

Growing Leaders

Developing Library Leaders: A Management Responsibility

Sheila Corrall

Director of Academic Services, University of Southampton
President, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

Leadership development is a hot topic in the library world – and not just in the UK. Colleagues in the United States, Australia and other countries are also concerned and the word ‘crisis’ is often used. Before considering what we should be doing about it, this paper sets that debate in context by drawing attention to recent research and current initiatives in the field. It deals next with the contentious issue of the relationship between leadership and management and mentions briefly the various schools of thought on how we should characterise leadership and leaders. It then looks at general approaches and particular examples of leadership development programmes and the factors that are crucial to success.

A profession in crisis?

Are we facing a crisis in library leadership? The Public Library Workforce Study (PLWS) led by Bob Usherwood pointed to a serious problem in that sector, “The general consensus was that there was a lack of leaders in the public library profession, and no identified way in which a new generation of leaders might be fostered”.(1) However, this issue is a cross-sectoral concern: the HIMSS project (Hybrid Information Management: Skills for Senior staff) investigated similar issues in higher education information services and revealed an equally depressing picture – shortages of candidates for director-level posts in libraries, computing services and converged information organisations and gaps in key generic skills, including strategic management and leadership, and the ability to manage change.(2)

It is also a cross-domain issue. The information services National Training Organisation (isNTO), which covers archives and records management as well as library and information services, has flagged this as a priority for action in its Workforce Development Plan and has just set up a Leadership Development Group. Identifying the most effective means by which to improve leadership across the sector is listed as a key task for 2002/03 in the Annual Workplan of Resource, the Council for museums, archives and libraries, which has funded the Quality Leaders project to improve the leadership potential of ethnic minority workers in libraries.(3) Resource is also collaborating with the Leadership Committee of the National Museums Directors Conference on a project to help existing sector leaders, with support from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Earlier this year the Clore Duffield Foundation responded to concerns by creating a Steering Group to look at leadership in the ‘cultural sector’ and specifically to consider how to improve the performance of existing leaders and how to prepare a larger pool of potential leaders. This Cultural Leadership Initiative was kicked off with an essay provocatively entitled “*Why are there not currently more successful leaders of arts organisations and museums, and why are there not more suitable candidates for these posts?*”(4) Circulated to 200 stakeholders, it generated a 75 per

cent response and a related seminar held at the British Museum in May attracted a large attendance. Many of the problems identified in developing and supporting arts and museums leaders echo comments voiced in the library world, such as lack of time and money, levels of pay and status, pressures and stresses of jobs, and ad hoc and fragmented career paths.(5)

Leadership and/or management?

Turning to the concept of leadership, many commentators have strong views on the relationship between leadership and management. Some, like Field Marshal Lord Slim, see a high-level distinction akin to the ‘two cultures’ – art and science, “There is a difference between leadership and management. Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality and vision; its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, a matter of accurate calculation . . . its practice is a science. Managers are necessary; leaders are essential.”(6) Others, like the American guru Warren Bennis, in my view interpret both roles rather narrowly in order to force the comparison:

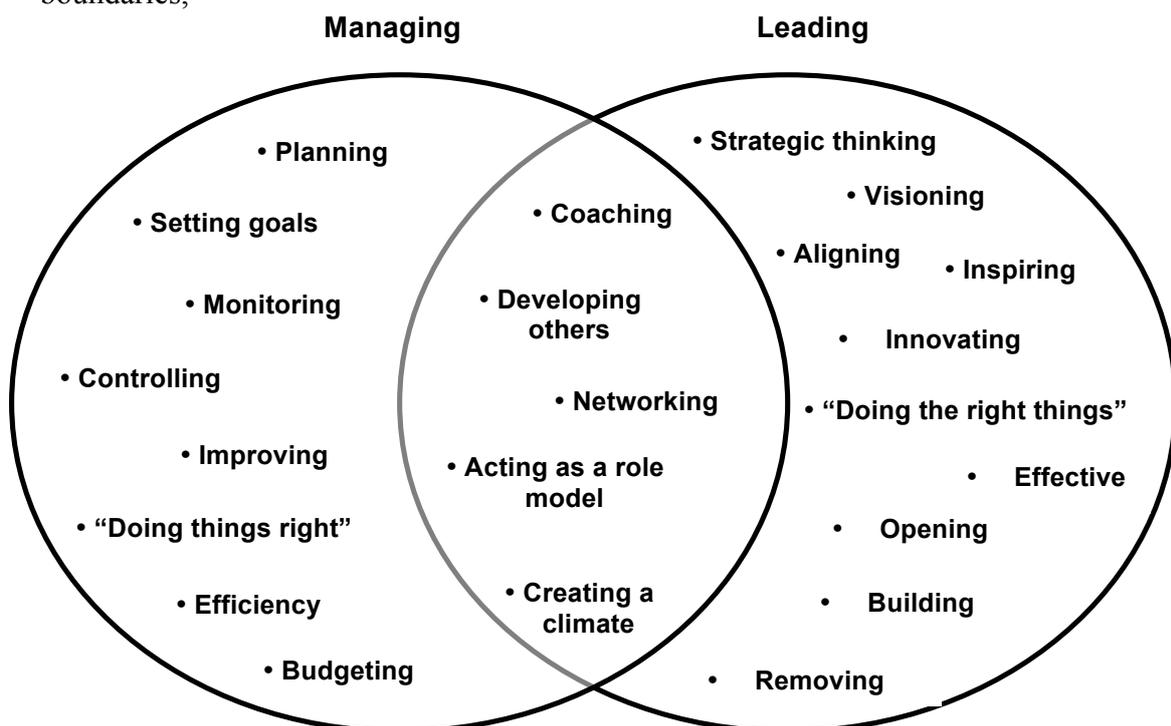
The Manager

- administers
- is a copy
- focuses on systems and structure
- relies on controls
- has a short-range view
- asks how and when
- imitates
- accepts the status quo
- does things right

The Leader

- motivates
- is an original
- focuses on people
- inspires trust
- has a long-range perspective
- asks what and why
- originates
- challenges
- does the right thing (7)

Do managers not ask ‘what’ and ‘why’? I prefer the perspective of Chris Lake, Director of Roffey Park Institute’s Developing Leadership Potential Programme, which acknowledges the complementarities of competencies and a blurring of boundaries,



“Distinctions between management and leadership are often unhelpful. Increasingly a manager’s role can be described in terms of his/her impact on others, so much of management is executed through leadership”.(8)

In this model, some activities (such as planning, monitoring and controlling) are associated more with Managing and some attributes (such as strategic thinking, visioning and aligning) are particularly associated with Leading, but several core competencies are seen as essential to both roles, namely coaching, developing others, networking, acting as a role model and creating a climate. Management and leadership are not mutually exclusive: they can and should be overlapping and management does not work well in today’s volatile and unpredictable environment without leadership to accompany it. The key point is that we need competence in both areas at all levels of our organisations, irrespective of the titles of people’s jobs and their positions in a hierarchy and we must develop capacity accordingly.

Theories of leadership can be broadly grouped as:

- trait-based – leadership depends on the possession of extraordinary qualities;
- behavioural – leadership is about adopting the right behaviour;
- contingency-based – leadership depends on matching the style to the situation;
- transformational – leadership is about being an effective agent of change.

There are many variants within these categories and they are not mutually exclusive. However, the different leadership theories suggest different development practices and raise questions about how – and even whether – leadership can be cultivated in a formal way. Are people born to lead or can they develop the required attributes? (nature versus nurture) Are standard courses suitable or is a tailored programme needed? (generic versus specific) As usual the answers are not clearcut: people can examine, learn and practise ‘leadership behaviours’, but they must also have the will to lead and a need to achieve; practical skills can be taught, but personal qualities are hard to develop from scratch. Cross-sectoral perspectives add value, but programmes need to be culturally sensitive and incorporate context-specific elements.

Creating new development pathways

Both the PLWS and HIMSS projects recommended new and improved approaches to developing library leaders. The PLWS report advocated co-operation among library and information educators and practitioners and a system of national traineeships funded by local authorities with designated posts reserved for this purpose. It also suggested consideration of fast-track schemes, leadership development programmes, compulsory continuing professional development and a staff college for the sector. (The latter reflects the national trend of setting up such bodies, exemplified by the National College for School Leadership, the NHS Leadership Centre and Defence Leadership Centre.) The HIMSS report also mentioned formal programmes, fast-tracking and links between education and practice, but placed more emphasis on development on or around the job through mentoring schemes, peer networks, external projects and ‘acting up’. In addition, it recommended raising awareness of job roles and career paths, consideration of succession planning and a web-based toolkit to help identify skills development needs.

The Cultural Leadership Initiative has identified a more comprehensive wish-list, “Practitioners would like to be able to afford to go on development courses; to

develop the entire senior staff of their organisation; to take ‘time out’ for study and reflection; to develop professional and support networks; to have access to coaching and informal learning; to be able to go on secondment; and to be mentored”. The progress report in June proposes a new cross-sectoral leadership development course and a mentoring scheme embracing the whole cultural sector, as well as university-based fellowships for production of research dissertations, secondments to relevant organisations, bursaries and other support for participants and their organisations, a professional coaching scheme and a summer school.

It is instructive at this point to compare the position in America and Australia, where there are several well-established development programmes for staff at various stages of their careers or in different sub-sectors of the profession. The Aurora Leadership Institute in Australia (9) and the Northern Exposure to Leadership in Canada (10) are both modelled on the successful Snowbird Leadership Institute in the United States (11) and all three are aimed at new managers rather than seasoned professionals. Other examples include the National Library of Medicine/Association of Academic Health Science Libraries Leadership Fellows Program,(12) the Council on Library and Information Resources/EDUCAUSE/Emory University Frye Leadership Institute,(13) the Association of College and Research Libraries/Harvard Graduate School of Education Leadership Institute,(14) and the Association of Research Libraries Leadership and Career Development Program, which is explicitly aimed at librarians from under-represented racial and ethnic groups.(15)

These programmes usually include practical assignments and mentoring relationships as part of the package and many offer subsidies or scholarships to reduce costs to participants and encourage applicants from small organisations and under-represented groups. For example, the NLM/AAHSL programme includes a one-day orientation, a half-day leadership institute, a mentoring relationship, a two-week placement, three web-based courses and a three-day ‘capstone’ event, with heavy subsidisation of both fellows’ and mentors’ costs. The CLIR Frye institute comprises a two-week residential, a year-long practicum and short final seminar, with around 50 scholarships available to promote ethnic, racial and gender diversity and support participation from liberal arts and small colleges.

Pulling this together, we have an emerging consensus about the need to combine theoretical and experiential learning, incorporating generic and context-specific elements, drawn from the following types of development methods:

- short courses, summer schools, residential programmes;
- role models, mentor relationships, formal coaching;
- cross-functional projects, broadening experiences, sabbatical leave;
- professional networks, peer support/benchmarking, communities-of-practice.

Structured frameworks, challenging assignments and personal support are the key ingredients: structured modules can provide the launch pad for people to learn through formative experiences by enriching or reinventing current roles with support from developmental relationships with mentors and peers. Some library managers – myself among them – have undertaken Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes to gain wider perspectives on leadership issues,(16) while others have opted for sector-specific offerings, such as the three courses organised by the Higher Education Staff Development Agency in collaboration with the Society of College,

National and University Libraries and the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association, that are aimed at new, middle and senior managers in library, information and computing services.(17) A third option, currently being pursued by a few library and information professionals, is the ground-breaking MPA – Master of Public Administration – offered by the University of Warwick, which is the equivalent of an MBA for people working in the public and voluntary sectors.(18)

Management responsibility for development

However, for any of these approaches to work, we must have a supportive climate. Both the UK library/information sector studies identified potential barriers to development: not just the usual problem of finding the time, but more worryingly a lack of suitable opportunities and managerial support, as well as cultural issues. The HIMSS research cited time, opportunities and support as barriers to training and development and the PLWS reported that “The indications are that the public library sector may not only have to identify and cultivate its future leaders, but may also need to modify the organisational culture in which they operate”.

We need a three-fold strategy to make progress with leadership development, embracing aspiration-raising, cultural change and management behaviour. We need to raise aspirations so that more people set their sights higher and aspire to the exciting roles that are available to library and information professionals today. There are opportunities to move into influential cross-functional appointments in all sectors, including expanded roles covering libraries and other areas (such as publishing, learning, heritage or computing services) and newly-created posts (like Chief Knowledge Officer and Head of e-Government) some of which may be limited-life developmental positions. We also need to promote cross-sector mobility as a way of broadening professional experience and enlarging candidate pools.

More fundamentally, we need to change the culture of services that do not support continuing professional development of all their staff. In particular, we need to examine the behaviour of managers as they interact with colleagues in potential learning situations in the workplace. As Donald Riggs points out, “Developing library leaders should begin with the local library; the head librarian must create a work environment that recognizes potential leaders and provides the resources for their leadership development”.(19) Service heads must create a climate where people can perform and develop, but line managers have key roles to play, as explained by Alan Mumford in his excellent work on this topic.(20) Sadly, all too often, they fall short in one or more of the following areas:

- appraising performance and potential;
- identifying and monitoring development needs;
- finding and facilitating learning opportunities;
- giving clear and timely feedback on performance;
- demonstrating leadership and learning behaviours;
- looking for deputising / delegation opportunities;
- encouraging people to share experiences.

Line managers need to understand the value of learning on the job and to accept responsibility for developing themselves and others. Service heads need to demonstrate and encourage behaviours that facilitate learning and development. Such behaviours include a democratic / participative decision-making style and the abilities

to listen; to give explicit direct feedback; to engage in processes of questioning, reflecting and planning what to do next; to be a good role model – to show how to learn by personal demonstration; and to recognise learning opportunities within the prime managerial activity.

Conclusion

Formal programmes that provide structured learning away from the workplace can play a valuable part in leadership development, but their full benefits will not be realised without suitable opportunities for learning within the organisation.

In conclusion, here is a set of things we can all do to help develop future leaders.

1. Allocate time and money to development.
2. Ensure that managers understand their roles in development.
3. Identify and act on development needs (including our own).
4. Participate in national and/or sectoral leadership initiatives.
5. Form partnerships with educators and other stakeholders.
6. Encourage people to raise their aspirations.
7. Promote a diverse and inclusive profession.
8. Create real learning organisations to support a learning workforce.

There are many ways to describe learning organisations: the definition of Peter Honey and Alan Mumford is simple and to the point, “Creating an environment where the behaviours and practices involved in continuous development are actively encouraged”. This is what we need to do and we cannot afford to wait.

Acknowledgement

This paper was originally presented as an invited plenary address at the Public Library Authorities Conference, 15-18 October 2002, Chester, UK.

References

1. Usherwood, B. et al. *Recruit, retain and lead: the public library workforce study: executive summary*. Resource, 2001.
www.resource.gov.uk/information/execsummaries/es_lic106.asp
2. Dalton, P. and Nankivell, C. *Hybrid information management: skills for senior staff: final research report and recommendations*. University of Central England. Centre for Information research, 2002.
www.himss.bham.ac.uk/Final%20Research%20Report.pdf
3. Resource. *Annual workplan 2002/03*.
www.resource.gov.uk/documents/wrkplan2002.pdf
4. Holden, J. *Why are there not currently more successful leaders of arts organisations and museums, and why are there not more suitable candidates for these posts*. Clore Duffield Foundation, 2002. www.cloreduffield.org.uk/
5. Holden, J. *Cultural leadership initiative: progress report*. Clore Duffield Foundation, 2002. www.cloreduffield.org.uk/
6. quoted in Van Maurik, J. *Writers on leadership*. Penguin, 2001
7. Bennis, W. *On becoming a leader*. Addison-Wesley, 1989
8. In search of effective leadership. *Roffey Park Newsletter: Developing People*, (46) 2001, 4-5 www.roffeypark.com/newsletter/dp46winter0102/n146-p3.html
9. Aurora Foundation www.alia.org.au/aurora/index.html

10. Northern Exposure to Leadership: A Learning Services Initiative
www.ls.ualberta.ca/neli/
11. Neely, T. Y. and Winston, M. D. Snowbird Leadership Institute: a survey of the implications for leadership in the profession, *in Racing toward tomorrow – ACRL 9th National Conference Proceedings, Detroit, Michigan, April 8-11, 1999* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1999): p 313-324 www.alia.org.au/aurora/testim.html#paper
12. NHM/AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program: a program offered in cooperation with ARL's Office of Leadership and Management Services.
www.arl.org/olms/fellows/
13. The Frye Leadership Institute www.fryeinstitute.org/
14. ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute
www.gse.harvard.edu/~ppe/programs/acrl/program.html
15. Diversity Program: Leadership and Career Development Program
www.arl.org/diversity/lcdp/index.html
16. Noon, P. and Clegg, S. Preparing for the top: is an MBA worth the effort? *Librarian Career Development*, 1 (1) 1993.
17. eg Making Management Work: A Course for Practising Managers
www.hesda.org.uk/events/practisingmanagersjune2003.html
18. MPA (Master of Public Administration)
www.warwick.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/social/business.html#taught6
19. Riggs, D. E. The crisis and opportunities in library leadership. *Journal of Library Administration*, 32 (3/4) 2001, 5-17
20. Mumford, A. *How managers can develop managers*. Gower, 1993