

# What Do We Mean By Library Leadership? Leadership in LIS Education

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Leadership is an often-misunderstood word, especially in the context of libraries. With multiple definitions for the word 'leadership' and vast numbers of leadership styles, it can be difficult to identify what exactly is meant when discussing library leadership. This literature review brings together 10 years of scholarly research on leadership in the library as it relates to LIS education. Through a close evaluation of this literature, a more holistic understanding of 'leadership' as a concept in LIS education can be better understood. Several topics are highlighted and discussed including the ambiguity in definitions of 'leadership', the qualities of library leaders, leadership in LIS curriculum, library leadership and organization change, and library leadership and new librarians. For this review, the definition of LIS curriculum includes professional association leadership programs. Closing this literature review are recommendations for incorporating leadership education and mentorship opportunities into MLIS programs.

**Keywords:** leadership, leadership programs, LIS education, LIS curriculum, mentorship

## Introduction

Leadership is an often-misunderstood word, especially in the context of libraries. With a plethora of definitions for the word 'leadership', it can be difficult to identify what exactly is meant when discussing library leadership. Much of this definitional confusion comes from the misidentification of leadership as simply 'management' (Riggs, 2001). Management and leadership are two related, but distinct, concepts. Both are important in the day-to-day experiences of professional librarians; yet, it is leadership that has been recognized as "the most important competency when hiring" (Hicks & Given, 2013, p. 7). Undoubtedly, leadership is an area that deserves attention and promotion in library and information studies (LIS) education. For this literature review, the definition of LIS curriculum includes professional association leadership programs (e.g. Special Library Association's (SLA) Diversity Leadership Development Program). In reality, LIS education and

curriculum covers more than only what is taught in MLIS programs. Regional, state, national, and association based leadership programs provide continuing education for MLIS students and professional librarians. Additionally, in this review the discussion of library leadership comes from a North-American context.

This literature review compiles 10 years of scholarly research on leadership as it relates to North-American LIS education. Some of these articles are geared towards the practitioner, while others concentrate on how iSchools and L-Schools are using their curricula to teach and encourage leadership skills in MLIS students. Instead of focusing on leadership within the context of a particular LIS school or type of library, this review draws together literature on LIS schools, public libraries, law libraries, school libraries, and international libraries. As a result of this evaluation of the literature, a more holistic understanding of 'leadership' as a concept in LIS education can be better understood.

## **Method**

The articles for this literature review have been compiled through database searches on the Library Literature and Information Full Text, Academic Complete Search, and Google Scholar. The keywords used to find relevant articles from these databases are 'leadership', 'LIS education', 'mentorship', 'curriculum', and 'library'. The majority of the 28 retrieved articles have been published within the past 10 years. Older articles were briefly reviewed as a historical reference on the way in which library leadership has previously been studied.

## **Defining 'Leadership'**

Numerous articles in this literature review point out the abundance of definitions for leadership (Hicks & Given, 2013; Mason & Wetherbee, 2004; Mullins & Linehan, 2006; Riggs, 2001; Winston & Hazlin, 2003). With over 100 definitions of leadership available and even more styles of leadership, it can be difficult to understand exactly where leadership fits within North-American LIS education and librarianship (Riggs, 2001). What does 'library leadership' mean? Should leadership development be included in LIS curriculum? Or should education on leadership take place as part of professional development in the workplace?

## ***Management vs. Leadership***

Often in the literature and professional communication, the terms management and leadership are used synonymously. This is particularly true among library administration and library staff that frequently view leadership as solely a role of those in management positions. However, management and leadership are two very distinct terms. Managers regularly "work within defined bounds of known quantities, using well-established techniques to accomplish predetermined ends" (Riggs,

2001, p. 6). In contrast, leaders maintain an understanding of what the mission and goals of an organization are and how these can be fulfilled (Riggs, 2001).

Management and leadership are both necessary for the survival and growth of a library. However, leadership is more than only the day-to-day management of people. Management involves completing the job according to a set plan, whereas leadership requires creating a vision for the library, compelling others to help achieve this vision, and motivating fellow employees to contribute to this vision (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004).

## ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformation leadership is a style of leadership often discussed in LIS education and leadership literature. Libraries have undergone significant changes over the past 20 years (Hicks & Given, 2013). Transformation leadership is particularly adept at handling organizational change by providing a support system for evolving leadership (Düren, 2013). In many ways, transformational leadership encourages this change. The very nature of an organization is changed as a result of strong transformational leadership (Mavrinac, 2005).

Transformational leadership can be described as "leaders acting as agents of their followers" (Hicks & Given, 2013, p. 9). Leaders and supporters work together, in an equal relationship, to fulfill the collective goals of the group (Hicks & Given, 2013). Transformational leadership requires enthusiasm, creativity, and risk-taking from individual leaders; all of which an organization must possess to "achieve success in the change process" (Mavrinac, 2005, p. 394). The ALA's Presidential Task Force on Library Education (2009) added "principled, transformational leadership" to its Core Competences for Librarianship (Hicks & Given, 2013, p. 7). Instead of opting for a less specialized leadership style, this task force selected

transformational leadership, a leadership style expressly suited to organizational change. The changes occurring within libraries demand a type of leader with talents and strengths different from those commonly associated with traditional leadership (Shoaf, 2004).

### **Qualities of a Library Leader**

Different types of qualities are required for different professions. The qualities of library leaders have been identified in a considerable number of articles discussing leadership in the library (Jange, 2012; Mason & Wetherbee, 2004; Riggs, 2001; Shoaf, 2004). Overall, these qualities can be applied to leadership in any field (e.g. business, early education, banking, etc.). However, library leaders, especially transformational library leaders, possess special qualities that leaders in other fields do not.

A survey of library professionals conducted by Jange (2012) revealed those leadership qualities respondents felt they already possessed, and those leadership qualities respondents felt should be possessed by library managers. The top three leadership qualities reported by these surveyed library professionals were commitment and dedication (59.2%), strong inter-personal and other communication skills (53.4%), and caring for colleagues and subordinates (56.3%) (Jange, 2012, p. 5). According to respondents, the top five leadership qualities library managers should possess are innovation, creativity, imagination, vision, and commitment (25.2%) (Jange, 2012, p. 5). These qualities echo the people and service-oriented nature of librarianship. Without compassion, empathy, and commitment, library professionals would struggle to create a warm and welcoming library atmosphere for the community and employees.

### ***Skills of a Library Leader***

Along with leadership qualities, there

are specific skills associated with successful library leaders. These leadership skills can be achieved through coursework in a MLIS program, life experiences, work experiences, or a combination of these. In the literature, there is debate as to whether leadership skills can be taught in LIS schools or should be left for professional development in a student's future workplace. During interviews with Presidential Task Force for Library Education committee members, Hicks and Given (2013) found that several of the members viewed leadership "as a skill best developed outside LIS programs through professional development and experiences" (p. 13). Some task force members asserted that while leadership can be developed, it should not be taught as part of LIS programs. One member stated that future librarians must have experience in the workplace before they can become leaders. Despite the disagreement among members, the inclusion of leadership in the Core Competences reveals how important leadership is as a characteristic of a professional librarian, and how it encourages his or her success as a librarian (Hicks & Given, 2013).

Additionally, there is a lack of agreement among LIS educators and practitioners about what should be included in the core set of leadership skills for a librarian (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004). For new leaders, the set of skills will be quite different from those possessed by earlier generations of librarians (Martin, 2009). The changes libraries are experiencing require a reevaluation of the 'ideal' leadership skills that a librarian should hold. During this reevaluation, libraries must "rethink what they are and what they can do" (Martin, 2009, p. 654). A library confident in its mission and vision will draw strong leaders who can advocate for librarians and libraries in communities.

### **Leadership in LIS Curriculum**

When leadership is taught in North-American LIS programs, it frequently

falls into management and administration skills courses for information professionals. Riggs (2001) suggests that “a clear differentiation” between management and leadership should be made (p. 15). This differentiation within LIS programs would encourage LIS curriculum that emphasizes leadership and promotes its advancement in the field. The leadership amendment added to the Core Competences developed by the Presidential Task Force (2009) suggests a direction for leadership education in LIS programs: “the concepts behind, issues relating to, and methods for principled, transformational leadership” (cited in Hicks & Given, 2013, p. 8). Although this amendment focuses on a particular style of leadership, transformational leadership, it can be applied to the study of library leadership in all its styles.

### ***Leadership Programs***

The literature on library leadership is filled with examples of programs developed by LIS schools and libraries to foster leadership skills in MLIS students and practicing librarians. The Library Leadership and Management’s (LLAMA) Development division has created an annual seminar called the Leadership Development Seminar, which is held each year during ALA’s Midwinter meeting (Considine, 2011). This seminar allows LLAMA members to learn from one another’s experiences in leadership, engage in discussions on leadership, and attend lectures from current and past LLAMA presidents (Considine, 2011). The Development committee states that its main goals for this seminar are professional development and networking opportunities (Considine, 2011). This seminar is similar in many ways to leadership training occurring in public and academic libraries. Networking plays an important role in learning how to become a leader and motivating others to take up leadership positions.

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULU), together with University of

Toronto and iSchool Institute, launched the Public Library Leadership Fellows Program (PFFL) in 2012 (Barrie & Raven, 2012). According to Barrie and Raven (2012), PFFL focuses on “the future of public libraries and the communities they serve” (p. 1). This 18-month program includes library site visits, webinars, instructional hours, and conferences. At the completion of this program, participants should be able to “reflect constructively on the nature of leadership”, “understand the role of leaders in shaping and engaging teams that advance the institution’s mission and vision”, and “identify and understand their personal leadership strengths” (Barrie & Raven, 2012, p. 3).

Since the founding of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) in 1909, leadership qualities have been of great importance, not only for the organization, but also for the communities being served (Cromer, 2009). SLA has provided training in leadership and management for officers of its chapters, subject-based divisions, and interest-led caucuses (Cromer, 2009). For the association, leadership qualities and practices are essential for the progression of SLA and of librarianship (Cromer, 2009).

Along with conferences on leadership and management, SLA promotes leadership through annual awards. Created in 1995, the Diversity Leadership Development Program aims “to help accelerate the advancement and visibility of members who represent a diverse population of the association by mentoring them” (Cromer, 2009, p. 889). This recognition of strong leadership among SLA members demonstrates the high value that the association places on leadership skills among its members. One of SLA’s core principles is leadership, which reinforces the special librarians’ role as “information leaders” in workplaces and communities (Cromer, 2009, p. 891).

Represented to a great degree in the literature, school media specialist programs have long perceived leadership develop-

ment as an important part of LIS education. In an article by Johnston *et al.* (2012), the certification program for school librarians at the University of Kentucky is evaluated for its leadership aspects. The results from a survey conducted by the researchers reveal that school administrators in Kentucky view school librarians as technology leaders within their school systems (Johnston *et al.*, 2012).

The theme of leadership emerged from the responses of the surveyed administrators. Not only were school librarians described as leaders in technology, but administrators also saw them as “leaders in research and information” (Johnston *et al.*, 2012, p. 204). For Kentucky school systems, school librarians played the essential role of leading technology integration within their school (Johnston *et al.*, 2012). In agreement with Johnston *et al.*'s findings, Mardis (2013) found that “leadership essential at all levels in schools has been described as an essential condition of innovation and change.” (p. 41). However, often times, school librarians are not seen as ‘leaders’ within the school by administrators, teachers, or staff although they have received leadership training (Mardis, 2013).

In 2004, the American Association of Law Librarians (AALL) identified leadership development as one of its chief goals for the decade (Parker, 2009). To improve training opportunities on leadership and expand mentorship programs, AALL created the Leadership Academy that is now available to all its members (Parker, 2009). The intention of the Leadership Academy is to offer law librarians “skills they can use to become leaders in the workplace as well as in AALL and other professional organizations” (Parker, 2009, p. 883). For AALL, the Leadership Academy assists in honing the skills of law librarians who will one day be asked, as leaders in their field and the professional organization, to confront challenges and changes (Parker, 2009).

Yet, several questions about leadership programs must be asked. Do leadership

programs deliver what they claim they will? How can the success of a leadership program be measured? To whom are these types of programs targeted? (Zauhua, 2007). Zauhua ponders these questions and others in her 2007 analysis of leadership institutes in LIS. The author describes leadership institutes as intense, secretive, and time-consuming. In this analysis, Zauhua (2007) studies the Pacific Northwest Library Association's (PNLA) Library Institute. The author discovered that in addition to the expense of producing one of these institutes, assessment and evaluation of an institute's outcomes could be very difficult. As discussed earlier in this literature review, leadership is hard to define and quantify. Often times, data from leadership institutes are only partly collected and analyzed before funding is depleted, and in some instances data collection and analysis is not even attempted (Zauhua, 2007).

Clearly, further research into the outcomes of leadership institutes must be conducted to determine the value and usefulness of these institutions to the profession. Zauhua (2007) proposes several questions for additional research: what are participants actually retaining and using from their experiences at an institute? Is there an increase in leadership activities that can be linked with an individual's leadership institute attendance? Do participants feel they have developed stronger professional networks as a result of attending a leadership institute? In contrast to the leadership programs reviewed earlier, Zauhua draws attention to the neglected criticisms of these programs. For these programs to be worthwhile to current and future librarians, they must be objectively assessed for purpose, usefulness, and any measurable outcomes.

## **Library Leadership and Organizational Change**

### ***Public Libraries are Changing!***

Change is unavoidable in any organiza-

tion, but North-American public libraries have experienced substantial changes over the past two decades. Changes in technology, patrons' needs, and cultural expectations of the role of the 'library' have impacted the way in which libraries function within their communities. To meet the demands of these changes, effective leadership in libraries is critical (Mullins & Linehan, 2005). It is in public libraries that the impact of change is most visible. They interviewed 30 leader librarians in Ireland, United Kingdom, and the United States to understand the state of leadership in public libraries. The authors found that instead of viewing leadership as held by one individual, 67% of respondents "see leadership as a shared activity" (p. 390).

For the majority of these respondents, leadership is necessary for organizational effectiveness and success. These views are similar to earlier research into leadership and organizational success. The results of Mullins and Linehan's interviews highlight the importance of library leaders to the success of public libraries. For public libraries to continue to succeed in a quickly changing society, vibrant leadership is required from librarians who will take risks and grasp emerging opportunities (Mullins & Linehan, 2005). Nurturing leadership skills in current librarians and MLIS students will ensure that public libraries are effective, relevant, and successful in the future.

### ***Research Libraries are Changing!***

Another type of libraries, research libraries, is changing in many of the same ways as public libraries. Not only are research libraries experiencing rapid shifts in technology and patron demands, the leadership in these libraries is also in transition (Dewey, 2012). These changes in the leadership of research libraries will demand "particular characteristics and sensitivities" to assist in transitioning the library to new leadership (Dewey, 2012, p. 133). Those individuals who take on these

leader roles will be thrown into the confusing and tumultuous circumstances of transition.

Periods of transition are messy, chaotic, and ambiguous (Dewey, 2012). The words 'messy', 'chaotic', and 'ambiguous' have been used in other articles in this literature review to describe transformational leadership. Transformation leaders must have the skills to deal with the uncertainty and vulnerability of organizations in transition (Dewey, 2012). These leaders will need to be skilled at analyzing an organization's situation, evaluating strengths and weaknesses, constructing a strategic plan that reflects these evaluations, and maintaining already existing organizational relationships (Dewey, 2012). Although periods of change can be confusing and overwhelming, these periods are also a source of strength and excitement. Change brings "new opportunities and transformational change" to the always fluid world of libraries (Dewey, 2012, p. 143).

## **Library Leadership and New Librarians**

### ***Generational Change***

One aspect of LIS leadership discourse is the attention given to developing future leaders in librarianship (Hicks & Given, 2012). The term 'generational' is used to describe the differences between those individuals just beginning in the profession and those who have significantly more experience (Hicks & Given, 2012). The transformational change foreseen in librarianship will be achieved through these new professional librarians (Hicks & Given, 2012).

Oxley (2013) describes iDiversity, a diversity focused student organization in an LIS, as a source of diverse "movers and shakers, innovators and leaders" (p. 236). One of the research questions for this study reveals the leadership aspect of this student organization: "how student engagement can be transformed into lead-

ership and action by diversity focus with curriculum, faculty guidance, and support from the information community” (Oxley, 2013, p. 236).

At the close of the first year of iDiversity, Oxley found that the student organization shared a passionate and collective belief that they were part of something much larger than themselves. The organization’s members understood that the librarian profession supports the “rights of all people to create, find, access, and share information” (Oxley, 2013, p. 242). This shared vision and interest in the mission of librarianship is the first step to becoming a library leader. With this vision and passion, upcoming professional librarians will eagerly respond to the challenges and possibilities that change will bring to their libraries.

### *Mentorship*

Mentorship is well-documented in North-American LIS educational literature, e.g. mentorship for MLIS students, mentorship for doctoral students, and mentorship for school librarian students (Hicks, 2011; Lacy & Copeland, 2013; Moreillon, 2013; Sugimoto, 2012). Mentoring has been called one of the best methods to foster leadership skills in new professional librarians (Hicks, 2011). Having a mentor to support, guide, and model offers many advantages to new and upcoming librarians. In LIS education programs, mentorship is typically not required or promoted to MLIS students.

While mentorship often occurs as part of the professional development of a practicing librarian, Lacy and Copeland (2013) evaluated mentorship within North-American LIS education. The goal of this study was to discover what benefits mentorship provide MLIS students and practicing librarians. The interviews conducted with participants revealed that students greatly valued their mentorship experience. These mentorships allowed students to partake in the professional culture of librarianship,

network with established librarians, gain job-seeking advice, and perform a wide range of positions with the library (Lacy & Copeland, 2013).

This exploratory study demonstrates the possible contributions mentorship programs can make to LIS curriculum and the profession (Lacy & Copeland, 2013). Lacy and Copeland encourage further research into the benefits and contributions that mentorship can provide LIS education and librarianship. LIS educators should encourage students to participate in mentorship opportunities and to advocate for more practicums and internships in MLIS programs (Lacy & Copeland, 2013).

### **Implications for LIS Education**

#### *Leadership in Coursework*

The literature consulted for this review attests to the importance of leadership education for future librarians. With the relevance of libraries and librarians to communities a common topic of discussion, the necessity of strong, capable, and determined leaders in libraries has never been more apparent. The inclusion of leadership education in the coursework of North-American MLIS programs is one way to urge librarians in training to take up leadership roles upon entering the workplace.

But how should leadership be incorporated into the already existing coursework of MLIS programs? There are two possibilities: The first option is a stand-alone, ideally required, course on all aspects of leadership including styles, qualities, principles, challenges, and opportunities. The second option is integrating leadership education across a program’s coursework. Deciding between these two possibilities depends on the mission, vision, and goals of a particular iSchool or L-School. Although there is some debate as to whether leadership should, or can, be taught in MLIS coursework, a basic understanding of leadership and its im-

portance in the library is crucial. For new MLIS graduates entering the library field and assuming administrative or management positions, this fundamental understanding may be their only experience with library leadership.

### ***Mentorship Opportunities for MLIS Students***

Mentorship as part of the on-the-job library experience is a frequently discussed topic in LIS literature (Bullington & Boylston, 2001; Lee, 2009). However, mentorship opportunities should not be regulated solely to the workplace. As discussed by Lacy and Copeland (2013), mentorship provides many benefits to MLIS students. In addition to learning about the day-to-day life of a professional librarian, student mentees gain experience in areas that may not be covered in their coursework. Practical knowledge, current trends, innovations, and customer service are a few areas that are not always included in the traditional coursework of MLIS programs (Lacy & Copeland, 2013). A mentorship can fill in any gaps by providing student mentees with relevant, hand-on, and ideally paid experience. Mentors give their MLIS students different perspectives on the profession, support reflection on practices, and provide guidance in a way that LIS educators may not. As a result of this, student mentees develop a deeper understanding of the profession.

For soon to be graduates, mentorship programs offer assistance in the job search process (Lacy & Copeland, 2013). Through discussions with mentors and other professional librarians, student mentees learn how to select, apply, and interview for librarian positions. Mentors serve as sounding boards for the concerns, doubts, and fears about job seeking their mentees may have. Mentorship programs can ease these worries and build the confidence of job seekers.

Along with practical knowledge, guidance, and support, MLIS mentorship pro-

grams inspire strong commitment to the librarian profession (Lacy & Copeland, 2013). Student mentees are able to recognize and appreciate the formal and informal mentorship that can occur in libraries (Golian-Lui, 2003). During a MLIS student's mentorship, he/she is introduced to passionate and supportive individuals within the profession. This motivates student mentees to become impassioned advocates for their chosen profession, as well as encouraging them to pursue positions of leadership in which they can serve as mentors to future librarians.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review collects scholarly research within the past 10 years that investigates LIS leadership, education, and curriculum from a North-American perspective. Over these course of this review, the following topics were briefly covered: the ambiguity in definitions of 'leadership', the qualities of library leaders, leadership in LIS curriculum, library leadership and organization change, and library leadership and the new generation of librarians. These topics attest to the diversity of research on leadership and LIS education. However, it also reveals the gaps in research and LIS curriculum that should be addressed in future studies and/or by iSchools and L-Schools.

The professional education in North-American LIS has a long and impressive history (Lynch, 2008). Librarianship has been enriched by research conducted from different perspectives: professional, vocational, and discipline (Lynch, 2008). The literature covered in this review demonstrates how LIS researchers and library practitioners can benefit from the experiences, expertise, and excitement of one another. Collaboration between researchers and librarians brings the possibility of a richer understanding of what it means to be an information professional and, in particular, a library leader in a quickly evolving world.



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