

Take the Lead Workshop Report

Sponsored by the Australian Institute of Management and ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Take the Lead workshop, attended by 55 fledgling young Canberra leaders who self-rated Canberra and facilitated by Charles Landry on October 27:

Summary:

Canberra's next generation of leaders agree on many things. Most of them centre around the perception that Canberra is stagnant in many key respects. Young people observed that Canberra has an abundance of ideas and talent but a paucity of vision, focus and action. The means the ideas don't readily translate into reality.

The group agreed that the ingredients or "pieces of the mosaic" are there. They "just need assembling".

Interestingly, when they were surveyed at the end of the session about who they would like to be mentored by, they predominantly chose people renowned for their high standard of ethics. Nelson Mandela was a favourite. David Suzuki, Fred Hollows and even Steve Jobs were also favoured. This group of people want ethical, high-quality leadership.

Also notable was the fact that many of the participants were amazed at the calibre of other young people in the room. They had never experienced this before. What this says is that we have been neglecting one of our most valuable assets, our future leaders. They have been working in virtual isolation.

What is clear is that Canberra needs to involve them more intimately in its future. This group has passion, talent, drive, optimism and determination.

Key comments voiced:

1. Political and public framework:
"Short-sighted", "In the not-for-profit sector you can do things. In the public service there's a real limit to what you can do", "Canberra loses the idea of people and community", sometimes you forget about the people and the community"
2. Distinctiveness, diversity, vitality and expression:
"We have these pieces of a mosaic. We just need someone to put them together. That's where our leadership challenges lie, to bring it all together", "It's a very in crowd and it's not very welcoming" (a show of hands determined that this was the overwhelming majority view), "It's definitely trying but there's nothing unique about Canberra", "There are elements of expressiveness but it's underground", "There's no sense of identity", "There's no place really dedicated to teens", "It's really dead", "There are no 'oohs and ahhs'", "We do think it's very distinctive", "People around this city are very polite" (from an international student, "I think we need more people to be proud of Canberra", "One distinct thing is there's no traffic", "It's a very transitional town",

“There’s so much choice of what to do. You just have to seek it out, get to know the right people”, “The underground scene in Canberra is bustling”

3. Openness, trust, tolerance and accessibility:

“Ahead of the curve on things like banning plastic bags”, “Canberrans are a bit selfish, especially when they’re driving”, “People in Canberra can be very snobby”, “very socially advanced”, “More buses because people are more open on buses”, “The nightlife is really disgusting. It’s not tolerant. There are all these bars encouraging a certain violent, chauvinistic culture”

4. Entrepreneurship, exploration and innovation:

“I started my own business and found there was no real support offered as I did not come from a university”, “Canberra’s got so many resources and it’s small so it’s very accessible”, “It’s all about word of mouth and who you know”, “When someone comes up with a cool idea people want to get involved because it is unusual”, “It’s probably one of the best places in Australia to start up a new business”, “The creative community here is stifled”, “There’s no hunger or need because Canberra’s population is so well off. It’s all a bit too complacent”

5. Strategic agility, leadership & vision:

“There are so many people doing the same thing. No-one’s really talking to each other. That long-term focus isn’t here”, “The vision isn’t communicated well”, “Our focus on sustainability isn’t as strong as it should be”, “We tend to get overshadowed by the national vision”

6. Talent and learning landscape:

“The structured education works very well but the informal stuff is not so good”, “There’s huge talent in Canberra”, “It has a brilliant array of educational institutions”, “We have very good adult education”, “The government’s really supporting other cultures”

7. Communication, connectivity and networking

It was generally agreed it was difficult to break into the informal networks but that once you had it was easy to expand them. “Once you’re in, you’re in”, “The one major downer is the lack of public transport”, “There’s no incentive to travel, to explore. There’s nothing to see in other centres”, “structured networks are very good. Incidental networks are more difficult”

8. Place and place-making:

“Get rid of the artwork”, We need public art and good architecture. Look at Berlin. Look at Melbourne. Those are places people want to live in”, “We have really great initiatives but because of the community consultation that the politicians take great notice of things get stopped”, “very vocal small minorities”, “the meddlesome minority”, “the Canberra Brickworks is an example”, “The Canberra Centre has been sucking the life out of this place for some time”

9. Liveability and wellbeing:

“I think Canberra’s one of the safest places”, “It’s the 15th most unaffordable city in the world. It’s not very affordable but it’s safe”, “There’s the opportunity to have a good work/life balance in Canberra”, “Accessibility to things is difficult”

10. Professionalism and effectiveness:

“Professional reports but not much action”, “The pace of change is too slow”, “Canberra’s very ineffective at delivering outcomes”, “Canberra’s a place of change at the moment. Watch this space. It just needs time. There’s so much cool stuff going on at the moment”, “I think there are too many penguin suits walking around. I think we’re too professional”, “We don’t have that middle ground”, “Canberra doesn’t have outlets for its creativity”, “Canberra doesn’t seem very ambitious”

Vox pops:

1. Charles Landry asked who in the room knew about the recently released the ACT Government *Time to Talk* report. Four people did, but only because they worked for the ACT Government, and not one person could name any of the seven major points in the report.

2. Landry asked the audience which Australian cities were more attractive than Canberra:

- Melbourne and Brisbane were voted more attractive than Canberra
- Sydney and Adelaide were voted less attractive than Canberra
- About half the audience thought Perth was more attractive, the other half thought it was less attractive

Canberra's Creativity Scorecard	150 established leaders in 2010	55 young leaders in 2011
Political & public framework	4.1	4.9
Distinctiveness, diversity, vitality & expression	5.2	6.1
Openness, trust, tolerance & accessibility	5.6	6.2
Entrepreneurship, exploration & innovation	5.5	6
Strategic agility, leadership & vision	3.4	5.7
Talent & learning landscape	7.4	8.2
Communication, connectivity & networking	5.4	5.9
Place & place-making	4.9	6.2
Liveability & wellbeing	7.5	8.1
Professionalism & effectiveness	5.3	5.8
Average	5.43	6.31

