for thought* [DLib₁]. Similarly, BMan₂ pointed out that it can take years between a staff member learning about a concept at a conference and the library implementing the idea, and DMan₃ thought that few ideas

are ever implemented immediately after the conference and without having undergone some change.

The library's processes of disseminating ideas and its culture of ideas also influenced the likelihood of the library applying ideas from a conference. The factors *Dissemination of ideas* and *Culture of ideas* that were found to influence conference attendance impact will be discussed in sections 4.3.8 and 4.3.9.

In summary, the librarians referred to different kinds of information and ideas from the conference and spoke about various actions they took with that content. The key themes relating to informational impact are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Informational impact of conference attendance



4.2.2 Conference attendance impact: social

The following section focuses on the second key theme that was found in the data, the social impact of conference attendance. This key theme will also be referred to by the term *networking* to increase the readability of the chapter. *Networking* is understood as any social interaction with other delegates at a conference that results in an attendee returning from the event with new contacts. As discussed in section 4.1.4.2, five out of the 16 librarians (ALib₁, ALib₃, CLib₁, CLib₃, CLib₄) used the term *networking* when asked to express their thoughts about conferences in the first open-ended question of the interviews.

As there was a specific question relating to the social impact of conference attendance in the interview schedule (A18: *How was the networking? Did you meet new people/reconnect with colleagues?*) all librarians discussed this key theme. Most used the term *networking*, while others referred to *making friends*, *meeting people*, *building connections*, *building relationships* or *chatting to people*. Half of the librarians (ALib₂, ALib₃, BLib₁, BLib₂, BLib₄, CLib₁, CLib₃, CLib₄) commented positively on the networking aspect of the conference. Three librarians considered it to be the best part of the entire event, while others saw it as the main aim of conferences or discussed the fact that conferences provide great opportunities for practitioners to meet others in the field. One participant stated that attending the conference was worthwhile just for the networking: *I would go to another conference just for the networking, because that was really, really awesome* [ALib₃]. Three distinct aspects of networking were identified during data analysis: types of contacts made; outcomes of networking; and managers' expectations.

4.2.2.1 Types of contacts made

The librarians referred to different types of delegates with whom they networked at the conference. These included delegates with similar roles or interests; delegates from diverse groups; and known and unknown attendees.

Networking with people working in similar roles featured strongly in the data (ALib₂, ALib₃, BLib₂, BLib₃, CLib₄, CLib₅). One librarian mentioned meeting people *with shared interests*, while another referred to bonding with other attendees over similar experiences at work. Other librarians echoed these descriptions, with one librarian

adding that getting to know people working in similar roles made it easier to feel relaxed at the conference. This links the key themes of social and affective impact of conference attendance, which is described in section 4.2.3.

The librarians also reported having connected with many different, diverse delegates, or in other words, with individuals they otherwise would not have met. BLib₁ stated that the conference offered them the opportunity *to interact with a wider group of people*, and other participants reported having networked with presenters they would not have met under normal circumstances. A third participant was inspired by a presentation at the conference to sign up to an international librarians' network that facilitates communication between information professionals from around the world.

Interview data from ten librarians also revealed descriptions about conferences providing opportunities to connect with known people, some of whom the participants had not seen for some time:

- ALib₁, BLib₁, BLib₄, CLib₆ and DLib₂ discussed catching up with old contacts and delegates they knew before attending the conference.
- BLib₂ and CLib₄ referred to meeting people with whom they had previously communicated with online.
- CLib₃ stated that *networking with people from my own institution that I don't see very often was really useful*.
- DLib₁ described having networked with vendors at the conference, while CLib₅ mentioned that they appreciated the opportunity to meet vendors they had previously corresponded with, stating *it's always good to put a face to a name*.

Data analysis also revealed that the location of the conference facilitated networking with colleagues and collaborators. One interviewee reported that the conference provided the opportunity to organise meetings with staff situated at another campus of their multi-branch library which helped enhance internal relationships. Another librarian spoke about organising meetings with libraries situated in the same town in which the conference was held.

4.2.2.2 Outcomes of networking

A second sub-theme describing the outcomes of networking was also identified within the key theme of social conference attendance impact. The researcher found that two librarians had already contacted delegates they met at the conference at the time of the first interview (on average 24 days after the event), and one librarian had connected with colleagues and delegates they met. During the second interview, librarians were encouraged to discuss whether they had been in contact with people they met at the conference. At this second interview many participants also described outcomes of their networking efforts at the conference. The following instances were coded as concrete outcomes of networking:

- Three participants had communicated with contacts made at the conference to discuss or to get advice on specific matters (BLib₁, BLib₃, CLib₂).
- ALib₂ reported keeping in touch via social media.
- DLib₂'s networking at the conference resulted in a vendor visiting after the event.

Networking also led to the expansion of networks beyond those of the participants. ALib₃ and CLib₆ described how they introduced contacts made at the conference to their colleagues and managers. A third librarian reported:

...being able to make connections with a couple of people and bring back those contacts, to not necessarily keep up communication with me, but to connect people that I work with, with some of the people that I met, has proved to be valuable. So I guess the other useful thing about networking is it's not just your own network that you expand, but that you can see other areas or other people that might be interested in having a relationship with some of the people that we meet and bring those people together. [BLib₂]

ALib₂ commented on the conference providing opportunities to network that encouraged them to be more proactive in regard to professional development. This had resulted in them volunteering to join various ALIA committees.

Librarians who had not contacted delegates they met at the conference during the second interview were confident that those contacts would be useful at a later stage, should an opportunity or a need arise. ALib2 echoed the thoughts of others (BLib1, BLib3, CLib1, CLib4, CLib5) with the following statement: *I know that if I have any questions they'd be happy to talk to me or answer anything.* This notion of contacts from a conference having the potential to be useful at a later stage echoes the sub-theme explored in section 4.2.1.2 – which described how participants referred to the potential future use of ideas.

4.2.2.3 Managers' expectations for networking

Nine of the twelve managers referred to networking as a significant and useful outcome of conferences, highlighting the importance they placed on social conference attendance impact. The following statements were coded to this sub-theme:

- AMan1 referred to conferences as important for networking and being *in touch with peers.*
- AMan3 stated that networks are the most useful impact conference attendance can have, as they allow staff to build *communities of practice* around a project or idea.
- BMan1 discussed how networks created at conferences can lead to future collaborations.
- BMan3 referred to networking as *the most useful thing that comes out of a conference.*
- CMan1 expected staff to establish networks at conferences that *they can call upon at any time because they have created that relationship.*
- CMan2 stated that networking was important because it gives *staff mentoring and peer support.*
- DMan1 discussed networking as being *really really helpful.*
- DMan3 referred to conferences providing opportunities for delegates to *form ad hoc informal professional networks.*

Regarding expectations concerning networking, one manager hoped that they did not need to tell their staff explicitly that they were expected to network at the conference. Another manager made the distinction between *pure networking* and *pure socialising*, emphasising that the networking they expected their staff to engage in during the

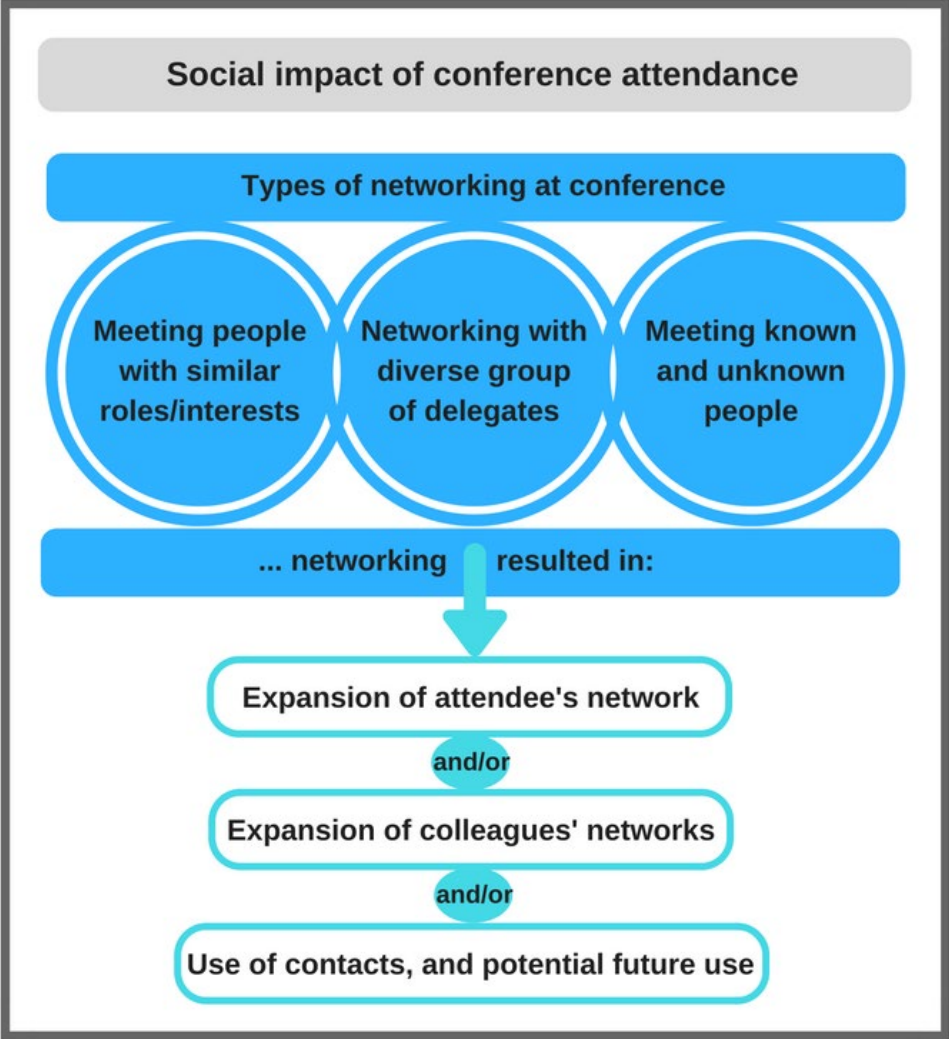
conference should be targeted and meaningful. The following extract from a different manager's interview is representative of the tone used to describe their expectations concerning staff and conference networking:

Well, I don't expect them to go and make friends with every person that they are meeting, but I do expect them to make a stop at our vendors, or if they see a name badge of one of the universities that's near us or if it's someone who has a similar role on their name badge, that I would encourage them ... to start conversations, and I would also encourage them to go to all the social functions, ..., because it's a good way to just find out who's out there and maybe meet one or two people. [DManz]

In contrast, BManz indicated their scepticism as to how much networking happens at conferences: *networking, I just have to say it's somewhat over-rated*, adding that *most people in library environments are, I would guess, mainly introverts and not particularly good at networking*.

This section has described the key theme of social impact of conference attendance as identified in the data analysis of librarians' and managers' interviews. Participants referred to networking as a significant and useful impact and discussed its different aspects, which are summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Social impact of conference attendance



4.2.3 Conference attendance impact: affective

The third key theme relating to conference attendance was affective impact. Data analysis revealed that participants reported having gained from the conference in an emotional sense. As discussed in section 4.1.4.2, librarians used words like *inspiring*, *exciting*, *engaging* or *fun* to refer to the conference in the first open-ended question of the interviews. When asked about the impact of their attendance specifically in later parts of the interview, the librarians used more of these terms describing affective impacts. While two participants thought that the conference was tiring and *hard work*, the majority of librarians spoke positively about the affective benefits of attendance. Five sub-themes were identified in the interview data; they are discussed in the

following sections: feeling inspired and enthusiastic; feeling valued and grateful; feeling confident; feeling part of something bigger; and returning motivated.

4.2.3.1 Feeling inspired and enthusiastic

Many librarians (eleven out of 16) reported feeling inspired and enthusiastic after attending the conference. They also used terms like *energetic* or *refreshed* to refer to the same cluster of emotions. The following list provides the statements coded under this sub-theme, and highlights how the participants discussed this in detail:

- ALib2 described how their attendance resulted in energy *to try and take more initiative in terms of learning things that are going on in the wider library world.*
- ALib3 referred to the enthusiasm they returned with as the biggest impact of the conference, and confirmed that the feeling of renewed energy was still present at the time of the second interview.
- CLib6 discussed how the conference reminded them of the reasons why they felt passionate about librarianship.
- DLib1 felt inspired by *advocates of the profession*, which made them *feel they could champion the profession a bit more*, and be a more active member of the industry.

BLib3 was convinced that the enthusiasm they obtained at the conference also had a positive impact on their colleagues. The following statement from this interview exemplifies the positive emotions, energy and momentum passed onto other staff and projects. This point also demonstrates how this sub-theme is connected to the sub-theme of content being communicated and shared (refer to section 4.2.1.2). Although this librarian attended the conference with colleagues, the quote refers to colleagues at the library who had not attended the same event:

So I would say I have a greater interaction this year with my colleagues than I have ever had before. And I think some of that came out of the conference because I'm enthusiastically sharing what I learnt and I think this enthusiasm is catching, it's not just me, there are others as well that are enthusiastic and passionate and I guess most of the librarians are passionate but some were quieter about their passion. Now we're all getting a bit noisy. . . . I think everyone came back [from

the conference] with quite a buzz and it was a good start to this busy time. . . . I think everyone started the year perhaps with a bit more of a spring in their step. . . . I think it actually started us in a more positive way this year. [BLib3]

Four managers supported the notion of enthusiasm as an important impact of conference attendance:

- BMan2 spoke about having seen their staff *coming back excited and energised*.
- CMan2 said conferences are *refreshing* because they provide an opportunity for staff to *step out of their normal routine of what they're doing and go somewhere else and have the opportunity to be part of something different*.
- CMan3 had witnessed staff returning from the vendor exhibitions feeling enthused about new products.
- DMan2 referred to the positive effect that conference attendance can have on the entire organisation, stating that conferences can give *a burst of energy to the library*.

Although these four managers shared the librarians' views that conference attendance resulted in enthusiasm and renewed energy levels, two other managers expressed doubts about the longevity of these feelings. AMan3 thought that *if it's just feeling enthused and coming back thinking, "Oh, I love being a librarian," I think that only lasts a little while before the daily realities reassert themselves*, and AMan2 expected *the enthusiasm to fizzle out a bit*.

4.2.3.2 Feeling valued and grateful

Data analysis revealed that feeling valued and grateful was another sub-theme of the affective impact of conference attendance. BLib3 spoke about feeling *appreciative of the opportunity* [to attend the conference], as well as *supported* and *trusted* because of being funded to attend. DLib2 stated that they felt *rewarded* and *reassured* that their library wanted to *invest* in them, and BLib1 felt *grateful* to the library for funding their attendance. BLib2 discussed feeling lucky to be able to attend the entire conference, as many of their colleagues were only funded to attend part of the event. Three managers (AMan2, AMan3, CMan2) referred to the same idea, with AMan3 referring to conferences as a type of *reward and recognition*, which results in staff feeling they *must*

be doing a good job if they are paid to go. AMan2 described the library supporting conference attendance of staff as an empowering thing, because it shows that that staff member is valued by the organisation.

The notion of staff feeling valued because the library paid for their attendance is related to the descriptions of the four libraries in section 4.1.3, which reported on budget constraints preventing the libraries from regularly funding all staff who express an interest in attending a conference.

4.2.3.3 Feeling confident

Some librarians spoke about feeling more confident as a result of attending the conference. The following statements were coded under this sub-theme:

- BLib3 felt increased confidence to contribute to discussions and team meetings after the conference.
- CLib6's conference attendance led to the whole team having more confidence to pursue ideas they had been considering.
- DLib1 spoke about feeling more confident about the direction the profession was taking.
- BLib2 and CLib5 felt confident about moving into different roles and positions, with BLib2 stating that: *I was feeling a little bit flat about where I was going and whether there were any more opportunities for me here. . . . I'm more certain about where my career might be heading since coming back from the conference.*

4.2.3.4 Feeling part of something bigger

Five of the participating librarians explained how the conference made them feel part of something bigger and less isolated (ALib2, BLib4, CLib1, DLib1, DLib4). BLib4 stated that *it felt good to know that there is a community out there I can relate to*. CLib1 realised at the conference that librarians from different sectors face similar issues, which in turn contributed to them feeling less isolated.

The connection between the key themes of social and affective conference attendance impact was evident in data analysis, as librarians gained positive emotions from attending the conference due to their interactions with other delegates. In addition,

the relationships between all three impacts of conference attendance (informational, social, and affective) are further discussed in section 4.2.4.

4.2.3.5 Motivation

The sub-theme of motivation as a benefit of conference attendance resulted from the direct questions about motivation levels in the interview schedule for the first and second interviews with librarians. Librarians were asked to rate their motivation levels during the interviews to facilitate discussion about this topic. At the first interview, they provided two ratings. The first referred to their motivation before their conference attendance, and the second to their motivation at the time of the interview (Question A19a: *On a scale from 1-10, where 1 is “not motivated at all” and 10 is “extremely motivated” can you tell me how motivated you – (1) were in your job before the conference? – (2) are at the moment?*). During the second interview, participants were asked to rate their motivation levels another time. This produced three ratings, which participants were encouraged to discuss.

Many participants reported feeling more motivated straight after the conference (11 out of 16 librarians). However, motivation levels often reverted to the pre-conference rating at the time of the second interview, which took place about seven months later. Five librarians indicated no change in their motivation levels that could be attributed to conference attendance or a slight decrease at the second interview, which they linked to other factors such as being unhappy about a new role they had taken on since their conference attendance. Ten interviewees articulated that it was difficult to separate the motivation levels linked to their conference attendance from other factors. These other factors included library restructures, the pressure of daily routines and tasks, studying while working, and personal issues.

The managers AMan₃, BMan₂ and DMan₁ all believed that conference attendance increased their staff's motivation levels. DMan₁ observed staff *always coming back really motivated, which is actually really nice*. One administrative staff member also thought that conferences are very motivating:

The other thing, especially with some of the lower level staff, is it's a great motivator. They go to a conference and they hear all this great stuff, and they come back and they're really in top gear, and their

enthusiasm does brush off on the others. It's... I'd say it's a great motivator, and it's great bringing the team together. [AAdmin]

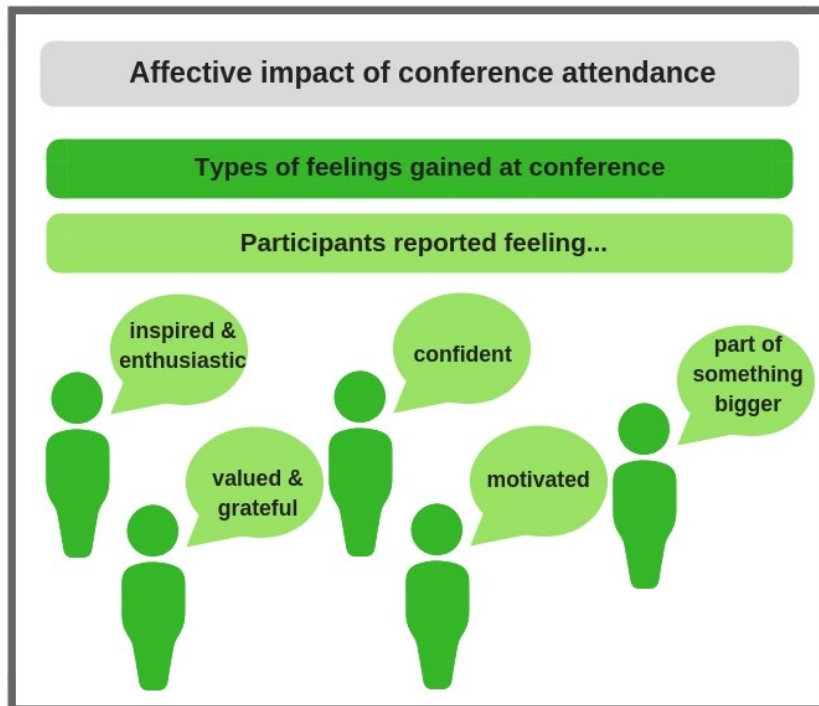
Although there was general agreement amongst librarians and managers that conferences have a positive motivational impact on attendees, half of the managers (AMan₂, BMan₁, BMan₂, BMan₃, CMan₂, DMan₃) were pessimistic about its durability. When talking about conference attendees returning to work, AMan₂ said:

You're no longer in that little bubble, you're back to reality, you have to concentrate on the tasks that you're doing, and it's hard to keep that motivation going. . . . Without constant reinforcement it's hard to keep that motivation going, definitely.

BMan₂ expressed the hope that while motivation levels might not remain elevated for long, they would still encourage librarians to communicate and share ideas from the conference. The fact that sharing and communicating ideas is also a factor that can influence conference attendance impact is discussed in section 4.3.8. AMan₁ focused on the need for *support and recharging* to maintain motivation levels, and AMan₃ referred to the potential for motivation to remain high if linked to a project. Only one of the librarians who reported having returned motivated from the conference spoke about a project they were able to channel that motivation into; after attending the conference, they re-joined ALIA and various ALIA subcommittees.

In summary, conference attendance was shown to result in many positive affective impacts for the participating librarians in this study, which are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Affective impact of conference attendance



4.2.4 Conference attendance impact: connections between key themes

This chapter has detailed participants' reflections concerning the informational, social and affective impact of their conference attendance separately, with occasional references to other sections in the chapter. However, data analysis demonstrated that these three key themes are linked and influence each other. The following section discusses these connections.

Connection between informational and social impact

At a conference, attendees are exposed to content via the people they meet and interact with, which exemplifies the connection between the key themes of informational and social conference attendance impact. Sharing and discussing content also has the potential to expand or enrich existing networks, which can occur during the conference itself, or after attendees have returned to work.

One librarian discussed how sharing ideas from a conference at their library resulted in enhanced relationships with their colleagues, and another spoke of how it widened their professional network by establishing new contacts at their university. In addition, data analysis revealed the following statements from managers that highlight networking as a means to access ideas and information:

- CMan₁ stated that *networking keeps the finger on the pulse on what's happening in our industry from an informal perspective.*
- CMan₃ articulated the expectation that networking provided their staff with additional perspectives on ideas presented at conferences.
- DMan₂ hoped that staff would *bring back greater networks so that we make friends with other libraries, so we have a bit more awareness of what other people are doing.*
- DMan₃ emphasised the importance of this sub-theme as follows: *We've been able through the networks and the kind of informal conversations that happen at conferences to get access to people, to get access to ideas, and for those people to give us document templates, reports they've written. . . . It's invaluable, really.*

Connection between informational and affective impact

Many librarians (ALib₂, BLib₂, BLib₃, DLib₁, DLib₂, DLib₄, CLib₃, CLib₅, CLib₆) discussed how being exposed to ideas and knowledge at the conference resulted in positive emotions. They used terms like *energised*, *motivated*, *inspired* and *stimulated* to describe how listening to engaging content made them feel. BLib₃ explained how their own motivation levels are *always higher after being stimulated by a learning experience*. CLib₂ referred to feeling *empowered*, because ideas at the conference were presented as *accessible and achievable by librarians like me*, and DLib₄ expressed feeling reassured when they realised at the conference that other librarians faced similar issues to themselves. The following comment describes the effect of exposure to new ideas on a more experienced member of the profession:

I've been in the industry for a long time and I've seen a lot of things come and go and it's just so, it was so inspiring to see a lot of people with fresh ideas when you think it's all been said and done. [CLib₃]

The managers AMan2, BMan2, CMan2 and DMan2 also referred to the connection between the informational and affective impacts of conference attendance. BMan2 expected staff to return motivated because they encountered ideas, different perspectives and *an awareness of things that happen in the profession*. BMan2 further stated:

[Being exposed to ideas and knowledge at the conference] opens up all sorts of possibilities for the future and you talk with other people around you about those possibilities, you know, and how good the experience was and they become enthusiastic as well. So there is that sort of transfer of energy and you do become energised from those types of experiences. [BMan2]

Furthermore, it became evident that the positive affective impact of conference attendance in the form of higher motivation levels encouraged the librarians to share and communicate content from the conference. This was previously discussed in section 4.2.3.5.

Connection between social and affective impact

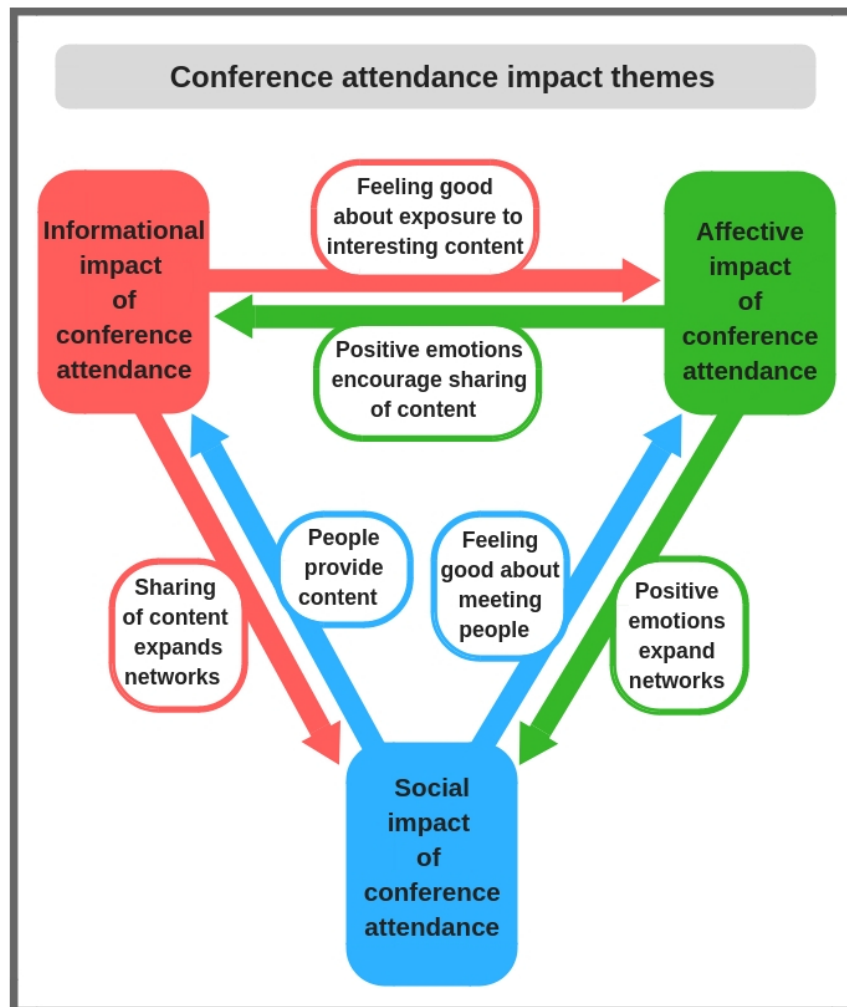
Many librarians (ALib3, BLib1, BLib2, CLib1, CLib3, CLib4, CLib6) expressed enjoying interactions with like-minded people in a relaxed atmosphere such as a conference. They stated that the conference had a *happy vibe, because everyone was willing to network and willing to share* [BLib2], or that they considered the conference to be *fun, refreshing, lovely, great, stimulating and amazing* because of the people they met. One librarian felt more confident after having made new connections at the conference, and BLib3 remarked that their enthusiasm following the conference resulted in *greater interaction with colleagues* at work – indicating the effect positive emotions can have on the libraries' internal networks.

Connection between informational, social and affective impact

Data analysis showed accounts connecting all three key themes of conference attendance impact. One librarian expressed the view that networking and exposure to ideas as well as sharing these ideas afterwards made them feel energised, and BMan1 stated that *being connected with the profession, being connected with current ideas is a motivating thing for your day to day practice*. Figure 7 illustrates the connections

between the three key themes of conference attendance impact discussed in this section.

Figure 7: Connections between key themes of conference attendance impact



4.2.5. Conference attendance impact: two minor themes

This chapter has discussed the three key themes of informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance. The following section examines two more impacts participants discussed: extending skill sets and conference attendance resulting in delegates attending or presenting papers at other conferences.

4.2.5.1 Extending skill sets

Two librarians felt that their networking skills had improved due to attending the conference, and another thought that their negotiation skills had increased after attending meetings with vendors. ALib₁, who had presented a workshop at the conference, spoke about gaining presentation skills, and DLib₁ discussed how their ability to communicate had improved by observing presentations at the conference. In addition, data analysis revealed a perceived increase in social media skills for two librarians, and a third discussed their increased ability to deal with unfamiliar technologies.

Two managers (AMan₁, CMan₁) found their staff returning with enhanced soft skills, specifically in the areas of networking and handling new technologies. In contrast, BMan₃ stated that conferences are not designed to teach new skills, pointing out that workshops and other training sessions are more useful in this regard.

4.2.5.2 Appreciation of conferences

Data analysis revealed an increased appreciation of conferences in general as another impact of attendance. Statements coded under this minor theme include:

- ALib₂, BLib₂, BLib₃, BLib₄ and DLib₄, report having enjoyed and benefitted from the experience, and subsequently encouraged their colleagues to apply for conference attendance.
- CLib₄, CLib₅ and DLib₄ expressed their desire to attend similar conferences.
- ALib₃ volunteered to be on an organising committee for an upcoming conference, and ALib₁ thought about volunteering.
- BLib₃ spoke about how applying knowledge from the conference resulted in their library agreeing to fund another conference attendance. They also described how their attendance motivated them to present a paper at a future conference.
- AMan₁ stated that their library encouraged staff members who implemented ideas and *made a contribution* to attend more conferences.

4.2.6 Reflections on the impact of conference attendance

The notion that conference attendance impact was occasionally difficult to describe and capture also featured in the data. BLib4 commented that *it can be very hard to tie a rope between the organisation and something that happens at the conference*. BMan1 stated that *conference going is a matter of facilitating possibilities rather than having immediate desired outcomes that you would expect to be delivered*, adding that they expected most conferences to have a medium to longer-term impact. CMan1 remarked that the impact of conference attendance depends on the staff member and on the quality of the conference. They also thought that the impact could be increased if more staff presented papers, rather than just attending as delegates. CMan1 also highlighted the importance of being open to any effect or benefit:

I think it's important that you don't actually limit them; that you're not sending them to a conference to say this is what I want you to come back with, that you just leave it open and therefore you – sometimes you get surprising stuff that comes back. [CMan1]

4.3 Conference attendance impact: influencing factors

The interviews with librarians and managers included many discussions concerning factors that influence the impact attributed to conference attendance. Data analysis revealed the following nine factors, which are discussed in this section:

- Attending with colleagues
- Serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts
- Social media use
- Experience, role and attributes of attendee
- Taking responsibility and planning
- Time factor
- Alignment with strategy and budget
- Dissemination of ideas
- Culture of ideas

4.3.1 Attending with colleagues

As discussed earlier in this chapter (section 4.1.1), 14 of the 16 librarians attended the conference with colleagues from their libraries. Data analysis of codes referring to the effect of attending with a colleague revealed that this factor influences informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance. Almost all librarians (13 of the 14) reflected on the positive influence this had on their experience at the event, and on the impact of the conference.

Two participants described how attending with colleagues *enriched* their experience and made it *friendlier*, as well as making them feel more *accountable*. DLib2 felt that their relationships with colleagues developed due to the shared experience, adding that it provided an opportunity to *talk about work in an out of work context*. One librarian said the following:

It gave me an opportunity to relate to staff who are not necessarily in my team or on my site, so that established or deepened relationships. I knew them all and at various times I had worked with them all, but not all currently. So it reconnected and deepened a relationship and that shared experience is a very positive thing going forward into our working relationship. [BLib 3]

Attending with colleagues was also considered beneficial because it resulted in the potential for more content to be brought back to the library. ALib1 and BLib2 chose to attend different presentations than their colleagues to be exposed to as many ideas as possible. One of the managers explained that a main reason for sending more than one staff to a conference was the increase in the number of ideas returned to the library.

Having colleagues at the event provided an opportunity for the attendees to talk about content immediately after being exposed to it, which lead to *generating ideas and talking about them straight away* [DLib2] and to a *shared understanding* [CLib6] of which ideas were relevant and could be applied at the library. This is linked to librarians having shared and communicated content they returned with as discussed in section 4.2.1., and to the influencing factor *Dissemination of ideas* as described in section 4.3.8 below.

Increased networking opportunities were also raised as an advantage, with librarians ALib₁ and CLib₂ meeting more delegates at the conference due to introductions made by colleagues. One participant encouraged their shy colleague to network and be more social, and another felt that having other staff from their library at the event made them feel more confident to try and meet other attendees.

Two participants thought that attending with colleagues can have a negative influence. One indicated that attending with an introvert colleague resulted in them *being less social* [ALib₃], and another stated that attending by oneself can be an incentive to network.

4.3.2 Serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts

Conferences have serendipitous characteristics in regards to delegates encountering relevant content and contacts, as attendees have limited control over what content they are exposed to and who they will meet. This is a factor that can influence the informational and social impacts of conference attendance. Data analysis revealed references to serendipity occurring at conferences, particularly in reference to its influence on networking (ALib₃, BLib₃, BLib₄, CLib₄). One librarian used the word *lucky* when describing how they met other professionals performing similar roles at the conference, with others using terms like *serendipitous*, *ad hoc*, *opportunistic* or *a bit hit and miss* to discuss the same influencing factor.

The incidence of serendipity when attending conferences also affected the potential usefulness of content delegates were exposed to. One librarian described the difficulty in assessing the relevance of a presentation from the title alone. Similarly, two other librarians referred to attending presentations without knowing how they related to their professional role.

Data analysis showed that managers also reflected on the idea of serendipity relating to attending a conference and its influence on possible impact. Two managers used the term *serendipity* specifically, with AMan₃ stating that *they are quite serendipitous and intangible, aren't they, the benefits of conferences*. DMan₁ echoed this thought when describing gathering ideas at a conference as a *kind of serendipitous activity*. A third manager remarked that *good fortune* is needed for ideas to fit the current context of the library when *the thing that you heard at the conference connects with something that*

you're currently doing within the library itself [BMan2]. The notion of content acquired at a conference needing to align with the library's strategic direction in order to be useful is further explored in section 4.3.7.

The serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts that is part of conference attendance was also highlighted when managers compared conferences to other professional development activities like training. DMan2 stated that *other professional development that's focused training on particular items, is a lot more instantly relevant to the work*, with another saying that courses can be more important than conferences because they address specific capabilities staff need and are therefore less serendipitous in their potential impact.

4.3.3 Social media use

Referring to social media use at the conference, ten of the 16 librarians reported having used either Twitter, Facebook or both of these social media platforms at the conference. Data analysis revealed that this influenced the informational and social impact of attendance as it encouraged and facilitated engagement with content and contacts from the conference.

Of the ten librarians who had used social media at the conference, two had read the contributions of other delegates but not posted tweets themselves. The other eight librarians used social media tools to follow conversations about presentations they were not attending and to share opinions and photographs about content. One of the librarians sent ideas to colleagues back at the library via Facebook, which links this to the factor *Dissemination of ideas* as described later in section 4.3.8. ALib3 considered that their Twitter feed provided an informal note taking tool that allowed them to save relevant content for future reference.

Librarians (ALib2, ALib3, BLib2, CLib2, DLib1) used Twitter to network, such as connecting with people previously unknown to them or with presenters. They also used social media to stay in contact with people they met or to discuss new ideas. ALib2 highlighted how communicating with people they met via Twitter allowed them to *keep up to date with what they're doing and [by doing that] I've actually managed to learn quite a lot about what's going on in the library world*.

ALib₁ reported that social media use led to more engagement with and reflection on the content presented and that communicating with other delegates using social media created conversations about ideas from the conference. Another comment focused on the effect that using social media can have on the way attendees listen to presentations: *you're kind of waiting for a little golden piece of information that you can put up* [DLib₂]. Four managers (AMan₂, AMan₃, CMan₁, CMan₂) discussed encouraging their staff to use social media during conferences, both those attending and their colleagues at the library.

4.3.4 Experience, role and attributes of attendee

Personal attributes of attendees, such as the length of their experience as practitioners in the librarianship profession, their role in the organisation and their personality influenced the informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance. The demographics collected at the beginning of the first interview with librarians were important in identifying the role of experience in librarianship. Although participants were not asked whether this made a difference to conference attendance impact, data analysis revealed that some librarians discussed this factor. Similarly, data analysis showed that participants believed that other attributes such as role or personality make a difference to the impact of attending a conference.

Two librarians thought that the length of their career and their experience in the librarianship profession influenced the impact of their conference attendance. ALib₁ found attending a conference more motivating when they were newer to the profession: *I guess in those days everything was fresh and new and exciting so I would have come back with a lot of fresh ideas*. ALib₂, being a first-time attendee, approached the event with an open mind, adding that their *judgement wasn't clouded by any past experiences*. A manager similarly observed that junior staff generally experience conferences as being more motivating. BMan₃ and BLib₃ thought that networking was easier for experienced conference attendees because *you tend to see the same people* [BMan₃].

Six librarians (ALib₁, BLib₂, BLib₃, CLib₁, CLib₂, CLib₆) spoke about the level or role of staff as another element of this influencing factor. This was evident in the context of communicating or implementing ideas in a non-managerial role. Two librarians stated *I'm not a manager* and *I'm not in the management circle* as reasons why they felt their ideas had not been heard and implemented. ALib₁ reflects on this factor as follows:

I'm actually in a position now to motivate people and to run with new ideas. I can do it. I mean, a few years ago I wasn't in that role and I guess I would've had to knock on a few doors to get people to listen to me. [ALib1]

CLib2 echoed this statement when describing how managers are generally in a better position to action ideas because they know more about the library's strategic directions and it is easier for them to initiate change. This is linked to the influencing factor of *Alignment with strategy and budget* as later discussed in section 4.3.7. BLib3 considered it beneficial that staff from different levels attend a conference because *we all have different groups we can influence*. Two managers also identified the level and role of staff as an influencing factor when discussing their expectations of conference attendance impact. One of them stated that occasionally, good ideas are not implemented due to the staff member's position in the hierarchy of the library, that is, they are employed in a role where they cannot easily influence others to enact change.

Concerning attendees' personality traits and how these can have an effect, CLib4 thought that networking was more challenging for introverted people, stating that *the thought of walking into a room full of people you don't know filled them with horror*. Two managers echoed this concern, with AMan3 saying:

If it's a traditional conference where you're sitting listening to conference papers and then having a morning tea and an afternoon tea, that kind of format, it's only quite assertive people who might make new friends or new contacts; it's quite easy to talk to the people you know or hide in the toilets, and not necessarily make those networks. [AMan3]

4.3.5 Taking responsibility and planning

As demonstrated in section 4.2.1, the data contained many references to informational conference attendance impact, with the librarians frequently referring to having returned with ideas and information. Data analysis showed that taking responsibility and planning was a factor that influenced the informational impact of a conference, because it affected the possibility of ideas being implemented in the library.

Participants discussed the importance of taking responsibility for the implementation of ideas. They thought that it was *completely up to the individual* [CLib6] to initiate actions, or that it was a *combination of responsibility between the person who comes back from the conference as well as management* [CLib2]. Librarians highlighted that this responsibility was related to reflecting on ideas and planning. DLib2 referred to the need for a *project plan* or *framework*, which they thought would aid staff *to get ideas off the ground*. CLib4 raised the same point, while BLib4 perceived that a lack of planning was evident at their library, as ideas were rarely *applied in a structured, systematic way*.

CMan1 commented that they *trust that the individual will be a little bit proactive and push those ideas forward because they have a vested interest in them going forward*, and explained that conferences only *plant seeds and give an overview of new processes without going into too much depth*. They added that attendees cannot *just walk away and implement ideas* [CMan1], but need to engage with them and plan actions they want to take. Another manager reflected on the importance of supporting staff during the planning and reflection process after they had attended a conference.

4.3.6 Time factor

The time delegates had available after they returned from the conference influenced the informational impact of conference attendance. Delegates needed time to follow up on ideas and to share and communicate content from the conference in presentations and via other communication channels.

Having time to focus on ideas from the conference was raised by five of the 16 librarians (BLib3, BLib4, CLib3, CLib4, DLib2). Participants discussed finding it *challenging* to find time to think about the content they gathered at the conference or reflected on how other projects at work quickly took *higher priority*. Two librarians were particularly outspoken about this issue. DLib2 expressed feeling slightly negative about their conference attendance due to the lack of time to engage with content they had obtained:

You feel quite time-poor to put some of these really great ideas into practice because you do come back and then the semester picks up and you've got a lot of work to do. So [I have returned with] a feeling like 'This is all really great and inspiring, motivating but I've also got

my normal job to get on with. How can I engage with this awesome stuff that I've been hearing about? [DLib2]

At the time of the second interview, the same participant reported not having sufficient time to think about the conference. They indicated that it was too late to engage with any content obtained because *the period of reflection should have happened in those first few months* [DLib2]. BLib3 had similar thoughts, stating *you need another day or two without your normal responsibilities to do that [conference reflection]*. They added that delegates lose momentum for new ideas if their institution does not provide them with time for planning, and suggested creating an action plan template to assist with this. BLib3 also reported that lack of time made it difficult for them to keep in touch with contacts made at the conference because they had a lot of *catching up to do job-wise*.

A third of the managers (AMan1, AMan3, CMan1, DMan1) recognised the importance of support and resources in this context, commenting on the need to ensure *organisational support* and *provisions for taking time* after staff had attended a conference. AMan3 witnessed staff losing the energy they gained from the conference once *the demands of the daily workload kick in*, with another manager highlighting that occasionally, ideas take a long time to be implemented:

People are quite enthused and very upbeat, ..., but then once we apply the reality check, sometimes a little bit of that – some of the shine's rubbed off and the reality that wheels grind very slowly, so that even if you did come back with something that was a great idea and we tried to implement it straight away, there are other forces that require us to go through some hoops, some bureaucracy or red tape. [CMan1]

Lack of time and the demands of roles and routine tasks also prevented report-back presentations from happening for many participants. There was strong agreement amongst nine of the 16 librarians that presentations were one of the best means to facilitate sharing content from the conference, and in all four libraries presentations were part of report-back policies. However, for eight of 16 librarians the presentation they had planned did not eventuate. In all instances, participants explained that this was due to a lack of time. Some librarians did not have enough time to think about and plan their presentations, and some managers lacked time to encourage their staff to

organise and deliver a presentation. For one librarian, there was insufficient time set aside for their report-back presentation at the library staff meeting. There was a sense of frustration associated with these situations; especially when staff had started to plan and organise their thoughts for presentations and were looking forward to sharing ideas with their colleagues. It is unclear what kind of influence these feelings of frustration had on the general affective impact of conference attendance, which as reported in section 4.2.3 encompassed various positive aspects for attendees.

4.3.7 Alignment with strategy and budget

Librarians and managers (BLib₃, CLib₂, DMan₁, DMan₂) emphasised the importance of ideas obtained at the conference aligning with the library's organisational strategy and budget to facilitate implementation. This links this influencing factor with the informational impact of conference attendance. In addition, this factor can also influence the motivation levels of staff, and therefore the affective impact of attendance.

BLib₃ stated that some ideas from a conference require a fundamental shift in the library's thinking. Ideas of this nature are often therefore less likely to be implemented. Two managers (DMan₂, CMan₁) noted that sometimes an attendee's motivation levels can be diminished if their idea is complex and needs to align with *multiple levels of management and different people who have different expectations of what the library can and should do* [DMan₂]. The following statement from BLib₃ was also coded under the influencing factor *Alignment with strategy and budget*. It demonstrates the link to *Experience, role and attributes of attendee* as discussed in section 4.3.4, and acknowledges that managers are more likely to be aware of the library's strategy and budget:

Managers have got a lot of . . . strategic directions that they may be part of or may have imposed upon them. So it depends whether the ideas that come from the conference might fit into that overall scheme and so it's having a sense of the bigger picture, and . . . so you need to have some respect that the manager might be making certain decisions to go in a direction [with that idea] that is not the way that you might think when you are brimful of enthusiasm and motivation from the conference. [BLib₃]

Ideas gained at a conference that required additional funding also needed to be feasible within the context of current budget allocations to be actioned. This point was raised by several librarians and managers (BLib3, DLib4, CMan1, CMan3, DMan2). DMan2 used the term *idealistic-lofty* to describe ideas that require a lot of staff time and funding and therefore need to be approved by staff in management roles.

4.3.8 Dissemination of ideas

Librarians and managers emphasised how disseminating ideas is important if staff want to increase the chances of implementing ideas from a conference. In addition, they discussed different mechanisms and the advantages of these mechanisms to disseminate ideas. Closely related to the dissemination of ideas as an influencing factor is the sub-theme *Content is shared and communicated* (section 4.2.1.2) as an informational impact of conference attendance. However, statements coded under *Dissemination of ideas* not only describe that content was shared and communicated, but focus on the importance and process of dissemination and its influence on informational conference attendance impact.

A number of participants (ALib2, BLib2, BLib3, AMan2, CMan1, DMan1, DMan3) referred to the importance of disseminating ideas from a conference. CMan1 noted that ideas need to be discussed widely in the library to give more library staff the opportunity to *come on board* and help with *pushing the idea forward*, which then resulted in *more likelihood of success* regarding implementation. DMan3 emphasised the importance of capturing ideas and exposing them to more staff to get to the *sticky ideas* – the ones that show potential and are supported by a wide range of staff. Librarian BLib3 expressed the view that they could not implement ideas obtained at the conference on their own and therefore needed to *engage with other people* who might then *hatch the ideas*.

The librarians and managers talked about various mechanisms available to staff to disseminate ideas:

- Presentations (Library A, B, C and D)
- Online ideas index (Library D)

- Post-conference survey to encourage engagement with and dissemination of ideas (Library C)
- Informal discussions (Library A, C and D)
- Contributions to newsletters and staff blogs (Library B and C)
- Working groups and internal committees (Library A and D)
- Online platforms and shared, collaborative documents (Library B and C)
- Brief reports at team meetings (Library A)

In all four libraries, presentations to colleagues were the most popular mechanism to disseminate ideas from a conference. Concerning the format and focus of presentations, one librarian commented that at their library, *you don't have to necessarily talk about how you are going to apply anything* [DLib2], and a manager from the same library agreed. In contrast, staff at Library C were encouraged to reflect on how content from the conference aligned with current projects, rather than just summarise the content of conference papers. The notion of ideas needing to align with current practices and projects at the library links this factor to *Alignment with strategy and budget*, as described in section 4.3.7.

Nine out of 16 librarians commented positively on presentations to colleagues as a mechanism to share ideas and to provide staff with *food for thought* [DLib4]. They all described presentations at their libraries as interactive, with comments and questions from other staff adding value to the sessions and facilitating wide distribution and discussion of content. CLib4 referred to presentations as the biggest influencing factor on the impact of conference attendance, because of their potential to serve as platforms to *pass your takeaways on*. DMan3 thought that presentations could assist in creating momentum and bringing about change, because they facilitated the distribution of ideas to other staff who *might see different opportunities with those things*. However, for some librarians presentations did not eventuate due to a lack of time, as previously discussed in section 4.3.6.

Participants remarked on how preparing for a presentation provided them with an additional opportunity to pause and reflect on ideas and information they had gathered at the conference:

- BLib₄ described presenting as reflective practice, saying *it makes you think about what you have been doing*.
- CLib₁ said that preparing for the presentation *reinforced everything and made me think about what we could take away from the conference*.
- DLib₁ engaged *more deeply* with content and tried to return *with as much information as possible* because they knew they needed to present once they returned to work.
- AMan₃ stated that knowing a presentation is expected *sharpens attendees' focus at the conference*.
- DMan₃ thought that presentations helped staff to clarify ideas because *you don't fully understand something until you have to explain it to someone else*.

Data analysis also revealed other mechanisms the four libraries used to disseminate ideas. One library had implemented an online ideas index, which allowed staff members *to propose a service modification or a new service* [DMan₁]. The analysis of documents from that institution indicated that management was committed to responding to each staff member using the register, with the aim of encouraging participation. Data analysis indicated that this process was open and transparent, with ideas, as well as any progress or resulting projects made available to all library staff *so that any staff member can review what is being proposed and how it is being managed* [DMan₁] by the senior management team. The library also appeared to be committed to providing staff from all levels with the opportunity to be part of a project team if their idea was implemented.

At another library, the submission of a post-conference survey was required after conference attendance. The survey encouraged staff to reflect on their own and the library's expectations, and to formulate *exactly what they got out of their conference attendance, and how they intend to put that into practice in the workplace* [CMan₃]. The survey also had the additional purpose of allowing staff *to make recommendations to the library's executive team regarding any follow-up action* [CDoc₁]. Staff were asked to think of three *take-aways* they brought back from the conference to their workplace, and to use the survey to communicate these to the library's management team. The document included questions such as: *What follow-up, if any, would be most useful for you?* and *How do you plan to apply the take-aways in your work situation?* [CDoc₁],

which encouraged staff to reflect on ideas and plan possible implementation. In using the term “take-aways”, the library defined the scope of what staff might reflect on broadly.

Informal discussions were another mechanism used by the libraries to disseminate ideas from conferences. Four managers (AMan₂, CMan₂, CMan₃, DMan₃) reported having informal discussions with their staff upon their return, with one of them speaking about wanting *to reinforce with the staff that I am interested in what they're saying and that we would like to be able to benefit from the experiences that they've had* [DMan₃].

Participants also referred to other means of disseminating ideas, without providing much detail or discussion. Librarians from libraries B and C spoke about how staff were encouraged to share ideas in the internal newsletter or on the staff blog. At Libraries A and D, staff communicated content in working groups or internal committees, and a librarian at Library B described how their team used online platforms and collaborative documents to share ideas. At Library C, take-aways are recorded in a document available to all staff, which resulted in further dissemination of ideas. A manager at Library A spoke about encouraging their staff to give brief reports at team meetings after attending a conference.

Despite the diverse dissemination methods noted by many participants, some believed their libraries lacked a formal process to share ideas. One manager described the process as *ad hoc* [AMan₃], and another said that providing staff with tools for content sharing is *probably the weakest part of what we do in terms of moving forward with anything that comes back* [CMan₁].

4.3.9 Culture of ideas

Data analysis revealed that a positive culture of ideas in the library can influence the informational impact of conference attendance. If libraries were receptive to the dissemination and discussion of ideas, the potential for ideas from conferences to be used and implemented increased. All three librarians from Library D and almost all librarians from Library B and Library C used positive terms to describe their organisation's culture of ideas. There was less evidence of this finding for Library A, with only one librarian commenting positively on the culture of ideas at their library.

Nine of the 16 librarians expressed the belief that their library encouraged disseminating and developing ideas. They stated that *the library is a very good communicative workplace, the channels are open and doors are not closed on you unnecessarily* [CLib6], and that they felt confident to share ideas because they were not afraid of being rejected. Another librarian described their manager as *supportive and receptive to ideas* [DLib4].

DMan3 discussed the need to communicate regularly to staff that their ideas are welcome, and to offer an explanation if their suggestions are not taken on board by the library. This latter point is expressed succinctly in the following quote, with the reference to level 4 or 5 staff being to lower-level or unqualified staff working in the library:

...if someone has the drive and the initiative to suggest an idea, we need to be very mindful of the fact that they've almost taken a risk or a chance in putting that forward, particularly if they're a Level 4 or Level 5, and we need to be very respectful of that and to give them a very careful response, firstly acknowledge that they're making a contribution, and if we're going to say that we can't do it, to be very clear about why and to not dismiss things out of hand. So trying to, as I say, respect the fact that people have made a contribution, so that we foster that on an ongoing basis; you know, the "no" can be a little hard for people to take and might dissuade them from engaging with that process in the future, and that's certainly what we're trying to avoid. [DMan3]

Data analysis also revealed some negative remarks concerning the libraries' culture of ideas. Five librarians (ALib2, BLib4, CLib1, CLib2, CLib6) discussed their perceptions of low staff engagement. BLib4 referred to staff at their institution as *disengaged* and described how this affected staff morale, general motivation levels and willingness to listen to, explore and disseminate ideas. Two librarians spoke about how their ideas were largely met with indifference from other staff and managers, with CLib1 remarking that *there's a bit of negativity sometimes if you do voice your opinion*, and CLib2 stating that the library was not interested in what they had gained from the conference because there are *different priorities*.

Some participants discussed challenges they faced when disseminating ideas from the conference, with comments suggesting that it *can be difficult to get ideas heard in other teams* [CLib1] and that there can be a feeling of *why are you telling me what needs to be done* [AMan2]. Another librarian perceived the fact that ideas were not communicated widely in their library as a problem. ALib2 was particularly articulate about this, stating that they did not see any opportunity to communicate ideas because *initiative is not encouraged* and they were seen as *outside their boundaries* if they suggested ideas. Furthermore, this participant described how *no one really showed much interest* in their conference attendance, and referred to their library as *very set in their ways* [ALib2] and not open to new ideas and change.

Linked to the importance of having a culture of ideas was the transparency and consistency of processes in regards to conference attendance at the libraries. Data analysis revealed instances of reports written by librarians not being circulated, or only circulated at the discretion of the supervising manager (BAdmin). In another case, ideas from the conference were captured in a document available to all staff to facilitate discussions, however, it was unclear how many staff knew of this document or its location (CLib5).

4.3.10 Summary of influencing factors

As discussed in the previous sections, this research identified nine factors that influence the impact of conference attendance. Table 13 provides a summary of which key themes of conference attendance impact (informational, social or affective) these factors influenced.

Table 13: Factors influencing conference attendance impact

Attending with colleagues		
Influences	Informational impact	Facilitates staff returning with more ideas Increases visibility of ideas at library
	Social impact	Makes networking at conference easier (though might also result in delegates networking less)
	Affective impact	Makes conference appear friendlier and staff feeling more accountable
Serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts		

Influences	Informational impact	Influences what kind of content delegates are exposed to
	Social impact	Influences who delegates meet and connect with
Social media use		
Influences	Informational impact	Changes the way delegates share and engage with content
	Social impact	Facilitates connecting and socialising with other delegates
Experience, role and attributes of attendee		
Influences	Informational impact	Librarians newer to the profession more likely to find ideas innovative Role or level of staff influences chance of ideas being discussed and implemented
	Social impact	Assertive, extroverted delegates find networking easier
	Affective impact	Librarians in early stages of their career more likely to find conferences motivating
Taking responsibility and planning		
Influences	Informational impact	Increases the possibility of ideas being implemented
Time factor		
Influences	Informational impact	Increases the possibility of ideas being disseminated and/or implemented
Alignment with strategy and budget		
Influences	Informational impact	Increases the possibility of ideas being implemented
	Affective impact	Delegates' motivation decreases if ideas are not pursued due to strategy or budget
Dissemination of ideas		
Influences	Informational impact	Increases the possibility of ideas being implemented
Culture of ideas		
Influences	Informational impact	Increases the possibility of ideas being implemented

In addition to influencing informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance, the nine influencing factors are also linked to each other. Table 14 details the connections between these influencing factors.

Table 14: Connections between influencing factors

Attending with colleagues & Dissemination of ideas
Colleagues who attended together are able to disseminate the same ideas, giving them more weight and momentum
Serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts & Alignment with strategy and budget
Discovery of ideas at a conference is serendipitous, therefore staff cannot control if ideas they encounter align or do not align with the library's strategy and budget
Experience, role and attributes of attendee & Alignment with strategy and budget
Staff in management roles have more insight into the library's strategy and budget
Social media use & Dissemination of ideas
Staff can use social media to disseminate ideas to their colleagues while at the conference
Time factor & Taking responsibility and planning
Staff need time after their attendance to reflect on ideas and plan what actions to take
Time factor & Dissemination of ideas
Staff need time after their attendance to disseminate ideas, for instance with presentations
Culture of ideas & Dissemination of ideas
A culture of ideas provides opportunities for staff to disseminate ideas from the conference

4.4 Comparison of data sources

The researcher used different sources to collect data relevant to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted twice with participating librarians, and once with managers and administrative staff. Collected documents were another element of the study's data collection phase. This section will describe how the different methods contributed to the key themes and minor themes of conference attendance impact, their sub-themes and to the nine influencing factors detailed in this chapter.

The average time between the conference and the first interview with librarians was 24 days, while the second interview was conducted on average seven months later. During the coding stage of data analysis codes from interviews with librarians were annotated to indicate whether they referred to the first round of interviews with librarians or the second. Accordingly, the researcher was able to verify at the end of the coding process which themes (key themes, minor themes, sub-themes or influencing factors) came from each dataset. It was established that the three key themes of conference attendance impact, most of their sub-themes, the two minor themes and the eight of the nine influencing factors were discussed in both interviews. Library staff raised the same themes and highlighted the same issues during the first and second interview with three exceptions:

- The sub-theme relating to different types of delegates participants meet (*Conference attendance impact: social*, sub-theme *Types of contacts made*, section 4.2.2.1) was raised predominantly during the first interview.
- The sub-theme of a potential future use of contacts made at the conference (*Conference attendance impact: social*, sub-theme *Outcomes of networking*, section 4.2.2.2) was referred to exclusively during the second interview.
- The influencing factor *Attending with colleagues* (*Conference attendance impact: influencing factors*, section 4.3.1) was discussed mainly during the second interview.

The three key themes of conference attendance impact presented in this chapter (informational, social, affective) featured in interviews with librarians and managers. Data from the interviews with administrative staff and from collected documents rarely

contributed to the three key themes, two minor themes, sub-themes and influencing factors. Instead they provided context to the findings in the form of information about policies and procedures at the four libraries.

The researcher also analysed all themes presented in this thesis to establish whether they were raised by a specific group of participants; for example, by interviewees from only one library, or by interviewees with certain characteristics (e.g. first-time conference attendees). The researcher found that all three key themes of conference attendance impact, the two minor themes, all sub-themes and influencing factors were present in interviews with participants from two or more libraries.

4.5 Answer to research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

This research discovered three key themes and two minor themes that explain the phenomenon of conference attendance impact in the context of Australian librarians and libraries. The three key themes of conference attendance impact identified included informational, social, and affective.

In reference to informational impact, three different types of content participants obtained from conferences were identified and described. This included original and unconventional content (*thinking outside the box*); content that provided perspective on established ideas (*the bigger picture*); and affirmative content (*benchmarking*). Original and unconventional content, which is defined as content previously unknown to the participants or ideas they did not expect, was the most visible and tangible type of content obtained. Content that provided perspective on already established ideas is another important sub-theme, as it changed attendees' views and influenced ongoing projects. Finally, the worth of affirmative content for an organisation wanting to compare its efforts and successes to others was established.

The descriptions of three types of actions taken with content or ideas from the conference are other sub-themes detailed in this study's findings. First, librarians spoke about using and applying content. They provided concrete examples of implementing ideas and using information from the conference to change ongoing projects. Librarians also discussed how content from the conference often changed shape over time. Second, participants referred to having shared and communicated ideas. Finally, the potential future use of ideas from the conference was described.

The second key theme of impact revealed in the study's findings is the social impact of attending a conference. All librarians participating in the research discussed having networked, and many referred to networking as a significant and enjoyable part of the event. Conferences provide opportunities to connect delegates with people they would not usually meet, with people in similar roles, with people with similar interests, or with known people – which included people the participants had previously only connected with online. Networking at the conference not only expanded attendees' networks but occasionally their colleagues' networks as well. Some librarians had re-connected with contacts made at the conference after they returned to work, with others pointing out the possibility of new networks being useful at a later stage.

The affective impact of conference attendance is the third key theme identified in the study's findings. References to emotions relating to attendance were assigned to five sub-themes, with feeling inspired and enthusiastic being raised by two-thirds of the librarians. Participants also discussed feeling valued and grateful, more confident and that the conference made them feel part of something bigger. Most of the librarians also reported increased levels of motivation after attending the conference. However, the librarians noted the difficulty in attributing changes in motivation levels to conference attendance alone, emphasising that other factors may exert influence too. Participants were sceptical regarding the sustainability of increased motivation levels after conference attendance. They discussed the need for this motivation to be channelled to a concrete project, and that staff needed to be supported to implement ideas in order for increased motivation to have a lasting impact.

The three key themes of informational, social and affective conference attendance impact provide a detailed and comprehensive answer to the first research question (*What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in*

Australia?). The study also established that the three themes of informational, social and affective impact are linked. Being exposed to interesting content and like-minded people at a conference leads to attendees feeling enthusiastic, inspired and more confident. The sharing and discussing of ideas and positive emotions associated with the conference increases interactions between staff and strengthens and expands participants' networks. Two minor themes of conference attendance impact were also presented in the study's finding. These included the widening of attendees' skill sets and a willingness to promote conference attendance to colleagues.

The findings of the study answer the first research question (*What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?*) with three key themes, two minor themes and many sub-themes as described in this chapter. One question in the first interview schedule for library staff referred specifically to the impact on the library (A22: *Did your conference attendance change the way the library handles things?*). During the second interview with library staff, two questions were asked that considered impact on the individual and impact on the institution separately (B1: *Now that a little time has passed since the conference, what would you say the biggest impact of the conference has been on you?*, B2: *What would you say the biggest impact of your conference attendance has been on your library?*). The interview schedule for managers also included a question relating to conference attendance impact on the institution (C11: *What do you expect the impact of conferences attendance of your staff to be on your library?*). Although interview questions explicitly mentioned the impact of conference attendance on librarians and libraries, participants' responses did not differentiate between the impact of conference attendance on the attendee and the impact on the institution.

The second research question refers to factors that influence the impact of conference attendance (*Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?*). The findings of this study answer this question by identifying nine influencing factors. Attending with colleagues influenced the impact of conference attendance, as did social media use. The serendipitous nature of content and contacts delegates were exposed to at the event was important, as well as the experience, role and attributes of the attendee. Time to reflect and plan after returning to work, and the attendees' willingness to assume responsibility for impact as another significant factor identified. The alignment of ideas with the libraries' strategy and budget and how widely they were disseminated was

identified to influence informational impact. Finally, the culture of ideas at the libraries was recognised as an additional factor that influenced the impact of conference attendance.

4.6 Summary of chapter

In line with the socio-constructivist paradigm that informed the research design of this study, this chapter first explored the context of the interviewees. This was achieved by detailed descriptions of the characteristics of participants, their libraries and parent institutions, as well as the conferences they attended and subsequently discussed during interviews.

The chapter discussed three key themes in relation to the impact of conference attendance that were identified during data analysis. The key themes of informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance were presented and explored, with sections delineating sub-themes and connections between them. Nine factors that influence conference attendance impact were also presented, and the links between these factors were detailed. In the last section of the chapter, the researcher demonstrated how the findings of the study answered the research questions for the study. The findings presented in this chapter are summarised in Table 15.

Table 15: Summary of findings

Impact of conference attendance	
Key theme: Informational impact of conference attendance	
Sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Types of content gained at conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Original and unconventional ▪ Affirmative Content ▪ Perspective on established ideas ○ Actions taken with content from conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content is used and applied ▪ Content is shared and communicated ▪ Content is potentially used at a later stage 	
Key theme: Social impact of conference attendance	
Sub-themes:	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Types of networking at conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting people with similar roles/interests ▪ Networking with diverse group of delegates ▪ Meeting known and unknown people ○ Networking resulted in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expansion of attendee's network ▪ Expansion of colleagues' networks ▪ Use of contacts, and potential future use 	<p>The three key themes of conference attendance impact are linked and influence each other.</p>
<p>Key theme: Affective impact of conference attendance</p>	
<p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants reported feeling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inspired and enthusiastic ▪ Valued and grateful ▪ Confident ▪ Motivated ▪ Part of something bigger 	
<p>Minor theme: Extending skill sets</p>	
<p>Minor theme: Appreciation of conferences</p>	
<p>Influencing factors</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending with colleagues • Serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts • Social media use • Experience, role and attributes of attendee • Taking responsibility and planning • Time factor • Alignment with strategy and budget • Dissemination of ideas • Culture of ideas 	<p>As with the key themes of conference attendance impact, the nine influencing factors are connected.</p>

5 Discussion

This study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

Previous chapters introduced the research topic, reviewed the literature relevant to the study, described the methodological approach and defined and explored the different themes that data analysis revealed: the three key themes of conference attendance impact and their sub-themes, the two minor themes of conference attendance impact, and nine influencing factors. In this chapter and in Chapter Six, the term *themes* will be used occasionally to encompass all these findings to increase readability of the text, unless the sections refer to specific findings. The chapter refers to *librarians* and their *libraries* when discussing the results, but also uses the terms *delegates/attendees* and *organisation/institution* to emphasise that the findings are discussed in a wider context.

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the wider literature and argues for their relevance and significance in the field of library and information science (LIS). It presents broad reflections on the study's findings as well as discussing concrete implications. The chapter commences with a wide viewpoint (5.1 *Conferences and conference attendance impact*), followed by a focus on librarianship (5.2 *Librarianship and conferences*), and more concentrated approaches to the discussion of results (5.3 *Responsibility for conference attendance impact* and 5.4 *Contribution to knowledge*). Finally, the chapter describes the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for future research in section 5.5.

The chapter begins with an overarching consideration of the unique nature of conferences. The benefits of face-to-face conferences in contrast to virtual events are discussed in the context of the study's findings. Conference attendance impact is described as impact that can be intangible, invisible, and slow to eventuate. The chapter also explores the fact that occasionally, impact has not eventuated when conference

attendance is evaluated and measured. Next, the researcher focuses on conference attendance impact in the profession of librarianship. The landscape of conferences in librarianship is another focus of the chapter, and the importance of innovation, benchmarking activities, networks and affective outcomes for the profession is deliberated. The question of responsibility for impact is then explored, and the chapter reflects on the shared responsibility of the individual and their institution. The chapter emphasises the study's original and significant contribution to knowledge on this topic in LIS, and reflects on the findings in reference to the impact of conference attendance on individual delegates versus the impact on their institutions. Implications for best practice, a conference attendance framework based on the research findings, and the study's limitations are then presented. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conferences and conference attendance impact

This section describes conferences as unique events that provide opportunities and possibilities that differentiate them from other professional development activities. These descriptions are based on the study's findings and literature that complements these results. Next this section discusses how conference attendance impact can be intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. Finally this section concludes by considering the benefits of face-to-face conferences in comparison to virtual events.

5.1.1 The nature of conferences

Conferences are events that offer a unique mix of possibilities and possible impacts. This study shows how conferences expose attendees to new information and ideas, which are often original and unconventional. Content from conferences can be used to compare one institution's efforts to others and provides perspectives on established ideas. The study found that exposure to ideas can lead to an informational impact of attendance. Vendor exhibitions also provide distinctive content to delegates and represent a platform to learn about new products which is unique as *you would never ever get another opportunity where it's all in one place at one time* [CLib5]. The mix of content delegates are exposed to at a conference contains many kinds of information and ideas; conference programs offer *a bit of everything for everyone* [DLib4]. In addition, this thesis established that the informational and social aspects are linked –

conferences not only provide unique content, but a platform to discuss this content with like-minded peers. Harrison (2010) writes that conferences allow “one to learn about many or all current trends in the field in a relatively brief time span. Additionally, they provide the opportunity to have specific questions answered by colleagues who are experts on the topic” (p. 265).

Conferences provide unique opportunities to create networks, which can support staff, facilitate the exchange of ideas and lead to collaborations between institutions. The social aspect of conferences results in delegates having the opportunity to mix with a diverse group of practitioners. The participants of this study reported having networked at the conference and described how they interacted with many kinds of delegates. They also pointed out that conferences provide access to delegates they otherwise would not have met. Thull (2014) writes that the effect of meeting other practitioners who face different challenges “provides a perspective and appreciation that cannot be underestimated” (p. 18). Social impact of conference attendance can result in delegates’ as well as their colleagues’ networks being expanded.

This study found that conferences are inspiring and energising events. Participants associated conference attendance with increased motivation and it made them feel *part of something bigger* - the industry and their peers who share common goals. Miller (2002) explains how conferences facilitate networking, which “provides new ideas and relieves feelings of isolation” (p. 39). Conferences were found to be enjoyable and fun, providing a unique mix of input from inspiring keynotes, presentations, panels and other means of communicating ideas. Lee & Min (2013b) believe that the “emotional value is considered an essential assessment for conventions because attendees . . . are excited and pleased to learn and exchange knowledge” (p. 403). The participants of this study described many emotional benefits they associated with the conference. They discussed how exposure to original ideas and like-minded peers added to the positive affective impact of attendance.

The informational, social and affective key themes of impact were found to be linked. The following statement is from a librarian who has worked in the librarianship profession for over 25 years. They had attended many conferences, and talked about the unique character of these events as follows:

For me, conferences represent a real privilege to be able to hear a lot of accumulated experience and wisdom in the one convenient spot, all packaged nice and neatly for me. All I need to do is turn up and pay attention. And I enjoy the opportunity to reflect on such input from the wider profession and it makes me think of the bigger picture, not just of my particular job. So it renews my enthusiasm to share not only personally what I learnt but to share how important I think it is for other librarians or other library staff to have that same opportunity, to take time out from their normal job and step aside and look at a whole range of different things that challenge you, inspire you, cause you to reflect about how you can do your own work better, how you can collaborate with other people, and just enjoy the rewards of being a librarian in such a great profession by attending a conference. [BLib3]

The statement above highlights how conferences offer unique opportunities, which result in a range of possible impacts on the delegates and their organisations. This study presented the key themes of informational, social and affective impacts of conference attendance, and described numerous manifestations of their effects. The findings of this research identified that most attendees and their organisations benefit from conference attendance.

Not all attendees will benefit from informational, social and affective impacts of conference attendance, for example, it is possible that ideas from a conference may not be implemented. This might be because delegates had no time for planning and reflection, or the organisation's culture does not support the dissemination and discussion of ideas. However, the unique mix of benefits conferences offer can still facilitate social or affective impact for the same delegate. They might return to their workplaces full of enthusiasm, or have made important contacts that will be useful to themselves and their institution in the future.

Another unique aspect of conferences that facilitates impact is the fact that often, they provide delegates with the opportunity to be away from their usual work environment. Egri (1992) writes that conferences "offer a temporary release . . . from the cares, worries and responsibilities of normal life" (p. 90). Parker and Weik (2014) describe how

conferences provide an “imperative to get away from home . . . Academics rarely attend conferences with their children, spouses, elderly relatives or pets. They tend to leave their cares behind, in the hands of their partner or extended family” (p. 170). The participants of this study similarly reported that conferences provide space to consider work matters in a relaxed atmosphere, where other needs are taken care of, and the responsibilities and pressures of their roles are temporarily suspended.

The location of a conference can also positively contribute to the delegates’ perception of the event. This thesis reported how attendees appreciated being in a different city, a point also made by Cutting (1995) who describes how the location of a conference can be relaxing and pleasant for attendees. This adds to the uniqueness of conferences, as other professional development activities such as reading scholarly journals or training might not provide the same opportunity.

This study discussed the serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts at the conference as an influencing factor. Conferences are events that provide a multitude of content and mix of delegates. This results in their impact having a serendipitous element – no attendee can take in all the ideas on offer, and it is unlikely they can meet all other delegates. Participants used terms such as *discovery* to describe why conferences are enjoyable: *It was like this discovery sort of feeling. Discovering new people, new things, new information* [ALib3]. The content or the contacts the delegate will engage with is left to chance, which results in the events containing an element of pleasant unexpectedness, and sets them apart from other forms of professional development.

One of the unique aspects of a conference is the variety of opportunities offered, and their capacity to cater for a broad range of needs and interests. Delegates with different attributes, working in different roles, having different needs and levels of experience can benefit from attendance. As highlighted in this study, even more experienced professionals can be inspired by cutting-edge ideas presented in keynote presentations. Conferences can be a more comfortable platform for introverted and early career librarians to network. They also provide an occasion for practitioners to reflect on their current workflows by exposing them to presentations from colleagues involved in similar projects, who candidly share their successes and failures. Finally conferences provide vendor exhibitions for practitioners working in acquisition to learn about new

products and network, or facilitate meetings between delegates working for the same organisation in different locations.

Some conferences are more targeted to particular audiences than others. For example, in librarianship, the New Librarians Symposium conference series is “geared towards students and new Library and Information Sector professionals but is open to everyone” (NLS, n.d.), while the annual conference organised by the Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA) is another targeted at a specific audience of librarianship professionals. Two participants in this study had attended either the New Librarians Symposium or the ALLA annual conference. The following statement exemplifies how a targeted conference can be unique in fulfilling specific needs:

Sometimes, I think the conference is better than anything, for example, when we have graduate librarians, trainee librarians, we do have a program for them to attend the new librarians' conference, that's really invaluable to them in terms of networking, and not only that, but participating, sometimes, in national initiatives for new librarians. We had a couple of graduate librarians here, who, as a result of going to the new librarians' conference, they got continuing contact with one of the presenters who was presenting a very well-known career-monitoring blog or software, which they both participated in, and made national input, and used it for their own career development records, and they both moved on, not just as a result of that, of course, to very good positions, so, sometimes the conference is the thing, there's no doubt about that. [AMani]

While the content of targeted conferences is more relevant to a certain group of practitioners and fulfils a specific need, they still provide diverse benefits to all attendees. Conferences provide opportunities for a mix of informational, social and affective impact on many different levels. This makes them unique compared to other professional development activities such as training sessions; workshops; reading industry-specific literature in journals; or social media use. Reading a scholarly journal article lacks the social aspect conferences offer, and workshops or training lack the same abundance of opportunity to discover unexpected ideas, which, in addition, can be enjoyable and stimulating. Furthermore, some types of content that are available to

delegates at a conference is a kind of content that cannot be accessed in any other way: *finding out what people are doing around the country, it was invaluable, there was so much out there that you just don't hear about in other ways* [CLib3].

This section has argued that conferences are unique in many ways, and authors are in agreement. Henderson et al. (2009) write that conferences “encourage new voices to participate in and identify with their larger communities of practice” (p. 153), and add that a conference “inspires new directions and further projects” (p. 153). Conferences provide delegates with opportunities for informational, social and affective impact, often in a setting that allows delegates to enjoy being in a different location as well as having time off work to reflect on current practices. The ideas and contacts delegates are exposed to at a conference cannot easily be accessed in any other way. King (1961) states that conferences are a “recognition of a need for direct communication with others, which can never be provided by the printed word,” (p. 70). The wide range of opportunities provided by conferences increases the chances of impact, as attendees are likely to experience benefits that are valuable to them personally and to their institution.

An important aspect of conference attendance is their social impact; the social aspect of conference attendance was a key point discussed by the participants of this study. Conferences facilitate the growth of delegates' networks, by meeting and connecting with a diverse group of attendees that cannot be easily accessed by other means. This aspect relates to the unique nature of conferences, as other professional development activities provide fewer opportunities for social interactions (e.g. reading blogs or scholarly literature), or interactions with only a limited group of attendees. Staff attending the same training session can be expected to be reasonably similar regarding their professional experience and knowledge, which means this form of professional development lacks the opportunities conference attendance provides in this regard. The networking delegates engage in during a conference results in the expansion of their own as well as their colleagues' networks, and contacts made are used after the event or have the potential for future use. Networking also adds to the enjoyment of attending a conference. This is demonstrated in the findings of this study, as engaging with peers who are interested in the same issues and who share similar worldviews and values was found to be gratifying and inspiring. Furthermore, communicating with

other delegates gives attendees the opportunity for exposure to more ideas, and the possibility to reflect on how those ideas fit within the context of their institution.

While some of the benefits of face-to-face conferences might be achieved in a virtual environment, it is difficult to create the same opportunities for social conference attendance impact if an event occurs exclusively online. It is arguably not easy for practitioners attending an online event to meet and socialise with other delegates, introduce friends to other attendees or have a friendly conversation during break times. For example, although writing about the benefits of virtual conferences, Bell and Shank (2006) concede that “there is tremendous value to making personal contact with colleagues and vendors, and that is an intangible asset that cannot be duplicated in the virtual setting” (p. 52).

In their investigations of virtual conferences, Johnson and Tremethick (2009), Bell and Shank (2006) and Guterman (2009), all write about the importance and enjoyment of delegates creating networks in person. They argue that this is one of the main disadvantages of virtual events. Other researchers find that library and information professionals prefer face-to-face conferences for the same reason (NASIG, 2008; Schmehl Hines, 2014a; Stewart, 2013). Edwards et al. (2017) refer to a sense of “camaraderie and sense of community” provided by face-to-face events that “other forms of online communication cannot match” (p. 11). Although virtual conferences have their place in the range of professional development activities available to practitioners, these statements highlight the importance and unique opportunities that are created by face-to-face events.

5.1.2 The nature of conference attendance impact

Conference attendance impact is a significant, multi-faceted set of benefits for the practitioner attending and their organisation. This study demonstrates that impacts of conference attendance are occasionally intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate, but nonetheless, important. Edwards et al. (2017) use the term the “long tail of conference impact” (p. 6), which refers to the many outcomes of conferences that occur in the longer term and are often difficult to capture. This section describes the nature of conference attendance impact in this regard, which is linked to the unique nature of conferences compared to other professional development activities as previously discussed.

Participants spoke about the difficulties of defining concrete ideas obtained from the conference, as content often overlaps with other content, or changes shape and focus which can cause the informational impact of conference attendance to be intangible. Impact based on ideas that are implemented a long time after the conference can be invisible, because they are not overtly linked to conference attendance. As ideas change and merge with other ideas over time, it becomes less evident that they originated from a staff member's conference attendance. A sub-theme of informational impact is the potential future use of ideas from the conference, which exemplifies how impact can be intangible because it might occur a long time after the conference has taken place.

The social impact of conference attendance has similar attributes. This study found that conference attendance can extend a delegate's and their colleagues' networks. However, in practice, this might happen long after the staff member has returned from the conference, and it might not be evident that these contacts originated at the conference. Also, participants reported different kinds of networking activities they undertook at the conference. These included reconnecting with known practitioners, or engaging with vendors and presenters. The deepening of those relationships might lead to collaborations, projects or have another impact, which can be difficult to connect to the staff members' conference attendance. As with informational impact, participants also highlighted the potential future use of contacts they had made at the conference.

Affective impact of conference attendance is difficult to separate from other factors that influence the emotional state of a delegate. Participants were inspired to join professional associations, felt more confident to apply for higher level positions, enthusiastically used ideas from conference presentations or felt more connected to the librarianship profession. However, these examples of affective conference attendance impact, like informational and social conference attendance impact, are not always obvious and tangible.

Corresponding to the impact on the individual, the impact of conference attendance on an institution can be intangible, invisible and slow to eventuate. It is based on the impact on the staff member who attended the conference and is therefore a challenge to define and capture. This is especially problematic if funding bodies or parent institutions require measurable accounts of benefits and outcomes. The study showed

how conference attendance expanded networks and raised motivation levels not only of the delegates, but also of their colleagues; an effect that is not immediately obvious to all stakeholders. Also, the content an attendee obtained at a conference was shown to either merge with existing knowledge in the organisation, to change shape, or to be implemented at a later stage, which makes it difficult to track and reveal. Participants highlighted the possibility that content and contacts from the conference might be useful in future, which indicates another complication when describing conference attendance impact on institutions.

However, the intangibility and lack of visible conference attendance impact on the delegate and their organisation does not reflect on its quality or importance. Conference attendance has been shown to have many significant benefits. This study found agreement from delegates and their managers that informational, social and affective conference attendance impact exists and is valuable. A manager stated that they thought it was *productive for people to meet as a group and discuss certain things that we have in common or certain issues that we're dealing with and then getting those different perspectives on that* [CMan₁]. The themes presented in the previous chapter illustrate the impacts of conference attendance. In addition, this chapter has demonstrated how conferences are unique in providing opportunities that facilitate the different kinds of impact that occur.

Conference attendance impact can be intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate, and this has implications for its perception as a phenomenon. For example, the colleague of an attendee might not know or recall that a new idea discussed at a staff meeting originated from a conference, or a manager might not realise that their team member's newly found enthusiasm to join a professional group is a result of conference attendance. For these reasons, it is possible that this generates a belief that conferences have seemingly lesser impact compared to other professional development activities. This is especially relevant when comparing activities with immediate and tangible benefits such as training sessions or workshops that meet specific needs. A manager described training programs as *a lot more instantly relevant to the work* [DMan₂], and another empathised that *conference going is a matter of facilitating possibilities rather than having kind of immediate desired outcomes that you would expect to be delivered* [BMan₁].

The fact that conference attendance impact can be intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate can result in a negative opinion of conferences in general. If impact cannot be easily demonstrated and measured, it is difficult to justify conference attendance to management and funding bodies. In this context, an understanding of the nature of conference attendance impact and what kinds of outcomes an institution and its staff might expect is valuable. The results of this study provide important new knowledge that will be useful in this regard.

5.2 Librarianship and conferences

This section begins with a description of the current landscape of conferences in the profession of librarianship. In line with the socio-constructivist paradigm that guided this research, this provides context to the discussion of findings in the remainder of the chapter and demonstrates how the findings are embedded in a profession with its own values and culture. The particular characteristics of librarianship conferences are deliberated, and the professional associations and their interests in conferences are considered. Next, the section focuses on the three key themes of conference attendance impact revealed in this study and explores their relevance in the profession of librarianship. This includes the importance of innovation and informational conference attendance impact; the importance of networks and social conference attendance impact; and the importance of positive emotional outcomes and affective impact of conference attendance. The findings of the study are contextualised and discussed in reference to current issues relevant to the profession.

5.2.1 The conference landscape in the profession of librarianship

In the Australian librarianship profession, key professional bodies such as the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) or the Victorian Association for Library Automation (VALA) organise the largest library-related conferences. These associations are very vocal about the benefits of these events, highlighting their positive influence on the attending library and information professionals and their institutions, as well as the entire profession. ALIA states that conferences contribute “to the evolution of the profession” (ALIA, n.d.-a). VALA summarises the aims of their conferences in the following statement, which encapsulates the profession’s enthusiasm for conferences:

The VALA conference experience continues to inspire and to ignite professional journeys, celebrate curiosity, and enable a rich exchange of ideas with colleagues and competitors. It is a place where people dare to take risks and where we continue to learn so much from the shared experiences of the speakers and the participants. (VALA, 2015)

The importance of conferences in the profession of librarianship is also confirmed by the fact that the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) itself was founded at a librarianship conference in Scotland in 1927. As other authors have noted, conferences are important events for an association, because they provide a professional identity and serve ceremonial functions (Haley et al., 2009; King, 1961).

ALIA encourages its members to engage in professional development and lifelong learning (Bunker, 2017). In 2020, this association is introducing a new professional development scheme (ALIA, n.d.-d), which make the process of demonstrating professional learning activities easier for practitioners and more transparent for employers. Members who aspire to be Certified Professionals will have to make a “formal commitment to ongoing learning” (ALIA, n.d.-d, p. 2). This research has shown how conferences have informational impact that can fulfil practitioner’s needs for updated knowledge and learning. In addition, participants described the process of learning at conferences in a positive manner. For many participants they were a *good way to get a whole bunch of different libraries together to showcase the best things they’ve been doing* [CLib2].

LIS scholars writing about conferences (Adomi et al., 2006; Aramide & Ladipo, 2016; Eke, 2011; Henczel, 2016; Saka & Haruna, 2013; Willingham et al., 2006) do not refer to librarianship conferences as being different from those in other disciplines in any way. Egri (1992) points out that there is a connection between professional associations and the conferences they organise, and that conferences “can be viewed as a ceremonial that reflects the fundamental culture of the organization for which it occurs” (p. 91). ALIA (2018) has a core values policy, which declares the promotion of the “free flow of information and ideas” (p. 1), the “connection of people to ideas, knowledge creation and learning” (p. 1), a “respect for the diversity, individuality and equality of all” (p.2) and “partnerships and collaborations” (p. 2) as values of the association. It is argued that these values contribute to a specific atmosphere at librarianship conferences,

which manifests itself in delegates willing to share professional failures as well as successes, and seeking to learn from others. There is anecdotal evidence that a certain competitiveness that might be part of other professions' culture and their conferences seem to be absent from events in the librarianship profession, and the researcher has certainly experienced this herself when attending librarianship conferences. The participants of this study referred to attendees at librarianship conferences being generous in sharing ideas and generally open-minded in their communications with other delegates. The willingness to share information about projects and current initiatives is reflected in the sub-theme *Affirmative content-benchmarking* as one of the study's findings.

As presented in Chapter One, section 1.2.1, the number of conferences organised by the main professional bodies in Australia, and the number of conference attendees support the notion that conferences are held in high regard by information professionals in Australia. ALIA members consider that providing opportunities for professional development, including organising conferences to be a core activity of the association (ALIA, 2014). The numbers of staff attending conferences at the four libraries that participated in this research also indicate that library practitioners value conference attendance.

Despite professional organisations in librarianship communicating the benefits of conference attendance and a general agreement in the profession concerning their worth, the findings of this study indicate that budgets for professional development including conferences are restricted. Participants described that occasionally, staff interested in attending conferences cannot be funded. There is ample evidence in the LIS literature (Corcoran & McGuinness, 2014; Eke, 2011; Henczel, 2016; Pinkston, 2009; Schmehl Hines, 2014a; Stewart, 2013; Terrill, 2014) that shows financial constraints are a significant barrier to conference attendance. This increases the need for practitioners and management to justify conference attendance. The following sections provide arguments supporting conference attendance, and discuss how conference attendance impact relates to important challenges in the profession of librarianship.

5.2.2 The importance of innovation – informational impact

This section links one key finding of this study, the informational impact of conference attendance, to current discussions relevant to library and information professionals.

Libraries and information services, like many other industries, have needed to adapt to the advent of the internet and the availability of vast amounts of information online (Adomi et al., 2006; Bradley et al., 2009; Corcoran & McGuinness, 2014). Corcoran and McGuinness (2014) write about this disruption of the industry: “As change sweeps through the library and information profession, academic librarians continue to question the meaning and relevance of their professional roles in a world where information seeking is fast-moving, primarily self-mediated and virtually always carried out online” (p. 175). In the academic library sector, services needed to be restructured to support online university courses, institutional repositories and increased complexities of resource acquisition, to name but a few.

In this environment, it is vital for academic libraries to keep abreast of new developments in the field, to have opportunities to acquire new ideas and to learn of other libraries’ successes and challenges. IFLA (2016b) states that the “constant flux in the needs of societies, changing technologies and growth in professional knowledge demand that librarians and other information professionals expand their knowledge ... on an ongoing basis” (p.8), and that librarianship professionals are expected to “monitor developments that impact the profession” (p. 9). Kummala Mustonen (2012) agrees, as do Davis and Lundstrom (2011) and Coveney (2008), with the latter stating that the “success and survival” (p. 40) of public library services depends on access to and generation of new ideas.

The need to obtain the latest ideas and developments in a profession aligns with the benefits that conferences offer. This study found that the informational impact of conference attendance included the following elements: access to original and unconventional ideas; affirmative content; perspectives on established ideas. The participants used ideas from the conference, shared and communicated them, and described the kinds of content available at a conference as unique and not easily accessible elsewhere.

The importance of access to original information and ideas is linked to the concept of innovation. Innovation is defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary as either the “introduction of something new” or “a new idea, method, or device: novelty” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, 2017), while Coveney (2008) describes innovation as the implementation of ideas (p. 39). Conferences are platforms to access new content, and

participants referred to applying and using ideas from the events. The nine factors that influence the informational impact of conference attendance (refer to Chapter Four, section 4.3.1) are important to note in this context, as they influence the possibility of ideas being implemented and leading to innovation. The Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC, 2014), states that a core personal competency for information professionals is the: “ability to move from idea to implementation to put innovation into action” (p. 13). This statement places the responsibility for initiating innovation with the individual employee; which will be further discussed in section 5.3.

Innovation is considered as crucial to the sustained success of libraries and information services. For example, Strange (2008) states that libraries in the UK need to “innovate or die out” (p. 37), and Smith (2011) and Kermani and Solhdoost (2017) concur. Rubleske et al. (2010) link access to ideas and the importance of innovation as follows:

The organizational ability to innovate is widely acknowledged as crucial to sustained success. For public libraries and other service providers, innovation entails the continued development of new services . . . Before a new service can be delivered, though, it must first be conceived . . . every new service . . . originated as an idea. (p. 1)

Independent from the context of conference attendance impact, the importance of benchmarking for libraries has been emphasised by Saarti and Juntunen (2011), who state that managers in academic libraries should use benchmarking tools to establish their institutions as “learning organisations” (p. 582). Smith (2011), describing factors contributing to organisational quality, emphasises the importance of “comparison and benchmarking with others” (p. 113).

The librarians who participated in this study referred to different kinds of information they accessed at the conference; one being knowledge about the projects and initiatives of other institutions. They discussed how conferences provide opportunities for libraries to compare their efforts to others in the industry, resulting in an activity that Chapter Four, section 4.2.1.1, described as benchmarking. Librarianship was noted earlier to be a profession that encourages and promotes freedom of information, creating a willingness to share and communicate ideas. These values facilitate the opportunities for benchmarking activities through attending conferences.

5.2.3 The importance of networks – social impact

Social impact is a key benefit of conference attendance. Networking at the conference was shown to result in the extension of participants' and their colleagues' networks. Attending conferences fosters relationships between colleagues and aids in connecting professionals with other delegates occupying similar roles and with similar interests. Participants of this study described engaging with other like-minded peers at the conference as a very enjoyable and an important part of the event.

The significance of networks has been stressed by many authors. Russell et al. (2003) write that personal networks are essential for staff in academic libraries, for instance when investigating new services. Saarti and Juntunen (2011) point to networking as an important method available to managers to establish tertiary libraries as “learning organisations” (p. 582). The link between the informational and the social impacts of conference attendance, that is, accessing content when interacting with other delegates, is an important finding of this study. It supports the statement from Rubleske et al. (2010), who refer to “mindful interactions with representatives of vendors, partners and other libraries” (p. 3) as means to innovate in libraries. They note that “the innovative administrator must always be networking and cultivating relationships” (p. 3). Networking efforts can also influence employees' salaries and levels of career satisfaction (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Henczel (2016), whose PhD thesis focused on the impact of professional associations in the profession of librarianship, describes the wide-reaching benefits of sustaining networks as follows:

In some cases, connections through professional networking became collaborations and others became opportunities to present conference papers, write articles or books and have them published, which further enhanced careers by enhancing professional profiles. Networks enabled members to broaden their view and understanding of the profession and to become more closely connected to it, thus encouraging them to become further engaged, retain association membership and seek roles at higher levels within the association and within the profession. (p. 128)

Networks as a means to broadening views are linked to the sub-theme of content providing perspectives on established ideas that was found in this study. Feeling connected and part of something bigger was also an impact sub-theme raised by participants. Librarians felt more confident after their conference attendance to move jobs and seek promotions, which echoes Henczel's (2016) comments.

The informational and social aspects of conference attendance impact are closely linked, as access to original ideas and content at a conference is often facilitated through communicating with other delegates. Yeh and Walter (2016) comment on the connection between informational and social elements of conferences, writing that "building partnerships with other libraries is positively related to service innovation in an academic library" (p. 799). Similarly, Balk et al. (2014) document "networking capacities" (p. 160) and "knowledge and organisational learning" (p. 160), explaining that they both determine the innovation capability of a library. Conferences are unique in providing opportunities to delegates to expand their networks and gain access to original ideas and content at the same event. This reinforces the importance of conferences for libraries and information institutions in their endeavour to strive for innovation and relevance.

Professional associations in librarianship refer to the ability to create and sustain personal networks as a vital skill. ALIA (2014) lists the "ability to build partnerships and alliances" (p. 6) as one of the core skills needed by library and information professionals in order to "effectively support the delivery of library and information services" (p. 2). Similarly, OCLC's competency index for the library field (2014) states that a successful and competent librarian "recognizes the value of professional networking and actively participates in professional associations" (p. 12). The findings of this study highlight the important role that conference attendance has in this context, as the social impact of attendance was identified as a key theme.

However, networking can be a challenge for some conference attendees. Jones and Wood (2018) found that librarians are not very confident regarding their networking abilities at conferences. This resonates in statements made by participants of this study. The social impact of conference attendance is influenced by *Experience, role and attributes of attendee*, as more introverted delegates may find it more difficult to engage with others at the conference, and to create networks they can use at a later stage.

5.2.4 The importance of positive emotional outcomes - affective impact

The third component of conference attendance impact is the positive affective impact of attendance. Matteson and Miller (2013) emphasise the importance of staff associating positive emotions with work, writing that “emotional states are connected with librarianship work” (p. 57). James (2011) explored the motivation levels of staff in academic libraries in Nigeria; he states that “all organizations, regardless of size, sector or industry require motivated employees to function effectively. Human resources are an indispensable asset that ensures the productivity, performance and prosperity of the organization” (p. 7). The findings of this study include *feeling valued and grateful*, and *feeling inspired and enthusiastic* as impacts of attendance. Another element of affective impact of conference attendance is *feeling part of something bigger*. Participants spoke about the positive emotions they associated with the feeling that they belong to a group of like-minded peers. In the context of school libraries and librarians, Munde (2012) explains that:

Relatedness is a person’s perception of belonging or affiliation with a group. For many, but not all, relatedness has high value as a reward and motivator. We are social animals and want to feel like we belong to a group. (p. 25)

OCLC (2014) stresses the importance of positive emotions and attitudes. They state that information professionals should “embrace and adapt to change with curiosity and enthusiasm” (p. 12), and “maintain a positive attitude in the face of challenges and unanticipated changes” (p. 12). These emotions were revealed in this study to be impacts of conference attendance.

Chapter Four described how participants’ reported motivation levels were higher after their conference attendance, but reverted to pre-conference levels at the time of the second interview. Managers doubted that increased motivation levels regarding conference attendance can be sustained over a long period of time. McShane, Olekalns and Travaglione (2014) examined the difference between emotions and motivation, arguing that motivation is less of an emotion and more a desire to achieve something concrete. They define motivation as follows:

[Motivation is represented by] the forces within a person that affect his or her direction, intensity and persistence of voluntary behaviour. Motivated employees are willing to exert a particular level of effort (intensity) for a certain amount of time (persistence), towards a particular goal (direction). (p. 138)

These authors explain that “motivation is goal-directed, not random” (p. 39). If libraries and information services want to sustain and tap into the increased motivation levels that are experienced after conference attendance, it follows that the motivation staff return with needs to be channelled towards concrete projects or goals. This was highlighted by participants of this study, who also discussed how increased motivation levels lead to staff sharing ideas from the conference more enthusiastically and widely, which in turn can increase the informational impact of attendance.

As discussed in the next section of this chapter, the responsibility for sustaining increased motivation levels lies with the staff who attended the conference and with the library who funded their attendance. This study documented that in most cases, the motivation levels of participants were not sustained at the higher post-conference level. Although the exact reasons for this are unclear, it is possible that staff were not able to sustain their increased motivation levels due to a lack of opportunity to advance or initiate projects in the libraries.

5.3 Responsibility for conference attendance impact

Previous sections of this chapter have discussed the many benefits staff and their organisations gain from conferences. However, impact does not occur consistently, or may not occur at all. Hilliard (2006) warns that “much formal learning and networking at conventions is lost or goes dormant following the convention” (p 66). The following sections discuss responsibility for conference attendance impact. Some elements of responsibility lie with the staff member, and some with their institution, while others are shared between both parties. To increase the readability of the text, the term *take-aways* is used to encompass content, contacts and positive emotions from a conference in subsequent sections of this chapter. The discussion in this section also leads to implications for practice, which are detailed in section 5.4.3 below.

5.3.1 Impact – a shared responsibility of individual and institution

This study's results demonstrate that responsibility to maximise conference attendance impact lies with the librarians who attend a conference as well as their library. The different commitments necessary from individuals and their institutions are addressed separately, which allows for a discussion of these findings from two different perspectives. However, some overlap is evident as often both parties need to focus on similar aspects. For instance, it is the responsibility of staff to share ideas from the conference widely, and the responsibility of their organisation to facilitate the dissemination of ideas. Additionally, the library's culture can encourage colleagues to be receptive to and engage with ideas from a conference.

Table 16 provides an overview of the different elements of responsibility for the individual and the institution. These elements are discussed in greater detail in sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3 below. In Table 16, the rows indicate a connection of the different elements, for example, *Consideration of reasons for attendance* is linked to *Clarification of expectations for attendance*. This illustrates that the individual considering their reasons to attend and the institution clarifying their expectations are related and can be part of the same process.

Table 16: Responsibility for impact – individuals and institutions

Responsibility of individual	Responsibility of institution
Consideration of reasons for attendance	Clarification of expectations for attendance
Open-mindedness to take-aways	Qualitative approach to measuring impact
Reflection on take-aways	Provision of time and resources Channel affective impact to concrete projects
Taking time, using resources	Provision of time and resources
Willingness to share Awareness of institution's strategy	Culture of ideas

The study found *Taking responsibility and planning* was an influencing factor for conference attendance impact. Librarians and managers contributed to this factor and

described a shared responsibility of the individual and the institution to facilitate impact. Leong (2014), writing about Australian academic libraries, states how the responsibility for professional development and its outcomes should be “shared by the executive, the staff development librarian, managers and supervisors, and individuals” (p. 3), which reflects the results of this research.

Arguably, delegates’ colleagues or conference organisers also have a responsibility to maximise conference attendance impact. Murray (2007) suggests the need for both delegates and their colleagues to be committed to learning from the content obtained, and to reviewing and analysing it (p. 60). Jones and Wood (2018) point to librarians’ responsibility to prepare for their networking activities at the conference, but also highlight how organisers are responsible for providing an environment that encourages networking. The responsibility of colleagues and conference organisers for conference attendance impact did not feature in the results of this study.

5.3.2 Impact - responsibility of individual

The findings of this research suggest that delegates have responsibility for the impact of their conference attendance. Although this responsibility is shared with the institution, attendees are in control of some elements that influence conference attendance impact. Corcoran and McGuinness (2014) define conferences as self-directed professional development activities and believe that they “require librarians to set the agenda themselves, either individually or through group collaboration, and frequently require a high degree of motivation” (p. 179). The concept of motivation needed to take ownership of anticipated outcomes is linked to this study’s findings of motivation as an affective impact of conference attendance. The following section discusses five elements of the individual’s responsibility for conference attendance impact as summarised in Table 16:

- Consideration of reasons for attendance
- Open-mindedness to take-aways
- Reflection on take-aways
- Taking time, using resources
- Willingness to share and awareness of institution’s strategy

The first element of the individual's responsibility for conference attendance impact is to consider the reasons to attend. The participants of this study reported going to the conference because they wanted access to ideas and opportunities to network. This is consistent with the literature on the aims of conference attendance (Adomi et al., 2006; Anderson & Orsatti, 2008; Eke, 2011; Hardesty & Sugarman, 2007; Vega & Connell, 2007; Terrill, 2014; Thull, 2014). It is important for delegates to be clear about their reasons to attend a conference, and to be clear about their institution's reasons for funding them. If staff know why they are funded to attend, they are in a better position to judge which kinds of impacts are important, as this facilitates the reflection process after attending. Sousa and Clark (2017) provide the following advice in this context:

Thinking deliberately before your conference to pinpoint your personal rationale, motivations, and needs allows you to get the most out of the conference experience. Being mindfully aware of your success indicators for attendance allows you to plan your time and energy more deliberately and strategically. (p. 1)

Conference attendees have a responsibility to approach the event openly, and to be flexible in their expectations of take-aways from the conference. Librarians need to embrace the serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts that lies at the core of conferences; they need to be ready to be inspired, surprised, and engage willing with other practitioners at the event. One of the librarians participating in this study said: *I want to affirm that it's a wonderful experience if you are motivated and you are prepared to take it all in [BLib3].* Finlay (2017) writes about her recent experience of attending an ALIA conference as a library student and reflects that "being a member of a profession means to give as well as to receive" (p. 24). This highlights the responsibility of delegates to share their knowledge and experience as well as being prepared to benefit from attendance. As the findings of this study show, affirmative content is one of the sub-themes of informational impact, which relies on attendees sharing their successes and challenges openly with delegates.

Although attendees need to be open and receptive during the event to maximise the impact of their attendance, they also need to be responsible for their own learning. IFLA (2016b), in their guidelines for continuing professional development, acknowledges this point when referring to the importance of the individual staff

member taking responsibility for their ongoing learning and improving their knowledge.

It is important for librarians returning from a conference to make time to reflect and plan how to progress content and contacts they gained at the event. In this study, this is reflected in the influencing factor *Taking responsibility and planning*. As the key themes of informational and social conference attendance impact demonstrate, it is highly probable that attendees return with new ideas and extended networks. They may also feel positive and energised about their profession and workplace, or feel more confident about their abilities to contribute to their library's success. In order to ensure that their conference attendance results in lasting impact, it is essential that the delegate takes the time to reflect and plan on how to progress these take-aways.

Reflection time was shown to be a factor influencing conference attendance impact, especially concerning informational conference attendance impact. Participants described how reflecting on ideas clarified their exact nature and how they fit within the librarian's work environment, within that of their immediate team and the library as a whole. It facilitates deciding which ideas are worth taking further, which ideas attendees will share and with whom and how, which is linked to the influencing factor *Dissemination of ideas*. Reflection also involves considering the scope of ideas and whether they will require funding or a major shift in the library's strategic direction, which is linked to the influencing factor *Alignment with strategy and budget*.

While most of the reflection process is likely to focus on ideas, it is equally important that staff reflect on what actions to take with contacts they made. As illustrated in this study, delegates need to be aware that contacts from the conference can expand their colleagues' networks as well as their own. Attendees who take responsibility for sharing and communicating their new networks in the same way they share and communicate ideas increase the possibility of their attendance resulting in social impact. Sharma et al. (2016) believe that "the post-conference follow-up is important to solidify the relationship established during the conference" (p.2308). They encourage delegates to get in touch with new contacts from the conference after the event, which is linked to reflecting on how to benefit from networking efforts. Sousa and Clark (2017) also emphasise the significance of post-conference reflection and planning. They focus on

informational, social and affective aspects of conference attendance impact in their opinion piece, and recommend the following:

After the “high” of a busy conference day, it’s easy to fail to capitalize on that conference magic – your new enthusiasm, connections, and insights. Take a few minutes . . . to write down key points you want to remember . . . At the end of the conference, while a collection of new business cards will weigh down your pocket, without action, these alone won’t make your prospects soar. At the end of each day and each conference, get into the practice of reviewing what your action points are and start working on them. (p. 2)

Sousa and Clark’s statement (2017) suggests attendees start the reflection process at the conference (if it is an event that spans several days), and continue with it once they have returned to work. Reflecting on content at the conference is connected to the influencing factor *Social media use*, and the findings of this study highlight how using social media at the conference leads to conversations about ideas as they are encountered. For some librarians, it also results in more engagement with content and contacts, which has the potential to facilitate the reflection process during and after the conference.

The delegate’s responsibility for sharing take-aways extends to contacts made at the conference. Extension of colleagues’ networks, future collaborations or friendships can result from attendees letting other library staff know which new contacts they have made at the conference. Similarly, the chance of conference attendance impact increases if staff reflect on the positive emotions and increased motivation they gained from attendance. If they feel more confident as practitioners, they might venture into authoring a journal article. Likewise if staff feel more motivated and passionate about their roles, they might want to channel these emotions into projects, or contribute in other ways to meeting their library’s goals. However, the findings concerning affective conference attendance impact have demonstrated that few participants were able to direct their increased motivation levels into a concrete project or initiative.

Reflection on the conference experience and possible actions with take-aways are crucial for sustained impact of attendance, and librarians need time to reflect and plan.

This highlights the link between the influencing factors *Taking responsibility and planning* and *Time factor* identified in this research. The findings recognised time as a factor that influences conference attendance impact, as daily routines and tasks prohibited reflection on content and contacts from the conference. Kermani and Solhdoost (2017), although not writing about conferences, suggest that a lack of time to discuss ideas can prohibit their implementation (p. 67). They believe that staff need some “training in time management skills” (p. 67) to alleviate this problem. The participants of this research did not always have adequate time to follow up on take-aways and to disseminate ideas through presentations. However, the responsibility of staff to ensure they have time for post-conference reflection and dissemination of ideas was not raised in this research.

Delegates need to share their reflections as widely as possible within the library. Sharing take-aways is important for conference attendance to result in impact, and is identified in the influencing factor *Dissemination of ideas*. Although this thesis focuses on the importance of sharing and communicating content in the context of conferences, it is valuable for the profession as a whole. OCLC (2014) considers the following as a core personal competency for information professionals: “shares knowledge gained through professional discussions, conferences, formal courses and informal channels with colleagues” (p. 7), adding that “communication and collaboration are at the centre of organizational effectiveness” (p. 8). Kermani and Solhdoost (2017) write that “one way to gain the support of co-workers for new ideas is through debates, as it allows employees to freely express and exchange their ideas with their colleagues, thereby sharing their experience and knowledge in different fields” (p. 67). Gaining support from colleagues to assist with implementing ideas from a conference also featured in this study’s findings.

The importance of sharing ideas from the conference is connected to the reflection process, as discussing ideas assists attendees to clarify and define their take-aways. Discussions lead to a shared understanding of the exact nature of ideas from the conference. They also facilitate agreement on which ideas warrant support and further investigation, and which contacts should be explored. This process can lead to colleagues sharing the delegate’s excitement about certain concepts, which in turn can result in more staff members working on implementing the same idea. Managers and other more senior staff members in the library who support ideas can facilitate their

implementation, especially if the ideas require major funding or a change in the library's strategic thinking. Disseminating ideas widely also ensures that they are encountered by staff who due to their role, duties or level within the library are in the best position to use or implement them. This is expressed in the influencing factors *Alignment with strategy and budget* and *Experience, role and attributes of attendees*.

When sharing their take-aways from the conference, librarians need to consider the best approach. They should be aware of their library's strategy and vision, its organisational structure, the different teams operating in the library and their current projects. The significance of ideas aligning with an institution's context is a factor that influences informational conference attendance impact (*Alignment with strategy and budget*). The same is true for new contacts from a conference. Staff may meet a delegate whose knowledge and experience is better matched to one of their colleagues who were not at the conference. It is therefore important to know colleagues' responsibilities and interests, so that take-aways can be shared with the staff who can best benefit from them.

The significance of staff being aware of their organisation's strategy and vision independent from conference attendance is discussed in the literature. For example, Saarti and Juntunen (2011), investigated management strategies in academic libraries, and believe that "it is important that the visions and strategic plans of the organization are clear to the staff" (p. 581). Coveney (2008) agrees, but cautions that "the lower the employees were in the hierarchy [of the library], the less aware they were of the organisation's objectives" (p. 49). Smith (2011) suggests that successful change in libraries needs "a group with enough power and influence in the organisation to lead and promote the change effort" (p. 116). This complements the findings of this study as the role of delegates (*Experience, role and attributes of attendees*) influences informational conference attendance impact. That is, the ability to implement changes based on ideas from a conference is linked to the role and position of the delegate.

Another element linked to the responsibility of the individual to increase the impact of their conference attendance is the fact that they are in the best position to communicate the benefits of their attendance and to make sure that the resulting positive outcomes are known within the institution. Conference attendance impact is best described qualitatively due to the nature of conferences and the benefits that are

attributed to them. In order to demonstrate to management that their investment was worthwhile, the delegate needs to share as many success stories of change and innovation that originated from their conference attendance as possible. In addition, librarians need to be aware of and use existing processes in this context, such as making use of opportunities to present to other staff, or to communicate take-aways in reports, forms and other means of written communications that are shared amongst library staff. This relies on the organisation providing appropriate processes for the dissemination of take-aways, which are discussed in the next section.

5.3.3 Impact - responsibility of institution

As noted earlier, the following elements are part of the library's responsibility to facilitate conference attendance impact:

- Clarification of expectations for attendance
- Qualitative approach to measuring impact
- Channel affective conference attendance impact
- Provision of time and resources
- Culture of ideas

The previous section discussed how delegates should reflect on their reasons for attendance before the conference. This element relates to the institution's responsibility to be clear about its own expectations as well. The impact of conference attendance can be intangible, invisible, and slow to eventuate; it is multifaceted and influenced by different factors. It is therefore important that there is a shared understanding between the individual and their institution of the reasons why staff are funded to attend the conference, and what the organisation expects in relation to post-conference processes and anticipated outcomes. The findings of this research indicate that participants were occasionally not aware of procedures and processes such as forms or tools to capture ideas, or that they were unclear about the institution's expectations in regards to conference attendance.

The importance of the kind of language used to describe elements of conference attendance impact is also worth noting in this context. An organisation that encourages staff to attend conferences should avoid using restrictive language when referring to

anticipated impact of attendance. If procedures only refer to *ideas* or *information*, they emphasise informational impact and neglect social and affective impacts. Referring to expected outcomes *take-aways* is preferable, as it encompasses a wider range of possible impact. Using less restrictive terminology acknowledges the serendipitous nature of conferences, which can result in a diverse range of impacts of attendance.

In the context of responsibility for conference attendance impact, it is also valuable to question the necessity to measure the impact of professional development activities like conferences. One of the participants of this study expressed a slight uneasiness in regard to the topic of this thesis, specifically about the perceived need to justify conference attendance by attempting to identify, describe and analyse it. They believed that stakeholders would automatically require quantitative measurements when the value of conference attendance is considered. This research is based on the belief that conferences are valuable, and that their qualities can only be described and demonstrated accurately using qualitative methods. This approach resulted in findings that are rich and detailed, which supports the value and use of qualitative approaches to measure and communicate conference attendance impact.

The study has shown that conferences increase the motivation levels of staff. However, they revert to pre-conference levels in a relatively short period of time. Managers also doubted the longevity of enthusiasm and inspiration gained from the conference. If motivation or other affective benefits are channelled into concrete projects, it is more likely that the individual and the institution can profit from these emotions in the longer term. This was discussed in detail in section 5.2.4. The responsibility to facilitate this process rests with managers, and to an extent, also with the individual. It is important to make use of affective benefits of conference attendance in order to maintain momentum and maximise impact from attendance.

In discussing the responsibility of the individual for conference attendance impact, it was acknowledged that time and resources are essential. Staff need time and resources to reflect and disseminate take-aways, and it is the institution's responsibility to provide them with these. The general perception of library staff being time-poor can be linked to time as a barrier to conference attendance (ALIA, 2014; Corcoran & McGuinness, 2014; Schmehl Hines, 2014a). IFLA (2016b) recommends that employers should provide "approximately 10% of work hours ... to professionals for attendance at

workshops, conferences, in-service training, and other educational services, as well as for informal learning projects, including professional association and publishing work” (p. 10). Institutions need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the time allocated to professional development activities includes conference attendance, and in turn, that this includes post-event time for reflection and planning.

This research has found that descriptions of impact did not vary greatly between the first and the second interview with librarians. When the participants reported impact of any kind (informational, social, affective), most did so during the first interview, which was conducted on average 24 days after attending the conference. This suggests that the timeframe to facilitate impact is brief – approximately three weeks. After that period, the staff member’s focus shifts from reflecting on their conference attendance to daily tasks and responsibilities. It is therefore important that the institution provides time and resources that facilitate reflection and planning as soon as practicable after the conference to ensure maximum impact.

The institution has a responsibility to display an openness and readiness to debate new concepts, which is linked to its culture regarding innovation and change. This is expressed in the influencing factor *Culture of ideas*. Participants of this study occasionally felt that their ideas from the conference were not appreciated, welcome or disseminated widely. Institutions need to facilitate the informational impact of conference attendance by providing opportunities to share and discuss take-aways. Mechanisms for staff to have discussions with colleagues and management need to be in place.

A library’s culture regarding sharing ideas and information forms part of its broader information culture. Oliver (2011) writes about the information culture at libraries, proposing a framework for assessing the value of organisations in the profession of librarianship. One part of the framework is the “willingness to share information”, which Oliver defines as “the level of granularity to which information sharing is regarded as the norm within the organisation” (p. 10). This resonates with the influencing factors *Dissemination of ideas* and *Culture of ideas* found in this research.

Saarti and Juntunen (2011) link the importance of sharing and communicating ideas in a library to its success as a learning organisation, stating that “the most important thing

is to build a distinct and working learning organization, i.e. enable and motivate knowledge sharing inside and outside the library” (p. 587). Kermani and Solhdoost (2017) state that “some researchers believe that successful innovation requires a climate that nurtures the identification, development and implementation of innovative ideas” (p. 59). They further add that “in a supportive climate, ideas and suggestions are more likely to be noted and supported by directors and managers. People tend to listen to alternative ideas and initiatives and innovations are encouraged” (p. 67). The notion of alternative ideas echoes the sub-theme of the unconventional content that delegates gain from conference attendance, as described within the key theme of informational impact in this study. Coveney (2008) emphasises the need for any library and information service wanting to remain creative and innovative to have an organisational culture that has a “fair, constructive judgement of ideas . . . mechanisms for developing new ideas . . . and an active flow of ideas” (p. 44). The importance for libraries and information services to be innovative was demonstrated in section 5.2.2. of this chapter.

Martin (2006) writes that “the culture of a library goes a long way towards explaining how that library operates, its employee satisfaction, and the level of resistance to change” (p. 2). As innovation by definition results in change within an organisation, the notion of innovation and resistance to change are linked. Wang, Su and Yang (2011) explore how organisational culture impacts on knowledge creation abilities. They believe that staff who are encouraged to be cooperative to “realize organizational value” (p. 365), contribute to a culture of cooperation which facilitates “motivation to exchange knowledge” (p. 365). This corresponds with the findings of this study, which demonstrate how positive emotions from a conference can encourage the dissemination of content. A cooperative culture of ideas at a library can reinforce this, as its staff are generally motivated to share and discuss ideas, independent of conference attendance. Wang at al. (2011) also state that “the willingness of organizations to experiment with new ideas and to take risks has a significant impact on knowledge exchange” (p. 365). This links the influencing factor *Culture of ideas* with the willingness to take risks that is part of an organisation’s culture.

In the context of fostering and maintaining a culture of ideas, it is important to ensure that staff are aware of the processes for the dissemination of ideas. Some participants of this study found that they did not know of certain procedures, and some

administrative staff voiced doubts about whether all staff at their library had knowledge of these. Also, occasionally reports and documents containing take-aways and reflections on attendance were circulated only to higher levels of staff, rather than to all staff members. Management are responsible for ensuring mechanisms to share ideas exist, and that these are communicated to and used by all staff. As discussed in the previous section, the individual staff member should also be aware of these mechanisms, to make use of them and provide feedback on their usefulness if appropriate.

The institution is also responsible for providing mechanisms and opportunities for staff to disseminate take-aways, and to provide them with the time and resources to do so. The four libraries that participated in this study relied heavily on report-back presentations as a means for communicating ideas from a conference. These presentations were generally perceived to be effective and valuable by librarians and managers alike. However, the findings highlight that due to time constraints, often these presentations did not eventuate. Presentations can be considered learning opportunities for staff, as Leong, Phillips, Giddens and Dickson (2014) state:

As the effectiveness of LIS organizations is largely dependent on the capabilities and positive motivation of the workforce, it is incumbent on managers to facilitate a supportive learning climate. Learning must be valued and utilized and this involves providing time and resources.
(p. 9)

In the case of written reports used to share take-aways, participants considered them to be useful if they were widely distributed in the library. Goodfellow and Graham (2007) reflect on the use of reports in their academic library, identifying that “many times conference reports are written months after the event, are poorly distributed to colleagues, and are often only read by senior managers” (p. 397). This statement is consistent with the findings of this study, and is an additional element of institutional responsibility for conference attendance impact that warrants attention from management.

5.4 Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this study identify three key themes, multiple sub-themes and two minor themes of conference attendance impact. In addition, the findings provide a definition and description of nine factors that can influence that impact. The following section identifies the important original contribution to knowledge these results provide. It summarises the findings and contrasts them with existing literature as examined in Chapter Two. The section reflects on conference attendance impact on the individual and on their institution, two concepts that are linked in the study's first research question (*What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?*). In addition, it discusses the study's implications for practice and presents a conference attendance framework.

5.4.1 Findings and established literature

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the findings of this research provide a detailed account of conference attendance impact and influencing factors. They provide a significant contribution to a gap in the body of knowledge about this topic.

The study reveals different reasons for conference attendance: access to ideas and information; to network with other members of the profession; the conference location; the provision of funding to cover costs; and to present a paper. This aligns with the literature, which identifies *information and ideas*, *networking* and *inspiration and invigoration* as reasons for conference attendance (Adomi et al., 2006; Anderson & Orsatti, 2008; Eke, 2011; Terrill, 2014; Vega & Connell, 2007). Egholm et al. (1998) found that presenting a paper can be a reason to attend a conference, which this research confirms.

The key theme of informational conference attendance impact is one of the key findings of the study. It provides a detailed account of the kinds of information and ideas delegates are exposed to at a conference: original and unconventional content; affirmative content that the library can use to benchmark its efforts against others; and content that provides perspective on established ideas. The findings also describe the actions librarians take with these ideas: they are used and applied; they are shared and communicated; or they are not implemented, but have the potential to be used at a later stage.

Several researchers have reported attendees returning from conferences with ideas and knowledge (Choi, 2013; De Vries & Pieters, 2007; Eke, 2011; Haley et al., 2009; Henczel, 2016; Jones & Hugman, 2010). However, the literature lacks studies containing detailed descriptions and discussions of the content delegates obtain at these events. The sub-theme of conferences providing an opportunity for libraries to benchmark is unique to this study, although two authors refer to activities undertaken by attendees that are similar to some extent: Garvey et al. (1972) reports scientists changing their research projects using information from a conference, and Cutting (1995) writes about academics attending a conference in order to receive feedback on their own work.

The sub-theme of potential future use of content is an original contribution to what is currently known about conference attendance impact. It is important as it links to the unique nature of conferences. Conferences provide serendipitous opportunities for impact that can be intangible, invisible, or slow to eventuate. This, in turn, has implications for assessing the value of conferences and how impact is measured and described.

The study's sub-themes of actions taken with content offer a useful insight into the nature of informational conference attendance impact. As other research focusing on this aspect is scarce, these results represent an original contribution to knowledge. The studies by Jones and Hugman (2010) and Garvey et al. (1972) are the only works located that explore attendees using and applying ideas. Haley et al. (2009) describe how attendees *intended* to act on ideas from the conference, and how they adapted content obtained at the event to their working context. This is similar to the notion of ideas from a conference changing shape and merging with other ideas discovered in this research. Eke (2011) acknowledges that content from a conference can add another dimension to knowledge already held by attendees, which is reflected in this study's sub-theme of content providing perspective to already established ideas.

The social impact of conference attendance was another key theme demonstrated in the research findings. Different types of networking at the conference relate to this impact: meeting delegates who work in similar roles or have similar interests; networking with a diverse group of delegates; and reconnecting with known peers or socialising with previously unknown attendees. The networking activities of delegates result in an expansion of attendees' and their colleagues' networks. Similar to

informational conference attendance impact, there was also a sub-theme concerning the potential future use of contacts.

Many authors have described attendees networking at conferences (Adomi et al., 2006; Casad et al., 2016; De Vries & Pieters, 2007; Haley et al., 2009; Henczel, 2016; Jones & Hugman, 2010). However, a detailed exploration of the kinds of delegates attendees meet at a conference is absent in the literature. Therefore the sub-theme of networking expanding attendees' as well as their colleagues' networks is also an original contribution to what is known about conference attendance impact. Jones and Hugman (2010) discuss attendees keeping in touch with contacts made at the conference, which is also a sub-theme presented in this study.

A third key theme of conference attendance impact this research identifies is affective impact. It consists of five sub-themes: feeling inspired and enthusiastic; feeling valued and grateful; feeling confident; feeling motivated; and feeling part of something bigger. The study also found that motivation frequently reverts to pre-conference levels if it had initially increased after attending the event. Vega and Connell (2007) are the only researchers to describe *inspiration and invigoration* as reasons to attend conferences. Four other scholars (Choi, 2013; Ernst et al., 1991; Palmer, 1996; Ryu & Lee, 2013) discuss their participants returning from a conference with positive emotions, however, none of them investigated these outcomes in any detail. The studies by Casad et al. (2016) and Henczel (2016) describe some of the emotions detailed in this study under the key theme of affective impact of conference attendance.

This study identifies two additional minor themes of conference attendance impact: extending skill sets of participants; and an increased appreciation of conferences, which leads to delegates being enthusiastic about attending conferences in future, promoting them to colleagues, and being inspired to present papers at future events. There is no mention of these two minor themes in the literature concerning conferences, which means that they represent an additional unique contribution to knowledge arising from this study.

The study found that the three key themes of conference attendance impact (informational, social and affective) were connected. Delegates enjoy being exposed to original ideas and socialising with like-minded peers. The positive emotions from the

conference encourage the dissemination of ideas and increase the chances of extended networks. Delegates also access more content when interacting with other attendees, and the sharing of ideas expands networks. Conferences provide unique opportunities in this regard, especially when compared to other professional development activities.

The existing literature contains few references to the elements of conference attendance impact being connected. Palmer (1996) describes the ideas from a conference as less polished and well-structured than those in a journal article. She discusses being exposed to such ideas as an intellectual stimulation that can be exciting for attendees (p.173). This corresponds with the connection between informational and affective impact that was found in this study. Choi (2013) and Lee and Min (2013b) consider the positive emotional benefits of being exposed to new and original content at a conference, and Johnson and Tremethick (2009), Bell and Shank (2006) and Guterman (2009) highlight the enjoyment delegates feel when creating networks, specifically in the context of virtual conferences. The results of this study provide a detailed description of the connections between the key themes of informational, social and affective impacts of conference attendance that is unique in its contribution to the body of knowledge on this topic.

In addition to providing three key themes and sub-themes and an additional two minor themes describing conference attendance impact, this thesis also documented nine influencing factors: attending with colleagues; serendipity of encountering relevant content and contacts; social media use; experience, role and attributes of attendee; taking responsibility and planning; time factor; alignment with strategy and budget; dissemination of ideas; and culture of ideas. These factors influence different key themes of attendance impact (informational, social and affective), and some are connected to others (refer to Table 14). They are a significant original contribution to the body of knowledge on conference attendance impact in LIS, as little other research has previously investigated this aspect. Two papers discuss delegates' characteristics and their influence on impact (Peters, 1975; Garvey et al., 1972), while more recently, Haley et al. (2009) explored how their participants' experience and attitude changed the impact of conference attendance. Dausat (1995) suggests in a short opinion piece that delegates write an individual action plan in order to reflect on ways in which their practices "would change as a direct outcome of participation in the conference" (p. 13). Wood et al. (2017) similarly recommend critical reflection methods after conference

attendance to increase impact, which echoes the influencing factor *Taking responsibility for planning* found in this study.

5.4.2 Impact on individual and institution

This research was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

The first of these questions refers to conference attendance impact on librarians and libraries, however, as described in Chapter Four, section 4.5, the participants of this study did not differentiate between the impact of their attendance on themselves and on their libraries. Both kinds of impact are treated as one concept in the research question, and the results of this study provide an extensive and detailed answer to this question. This section discusses the relationship between the two types of impact, the impact on the individual staff member who attends a conference and the impact on the institution who facilitates their attendance.

The impact of conference attendance on the institution relies on the impact attendance has on the individual delegate, and both kinds of impact are connected. One participant of this study referred to this notion when stating that the content they returned with was not *personal knowledge*, but *corporate knowledge* [BLib3]. The impact on the delegate was also shown to have a 'ripple' effect on colleagues, which provides a further indicator that the impact on the individual and on the institution are connected. BLib3 stated that the conference *helped me situate where I am and where our library is in the directions that libraries are taking*, indicating an awareness of a link between the two kinds of impact. DMan2 referred to the positive effect that conference attendance can have on the entire organisation, stating that conferences *can give a burst of energy to the library*. As this type of affective impact of attendance relies on staff members attending a conference, it is another argument for the notion that the impact of conference attendance on the institution is intrinsically linked to the impact on the individual.

Any impact delegates refer to can be viewed as an impact on the individual and on their institution. Interviewees cannot speak exclusively for themselves as individuals and then separately as staff members of an institution, as both viewpoints are linked. Henczel (2016) writes that “as impact is ‘external’ it is always identified and assessed by the recipient of the impact, with their perceptions and perspectives providing the evidence of impact” (p. 47). Henczel (2016) treats impact on the individual and on the institution separately in the results section of her doctoral thesis, however, she concedes that there is substantial overlap between the two. Stephens and Cheetham (2011), who investigated the impact of learning programs on librarians and libraries, do not distinguish between the two kinds of impact. They label, for instance, increased knowledge of staff as “a benefit for the organization. Increased knowledge and increased confidence could impact work in a positive manner” (p. 53), and write that changes in staff attitude can “lead to improved sharing, communication, and visibility for libraries that continue the practice” (p. 57).

This study views the impact of conference attendance on individuals and on institutions as concepts that are closely linked, with the impact on institutions dependent on that of the individual. The relationship between the two concepts can be considered a continuum. It is possible that conference attendance has an impact on the delegate that does not extend to their institution, however, no evidence was found in this study to support this idea. It is suggested that most impact is likely to be found in the middle of the continuum, in other words, it is unlikely that conference attendance has impact on the institution, but not on the staff member who attended the conference. Affective impact themes found in this study such as increased enthusiasm to join professional associations could be viewed as impact on the individual alone, however, their institution may also benefit from increased reputation in the sector if their staff are contributing to the profession in this manner.

The relationship between the two kinds of impact is also linked to the responsibility of the individual to demonstrate impact as described in an earlier section of this chapter. Staff have a responsibility for the impact of their attendance, on themselves and also on their institution. The notion of impact of attendance on individual and institution being closely linked also relates to the discussion on conference attendance impact being potentially intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. While impacts on the

delegates might be more immediate and obvious, the impact on their institution will possibly take longer to manifest or might remain invisible or intangible.

5.4.3 Implications for practice

The following section identifies implications for practice to improve institutional processes relating to conference attendance impact. They are based on the findings of this study, and the discussion of these findings within this chapter. As this research is situated in an Australian academic library context the implications for practice focus on this sector, but might also provide valuable recommendations for other sectors and indeed other professions.

When an institution considers the impact of an activity such as conference attendance, an understanding of the nature of the activity assists this process. Conferences have unique characteristics and offer a unique range of possible benefits. This thesis provides a comprehensive description of conference attendance impact that can facilitate the evaluation of existing processes and the creation of policies.

Libraries need to be clear about the reasons for funding staff to attend conferences, and they need to be equally clear about their expectations regarding the anticipated outcomes of attendance. This study has shown that the impact of conference attendance can comprise of many different elements, some of which can be intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. Clarification of reasons to attend and expectations of outcomes avoids disappointment when the impact of conferences attendance is assessed.

Considerations regarding conference attendance could be communicated in a document (a *conference attendance strategy policy*), that is aligned to the library's strategic plan. This will ensure that the wider implications of conference attendance are taken into account. It is important that the process of developing the conference strategy policy is undertaken in consultation with all staff to ensure transparency. The policy could encompass other professional development activities, which is in line with how the libraries in this study treated conferences in their budgets. It should also align with reasons for funding staff to attend, and with expected outcomes. The library's processes and procedures should express how the strategic approach to conference attendance as described in the policy is put into practice. Knowledge about possible

outcomes of attendance can inform the development of a policy; for instance, the sub-theme of affective impact needing to be channelled into concrete projects, or contacts expanding colleagues' networks can be considered.

Lack of funding can be a barrier to conference attendance. Academic libraries are not in control of the overall funds allocated to them by their parent institutions, however, they have responsibility for their budget, and it is important to consider professional development, and conferences specifically, within those resources. All four libraries in this study had professional development budgets that included funds for conference attendance, but none of them had funding specifically allocated to this. In addition, participants pointed out that conference attendance was the last on a long list of professional development activities funded at their libraries, with training, study support and many others given higher priority. This low consideration of conferences undermines the important impact they can have. This study has shown that certain characteristics are inherent to conference attendance which are not replicated by other professional development activities. This means that institutions might not be able to benefit from the significant opportunities conferences offer to improve services and processes.

This study has found nine factors that influence conference attendance impact, which have relevance in regard to implications for practice. The study identified that attending with colleagues is beneficial; many participants attended the conference with colleagues from their library which resulted in increased informational, social and affective impact. In times of budget constraints, it can be difficult for libraries to access funds to send one staff member, let alone two or more. However, libraries could use creative ways to achieve similar outcomes. For instance, a staff member at the library could be a nominated *conference buddy*. The conference buddy could then follow as much of the conference program as possible online and on social media, communicate with the staff member at the conference, read all papers presented and discuss content and contacts with the colleague who attended. If a presentation is given at the library to report take-aways, the conference buddy could co-present with the attendee. This approach would mirror many of the benefits of staff attending with colleagues, without the cost of funding an additional staff member.

The research demonstrated the positive influence of social media use on the informational and social impact of conference attendance: as a note-taking tool; to facilitate networking; and for staying in touch with contacts made after the event. In addition, social media use supports the reflection process that is necessary for clarifying, defining and eventually implementing ideas from the conference. This implies that social media use by staff attending a conference should be encouraged by the library. Sousa and Clark (2017) believe that many delegates are “surprised by how much fun engaging and sharing online content is at conferences – it adds a new and different dimension to the conference experience for very little additional effort” (p. 1). Managers can also increase engagement with take-aways by encouraging staff back at the library to communicate with their colleagues who are at the conference using social media, which would support the process of contextualising ideas from the conference.

The thesis has described how factors like time for planning and reflection, the importance of a culture of ideas and the provision of tools to communicate ideas can have a significant influence on the informational impact of conference attendance. These factors can be translated into implications for practice for library and information services. For example, it would be beneficial to give staff returning from a conference a half or even full day to reflect on their experience and plan how to act on take-aways. It can be assumed that most academic library staff are busy; most libraries are not in a position to have other staff cover for librarians attending conferences. Therefore, a best-case scenario would be to facilitate staff reflecting and planning away from work, working from home or at a different location. It is also essential to ensure staff have time to prepare for report-back presentations. This study has highlighted the important role presentations play to reflect on take-aways and disseminate ideas. This is especially significant if presentations are the only communication channel available to staff to report back from the conference.

The ideas and information from a conference have been shown to have more impact if they are shared as widely as possible. Managers need to recognise the importance of providing channels that support and encourage the sharing of ideas, formally and informally and in oral and written form. Participants in this research provided many examples of how sharing content from a conference can be facilitated: informal discussions with colleagues and managers ad-hoc or during meetings; dissemination of report-back documents within the library (distributed via email, blogs or newsletters);

presentations at staff meetings that include opportunities to discuss and engage with content presented; or a formal idea register. The library could also provide means to aid the reflection process, for instance forms containing open questions (*What have you brought back from the conference, and what are you planning to do with it? Which resources might you need?...*), while avoiding language that is too restrictive and only focuses on the informational impact of conference attendance.

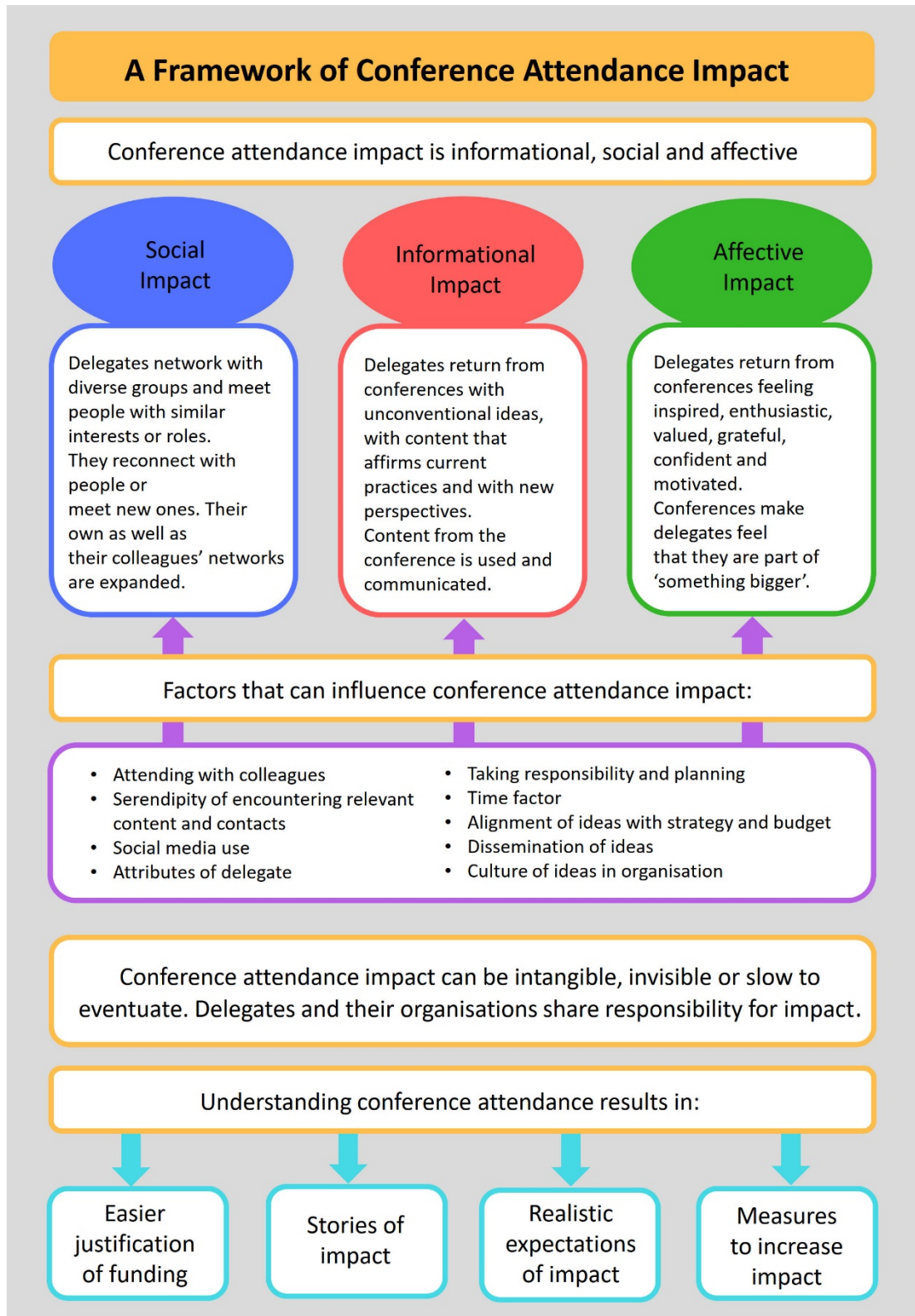
As previously discussed, conference attendance impact can be intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. It is therefore important that staff who attended a conference, as well as their colleagues and managers, communicate how attendance supported institutional change, created and strengthened networks and had positive benefits on staff morale and motivation. This is best achieved using qualitative measures, such as telling stories of how conference attendance created impact.

Sharing conference attendance impact in a qualitative manner is a form of storytelling. Storytelling, and especially organisational storytelling is recognised as a tool to highlight products or services in many professions (for examples in LIS, refer to Bartlett, 2011; Howley, 2016; Schmidmaier, 2003). This approach could be used to ensure that conference attendance impacts, while being intangible, are made more visible. This would facilitate the communication of the many impacts of conference attendance. As discussed in previous chapters, financial constraints can be barriers to attendance, and the libraries that participated in this study reported significant constraints concerning the allocation of funding for professional development activities. Qualitative techniques like storytelling would produce engaging success stories that can be used when communicating with funding bodies and stakeholders.

5.4.4 A framework of conference attendance impact

In order to make the findings of this study easily applicable for practitioners, the researcher created a conference attendance impact framework (see Figure 8). It presents the key results of the research and arguments made in this chapter concerning implications for practice.

Figure 8: A framework of conference attendance impact



5.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research

5.5.1 Limitations

Research must be clearly defined to ensure the scope is reasonable and manageable. In the case of this qualitative study, a decision was made to focus on four Australian academic libraries. The research was undertaken at purposefully selected libraries, which added institution-specific parameters to the data collected. Furthermore, the research sample was restricted to librarians who had recently attended a conference, which means that the findings of this study are based on the views of these participants. The researcher acknowledges that other libraries, or other staff at the participating libraries, might have contributed different viewpoints or emphasised different aspects of conference attendance impact.

The study is based on a socio-constructivist worldview and used qualitative methodologies in data collection and analysis. This approach does not limit the quality of the findings, their importance or their unique and important contribution to the body of knowledge regarding conference attendance impact in LIS. However, the approach means that the findings cannot easily be extrapolated to other academic libraries, other library sectors or other professions as might be possible in quantitative research.

The participants of the study were self-selected, and it is possible that they had stronger opinions about conference attendance and were more willing to reflect on it than some of their colleagues. The librarians knew before attending the conference that they were going to be interviewed afterwards, which might have increased their awareness and influenced their behaviour before, during or after the event.

The study's data collection plan included two interview stages, which was intended to provide data on the short-term and longer-term impact of conference attendance. It was anticipated that librarians would discuss their experience at the conference and plans with take-aways during the first interview, and talk about the impact those take-aways created during the second interview. In most instances, the first round of interviews were conducted about 24 days after conference attendance, and the second interview around seven months after the first. Data analysis showed that participants

raised themes related to impact and influencing factors in equal measures during both interviews. As the initial expectation regarding the second round of interviews was not met, this might have limited the findings of the research. It is possible that a longer-term study might identify aspects of conference attendance impact not found in this research. However, the method produced rich, detailed data that resulted in original contributions to the body of knowledge on this topic in LIS. Interviewing the participants on two occasions confirmed the themes identified, which contributes to the quality and strength of the findings. In addition, it produced data that allowed the researcher to reflect more thoroughly on the notion of time in the context of conference attendance impact.

Finally, the findings of this study are limited by the fact that conference attendance impact is impossible to separate from other influences, which relate to the delegates, their lives and circumstances, their experiences during the conference and after they have returned to work. Concrete examples of elements that may have changed a participant's experience and impact of attendance include:

- Elements tied to the nature of the conference – its intended audience, its focus, location and timing, the quality of presentations and other activities organised for delegates.
- Elements that have an influence on the attendee's experience at or after the conference such as personal or environmental circumstances (delegates' physical health, quality of conference venue, food and drink on offer, quality of accommodation).

These limitations do not decrease the importance or quality of the findings presented in this thesis. They highlight the need to understand them as viewpoints considered to be true by the participants and the researcher at a specific moment in time and in the study's particular context.

5.5.2 Suggestions for future research

Drawing on the findings of this study and the discussion concerning limitations above, the following section contains suggestions of topics that warrant further examination.

Researchers could explore the topic of conference attendance impact in different professions or different sectors of librarianship such as public or special libraries. Different sectors might have different priorities regarding expectations of conference attendance impact. For example, librarians working in a law library or in the corporate sector might need different kinds of knowledge and ideas, or professional networks may be more important for librarians in a public library environment.

The study invited all staff regardless of their role to participate, as it was argued that paraprofessionals and staff without an industry-related degree still form part of the organisation and were anticipated to provide valuable insights. All participants did have an LIS qualification, although two interviewees were not employed as a librarian at the time of data collection. Future research could investigate paraprofessionals or unqualified staff concerning their views on conference attendance impact. Schmehl Hines (2014a) writes that “paraprofessionals face additional barriers in attending conferences, as time off may be more difficult to arrange and they often have no access to a library’s professional development fund” (p. 263). She argues that paraprofessionals are worthy of further examination in reference to “what this particular group needs and wants from professional development opportunities like conferences. Are their needs different from librarians? Do our conferences and other outlets provide more for the librarian mindset and not enough for the paraprofessional?” (p. 270). ALIA organises a conference series specifically aimed at library technicians (as paraprofessionals are often called in Australia), which provides another angle for possible future investigations.

Future studies could use existing models and theories that explain aspects of conference attendance impact. For instance, the overlap between knowledge management, theories on social networks or organisational change and behaviour and conference attendance impact could be explored. An information practice and information sharing lens could also produce valuable results. In addition, the topic could be investigated from the point of view of conference organisers or professional associations like ALIA or IFLA.

An interesting approach to future research would be to consider personality traits of attendees and their effect on conference attendance impact. While this was found to be an influencing factor in this study (*Experience, role and attributes of attendee*), it could be investigated in more detail. Research could consider specific personality traits

and their influence, using, for instance, the model of change champions from Paton, Beranek and Smith (2008), or the Five-Factor-Model devised by McShane et al. (2014, p. 44), that describes the five personality dimensions of conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and extroversion.

This study has produced a conference attendance impact framework which summarises the key findings of the research, see Figure 8 in section 5.4.4 of this chapter. Future research projects could validate and test this framework in different contexts and for different groups of practitioners.

5.6 Summary of chapter

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in a wider context and examined their relevance to the profession of librarianship. It demonstrated that conferences have unique characteristics when compared to other professional development activities. They offer delegates informational, social and affective benefits, in one location, over a specified time. While the opportunities are broad in scope and at times serendipitous, the possible impact of conference attendance is multi-faceted, diverse, and occasionally intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. In this context, the importance of describing conference attendance impact convincingly was acknowledged, especially as libraries are facing financial pressures that affect funds available for staff to attend these kinds of events.

The advantages of face-to-face conferences in contrast to virtual events were discussed. Primarily these include the possibility of social and affective impacts that are not easily achieved in a virtual conference format. It was argued that the benefits of staff attending conferences are able to address important challenges currently prominent in librarianship; with examples including the need for innovation, the value of benchmarking, and the significance of networks and motivated staff.

The chapter also discussed how the responsibility for conference attendance impact is shared between the individual and their institution. The original and significant contribution this thesis makes to the body of knowledge in LIS was described, and the relationship between the impact of conference attendance on an individual versus the

impact on their institution was clarified. Implications for best practice as well as a conference attendance framework were presented, which are useful for libraries wanting to maximise the impacts of conference attendance. Limitations of the research were provided, and the chapter concluded with suggestions for future research.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Review of findings

Existing literature concerning conference attendance impact in library and information science (LIS) is scarce. Furthermore, previous research has been conducted primarily using quantitative approaches or by applying specific lenses to study this phenomenon. This thesis reports on qualitative research that investigated the impact of conference attendance, in the context of Australian academic libraries and librarians, in an open, qualitative manner that allowed previously unknown insights to emerge. The findings of the study complement the literature and add new and original themes to the body of knowledge. The research questions guiding the study included:

1. What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?
2. Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?

Researchers in LIS and other disciplines agree with Taylor et al. (2014) that conferences are “environments where delegates wish to absorb information, build relationships amongst the research community and be inspired and energised” (p. 1). These reasons for attending conferences and the three corresponding key themes of impact identified in the study’s findings reverberate throughout this thesis. The three key themes of informational, social and affective impact of conference attendance, and the two minor themes of *Extending skill sets* and *Appreciation of conferences* answer the first research question (*What is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia?*).

Informational impact refers to ideas, knowledge and information that delegates are exposed to at the conference and bring back to their institution. The findings of this study described types of ideas attendees obtain at the conference, and documented the different actions delegates take with that content. The social impact of conference attendance is more commonly referred to as networking. This research explored what kinds of peers attendees engage with, and what happens to these contacts after the conference. The key theme of affective conference attendance impact provides another

substantial response to the first research question. In addition to the three key themes of conference attendance impact, the study produced sub-themes and a detailed description of their nature.

The three themes of conference attendance impact, which also correspond to reasons for attendance, are linked to each other. This is an advantage and characteristic of conferences that differentiates them from other forms of professional development. Conferences are unique in providing opportunities for encountering engaging content in the company of like-minded practitioners, which usually results in inspired and enthusiastic attendees. Conference attendance connects delegates with people that are often difficult to access and provides a perspective on knowledge that other avenues of professional development cannot easily provide.

Nine factors that influence the impact that conference attendance has on conference attendees and on their institution were detailed. These factors represent the answer to the second research question (*Which factors influence the impact of conference attendance?*) and ranged from attending with colleagues and social media use to the serendipitous nature of conferences. Some factors influence informational conference attendance impact, such as the alignment of ideas with the strategy and budget of the institution, the importance of disseminating content the attendee returned with or the library's culture of ideas. Others factors influence the social or affective impact of attendance, such as social media use or the experience, role and attributes of the attendee.

The findings are important for the profession of librarianship, which strives to be innovative and collaborative, and aims to attract and retain inspired and enthusiastic individuals. The significance of these findings demonstrates that the researcher was successful in gathering relevant data and analysing it appropriately to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The study produced three key themes of conference attendance impact and their corresponding sub-themes, two minor themes of conference attendance impact, nine influencing factors as well as a conference attendance impact framework that expand the body of knowledge concerning the topic in the context of Australian academic libraries.

6.2 Overview of research

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic and the scope of the study and provided an outline of the chapters that followed. It also offered definitions and descriptions of key concepts that were important to the study – specifically *conferences*, *academic libraries* and *librarians* and *impact*. In addition, the chapter provided a detailed account of the significance of the research.

Chapter Two discussed the literature on the topic of conferences and the possible impact of attendance. Authors, specifically in LIS but also in other disciplines have investigated the topic using different perspectives. Seven such perspectives were determined in this study, they are: advice and recommendations to delegates; virtual conferences and associated technologies; barriers that prevent practitioners from attending; reasons that inspire them to attend; conference attendance impact and influencing factors; and other approaches to conference impact analysis. The concepts of barriers to conference attendance, reasons for conference attendance and the impact of attendance on delegates and organisations were emphasised in this chapter as they were of greatest relevance to the study's research questions.

Regarding outcomes attributed to conference attendance, the literature review showed that previous research has investigated impact from bibliometric, economic, environmental or gender-related perspectives. Most research has investigated the impact on delegates, and to a lesser extent, on their institutions. The concepts of *information and ideas*, *networking*, and *inspiration and invigoration* as benefits of attending conferences are prominent in the existing literature. Strategies to increase the benefits of conference attendance have also been explored. Some papers use a lens or specific focus to explore the phenomenon, such as information seeking behaviour, learning theory models or analysis of attendees' satisfaction levels. This study differs from these approaches, as it investigated the topic holistically, using an open and unrestricted approach. The literature review concluded with a summary of statements by researchers who refer to conferences and their possible benefits as an under-researched field that warranted closer examination.

The methodological background to the study was described in Chapter Three. It discussed how a socio-constructivist approach aligned with the researcher's own

philosophical beliefs and values and was appropriate for the study's topic and its research questions. The ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological principles that constitute social constructivism were detailed, followed by an explanation of how they support the qualitative approach taken to data collection and analysis. The alignment between the research questions and the use of qualitative methods was examined. The second part of the methodology chapter provided a detailed description of the research design, which included information about the pilot study, the sample selection, the interviews, the collection of documents and data analysis.

The findings of the research were presented in Chapter Four. The first section described the participants of the study, their libraries and the conferences they attended. The three key themes of conference attendance impact (informational, social and affective) were then defined and explored. Informational conference attendance impact presented the kinds of content librarians obtained from a conference, and the resulting actions with this content. Social impact detailed the kinds of connections that were made at a conference, and their value for future use. The affective impact of conference attendance was the third and last key theme presented in the chapter. The chapter also described how the three key themes of impact were connected, and presented two minor themes of conference attendance impact. Nine factors which influence conference attendance impact were then defined and explored in detail.

Chapter Five discussed the nature and unique qualities of conferences, especially when compared to other professional development activities. Conference attendance impact was described as possibly intangible, invisible or slow to eventuate. The benefits of face-to-face conferences compared to online events were deliberated. The chapter argued that conference attendance fulfils specific needs that are important to librarianship. Access to ideas and original content was shown to be vital for innovation, and innovation was shown to be significant in the profession of librarianship. The fact that conferences facilitate the creation and maintenance of networks is equally important, as the ability to build partnerships is a core competency for librarians. Similarly, the chapter referred to the need for enthusiastic and motivated library staff and explored the necessity of channelling motivation into concrete projects and plans after returning from a conference.

The shared responsibility of the attendee and their institution in reference to facilitating lasting benefits from conference attendance was also considered. This leads to a discussion of the findings of this study in other contexts such as organisational culture and core competencies for librarianship professionals. The chapter also considered conference attendance impact in the context of librarianship and suggested implications for best practice based on the study's findings. It introduced a conference attendance impact framework, identified the limitations of the research and offered suggestions for future research.

6.3 Reflection on process

The motivation to research conference attendance impact arose from the researcher's own experience working in an academic library. While being funded to attend conferences felt like a reward and was motivating, there seemed to be a divide between her own and her institution's expectations regarding the impact her attendance might have, which sparked an interest in the subject. Investigating events that bring together like-minded people to form networks and discuss new ideas in order to bring about positive change was found to be relevant and exciting, as it aligns with the values and interests of the researcher.

After spending six years researching and writing about the topic of conference attendance impact, the researcher's opinion that conferences are valuable, exciting and useful has not changed. Conferences facilitate outcomes that allow libraries to "proceed in promising new directions" (OCLC, 2014, p. 12), as they aid institutions to be innovative, collaborative and retain enthusiastic staff.

The findings demonstrate that the qualitative methodological approach taken to the research design produced rich and in-depth data resulting in high-quality results. The applied methodology allowed for the inclusion of participants' perspectives, while providing data that allowed new insights to be discovered. The thesis demonstrates that the results extend the scarce existing literature and add to the body of knowledge in LIS in new and original ways.

The researcher, like many PhD students, was relatively new to qualitative research at the beginning of this study, but is now a strong advocate for this approach. It allows for the *why* and *how* of a phenomenon to be explored, by providing a fuller, richer and more detailed picture. This is a strength of qualitative research, and many phenomena relating to librarianship can benefit from this approach.

The study's participants generally gave the impression that they enjoyed participating in a study about conference attendance impact. Two were particularly articulate about the benefits of taking part in the study. DLib2 referred to it as a *next level reflection*, adding that they believe that the study will encourage them to be more engaged and reflective the next time they are funded to attend a conference. BLib3 highlighted how they considered the interview being part of the reflection process:

. . . having these two conversations with you has helped me in my reflection on the conference and has enriched my conference experience being able to articulate it to you in quite lengthy conversations because that opportunity doesn't happen here [at the library] . . . So it's actually been very useful for me to think aloud and to articulate it and in both of our conversations I've taken notes to remind myself of things that I want to do. Not directly on the content of the conferences but how I want to use what I learnt. [BLib3]

The engagement and enthusiasm of the participating librarians and libraries indicate a wide interest in the topic, and a need to gain greater understanding about the impact of conference attendance impact and factors that may influence it. It is hoped that this thesis has done justice to the generosity and enthusiasm of the participants in its detailed account of the phenomenon and its discussion of the implications for practice.

6.4 Concluding thoughts

Throughout the analysis of the literature, data collection, data analysis and writing of this thesis, the researcher encountered positive and occasionally enthusiastic attitudes towards conferences and conference attendance. While conference fatigue or doubts about the ability of conferences to inspire change are occasionally present, the overall

sentiment is one of agreement on their value. Colleagues in LIS and practitioners from librarianship and other disciplines share a positive attitude towards conference attendance and believe in its important contribution to professions. The interest in the topic is also reflected by an unusually high response rate to the initial contact made with academic libraries in Australia, and by the many practitioners who indicated their interest in the study's findings to the researcher.

The number of conferences that are organised in the profession of librarianship and other disciplines highlights that they are perceived to be beneficial on many levels, and so does the numbers of attendees who take time out of their busy schedules to attend. The following statement from one of the participants in this study exemplifies a view shared by many:

I think nowadays the sort of formal professional development activities such as training and doing short courses and things, those seemed to have declined in prominence, in my experience. So conferences have actually risen to the top of the pile . . . In terms of staff development overall I think conferences rate quite highly now as one of the prime ways to develop staff. [CMan3]

Conferences and their many benefits address important challenges in librarianship. A need for innovation and keeping abreast of new technologies and discoveries is evident in the field, as is the importance of networks and motivated and engaged staff. Many authors and professional associations believe that these challenges are significant. Davis and Lundstrom (2011) write that “libraries face a host of new challenges . . . Staff development and continuing education will begin to take their places amongst the most strategically urgent activities in which libraries and the librarian profession engage”. (p. 334, 335). Corcoran and McGuinness (2014) emphasise that professional development activities such as conferences “must be accorded the utmost importance if academic librarians are to remain valuable to their employers, colleagues and library users . . . Ultimately the survival of the profession and indeed the professional depend on it” (p. 192). Edwards et al. (2017) believe that “conferences have a bright future” (p. 3), and the participants in their study “unanimously agree that there is still no substitute for the power of congregation” (p.3). Despite general agreement on the reasons for conference attendance and an abundance of anecdotal evidence referring

enthusiastically to its benefits, few studies investigate the phenomenon in an open, qualitative manner. Very little was known about the outcomes of conference attendance, or its impact on delegates and their institutions in LIS and other disciplines. This resulted in a gap in the literature on conference attendance impact that this research has addressed.

Increased financial constraints in academic libraries result in a need for conference attendance impact to be documented so that management can communicate benefits in a convincing and methodical manner to parent institutions. The findings of this study including the conference attendance impact framework are a valuable contribution to the knowledge on the topic that address this need. The study's results are also useful to professional associations wanting to understand the impact of the events that they organise. The study's strength is its qualitative approach, which produced rich, detailed data that led to findings that extended existing knowledge and added original and detailed insights into the phenomenon of conference attendance impact. The project contributed significantly to the body of knowledge concerning conference attendance impact in LIS, and with its recommendations for practice, will be valuable to academic libraries, their staff and the profession at large.

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Appendix A

Consent form

Title of project:

The impact of conference attendance on Australian academic librarians and libraries

Name of participant:

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study sign and date the declaration at the end. If you would like to clarify any points, please ask.

- I freely give my consent to participate in the study as outlined to me.
- I confirm that I have been informed of and understand the purpose of this study and that I have been given an opportunity to ask any questions.
- I understand that the research will involve two interviews lasting approximately 40 minutes and that the audio will be recorded.
- I understand that I, personally will not be named in any written work arising from this study.
- I am aware of the fact that some direct quotes from the interview may be used in a thesis and publications reporting the research, subject to my permission.
- I understand that any recorded information will be used solely for the purposes of the research and related publications.
- I understand that the data will be stored for seven years on a Curtin University password-access computer/drive and access to the data will be limited to the researcher and supervisor only.
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation and without penalty.

Signature, date:

Information sheet

Project title

The impact of conference attendance on Australian academic librarians and libraries

Project objectives

The proposed research project seeks to answer the question: what is the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries in Australia and how does it evolve? In addition, the project aims to establish if there are any factors or circumstances that influence the impact of conference attendance.

The research project has three general objectives:

1. To identify and analyse the impact of conference attendance on academic librarians and libraries
 - a. immediately after the conference, and
 - b. in the longer-term.
2. To determine factors that have an influence on the impact of conference attendance, such as
 - a. Policies and procedures the libraries have in place concerning conference attendance of their staff
 - b. Expectations the library has in terms of conference attendance of their staff
3. To identify and analyse the relationship between the impact of conference attendance and factors that influence the impact

The project has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number MCCA-14-12.

Participation

Your participation in this study will involve two recorded (audio only) interviews, with one interview held as soon as feasible after you have attended a conference and then again six months later. The interviews will be conducted in-person, by phone or online as convenient, and will take approximately 40 minutes each.

Feedback on the progress of the study will be provided, giving you the opportunity to verify the data collected. The interview will be organised in a way that ensures as little disruption as possible.

The data gathered will be analysed and used for the researcher's doctoral thesis and possibly other publications. No personal or identifying information will be included in these publications and your permission will be sought prior to using any direct quotes. All collected data will be stored securely and will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. Any printed information relating to the research will be stored in a secure filing cabinet.

Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated, but you will be at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

The findings of this project will add to the body of knowledge in regards to the impact of professional development activities as well as assist both libraries and their staff to understand and possibly increase the impact of conference attendance.

Contact details

For questions about your rights as a participant or to discuss any other aspect of this study, please contact either the researcher, her supervisor or the Ethics committee of Curtin University:

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Appendix B

Interview schedule librarians - first round

Part A: Demographic information	
A1	Gender? F <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/>
A2	Can you tell me in which of the following age groups you are in? 18-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26-35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> 56-65 <input type="checkbox"/> 66+ <input type="checkbox"/>
A3	How long have you worked in the Library and Information Science sector? 5 years or less <input type="checkbox"/> 6 - 15 years <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 16 years or more <input type="checkbox"/>
Part A: Conference experience	
A4	What are the first 3 words that come into your mind when you think about the conference you have just been to? <i>Can you tell me more about these 3 things?</i>
A5	What was the best thing that happened to you at the conference?
A6	What was the reason for going to this conference? Did you ask to go? <i>How do you think this changed your experience?</i>
	Talk about factors that might have influence experience
A7	Was this your first conference? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A8	Did the library fund all of the conference? N > How do you think this changed your experience?
A9	Did you present a paper/poster/session? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A10	Were you involved in organising the conference? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A11	Did you attend the whole conference? N > How do you think this changed your experience?
A12	Did you go with a colleague/colleagues from work? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A13a	Did you use social media during the conference? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A13b	Y > Did you communicate with your colleagues at the office via social media? Y > How do you think this changed your experience?
A14	Can you think of anything we have not discussed so far that had an influence on your conference experience? <i>Is there anything you can think of that had an influence (positive or negative) on your conference experience?</i>
Part B: Conference impact	
A15	What did you bring back from the conference? <i>What is different now in terms of you having been to that conference?</i> <i>What has the impact of the conference been on you?</i>

	Now moving on to categories out of lit review, might have already discussed some	
A16a	Ideas, information	Did you find out about new ideas, gain new information?
A16b	Ideas, information	Y > Can you tell me what they are?
A17	New skills	Did you gain any new skills? <i>(practical skills?) Did you learn any new ways of doing things?</i> <i>Do you now know how to do something that you did not know how to do before?</i>
A18	Networking	How was the networking? <i>Did you meet new people/reconnect with colleagues?</i>
A19a	Motivation	On a scale from 1-10, where 1 is "not motivated at all" and 10 is "extremely motivated" can you tell me how motivated you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> were in your job before the conference? are at the moment?
A19b	Motivation	Is the raise/fall in your motivation level directly linked to the conference?
A20	Feelings	Can you talk about what feelings you associate with this conference? <i>How did the conference make you feel?</i>
A21	Materials	Did you bring back materials? <i>(like notes, brochures, business cards, includes electronic material)</i>
A22	Impact on institution	Did your conference attendance change the way the library handles things? <i>Did it have an effect on your library?</i>
A23	Other	Are there any other outcomes of your conference attendance you can think of?
Part D: Organisational requirements		
A24	What does the library require you to do now that you have returned from the conference? <i>Are there any policies or procedures in place (in regard to people coming back from a conference?)</i>	
A25	Do you think your library made it clear to you what their expectations are in terms of you attending this conference?	
Part E: Additional comments		
A26	Do you have any other thoughts in regards to your conference attendance you would like to share?	

Interview schedule librarians – second round

Part A: Conference Impact	
B1	Now that a little time has passed since the conference, what would you say the biggest impact of the conference has been on you?
B2	What would you say the biggest impact of your conference attendance has been on your library?

B3	Do you think there is anything the library could have done to increase the impact of your conference attendance?	
B4	Ideas, info	<i>Last time we went through a few categories of conference impact that I found in the literature. Will go through list again:</i> You talked about a few ideas you brought back from the conference last time we spoke. <i><give examples from 1st interview></i> Can I ask you what happened to them? <i>(Did you follow up on them? Did you share them or develop them in any way?)</i>
B5	Ideas, info	Do you feel that the library encourages you to share or develop your ideas?
B6	Ideas, info	Does the library provide means to share and develop ideas? <i>(that are accessible to all staff, for example informal meetings, online forums, idea competitions etc.)</i>
B7	Networking	Have you been in touch with any of the people you met at the conference? Can you tell me a bit more about that?
B8	Motivation	On a scale (show scale) can you tell me how <u>motivated</u> you are in your job now?
B9	Motivation	Can you tell me more about how you rated your motivation before the conference, immediately afterwards and now? (make sure we talk about motivation as a result of conference attendance!)
B10	Materials	You talked about a few materials you brought back from the conference <i><give examples from 1st interview></i> Can you tell me what happened to them?
Part B: Organisational requirements		
B11	You talked about a few things that the library required you do to after the conference <i><give examples from 1st interview></i> Can you tell me how that went?	
Part C: Individual follow-up		
BB		
Part E: Additional comments		
B12	If you were in charge of the library, and there would be no limits in terms of money or time, what would you do about conferences, about the whole process concerning conferences?	
B13	Do you have any other thoughts in regard to your conference attendance you would like to share?	

Interview schedule managers

Part A: Organisational expectations		
C1	What are your expectations in terms of your staff attending a conference?	
C2	How do you think conferences rate in comparison to other PD activities? <i>(like courses, self-study, mentoring...)</i>	
Part C: Conference impact		
C3	What do you think staff generally bring back from a conference? <i>Are there some things you expect to be different after staff has returned from a conference?</i>	
	<i>Explain that we will talk about categories coming from literature review now. Some might already have been mentioned before.</i>	
C4	Ideas, information	What are your expectations in regards to staff bringing back ideas and information from the conference?

C5	Ideas, information	What do you think will happen to these new ideas and information?
C6	Ideas, information	How are staff encouraged to share and develop new ideas? (<i>for example informal meetings, online forums, idea competitions etc.</i>)
C7	New skills	Do you expect staff to learn new ways of doing things? <i>Do you think they gained any new skills (practical skills? Do you think they now know how to do something that they did not know before?</i>
C8	Networking	What are your expectations in regards to your staff's networking at the conference?
C9a	Motivation	Are you expecting your staff to be more motivated now than before the conference?
C9b	Motivation	Y > Do you expect this motivation to last?
C10	Materials	What are your expectations in terms of materials brought back from the conference?
C11	Impact on institution	What do you expect the impact of conferences attendance of your staff to be on your library?
C12	Impact on institution	How do you think that impact could be increased?
C13	Other	Are there any other outcomes of conference attendance you can think of?
Part B: Organisational requirements		
C14	What is your staff normally required to do after they have come back from the conference? <i>(for example write a report, present to staff...)</i>	
C15	Do you usually have a formal/informal discussion with the staff after they have come back from a conference? What sort of things do you discuss?	
Part D: Influencing factors		
C16a	Do you encourage the use of social media during a conference? (by staff in the office and staff that attend)	
C16b	Do you use social media to follow the backchannel of a conference?	
C16c	Y > Have you communicated with staff that were at a conference? How did that go?	
Part E: Additional comments		
C17	Do you have any other thoughts in regards to conference attendance you would like to share?	

Interview schedule administrative staff

Interview	
D1	Can you talk me through the entire process of someone attending a conference at your institution? <i>(from the time when a certain conference is announced to when the attendee is back at the library)</i>
D2	Has this process changed in the last few years, and if yes, why and how?
D3	Is there a lot of interest amongst staff to attend a conference? <i>(Does everyone who would like to attend get to go, is the process quite competitive or do you have to encourage staff?)</i>
D4	Are there any restrictions as to who gets to attend a conference? <i>(levels, years of experience, need to present...)</i>

D5	Are there processes/procedures in place that occur after the attendee has returned from the conference?
D6	Can you talk to me about expectations the library has in terms of conferences?
D7	Can you talk to me about funding and budgets in regards to conferences? <i>(Is there a specific budget for PD activities/conferences? And if yes, what percentage of the overall budget does it take?)</i>
D8	<Questions in regards to documents interviewees have sent prior to the interview>
D9	Do you have anything else you would like to add in terms of staff attending conferences?