

LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY LEADERS IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Libraries are defined as non-profit service organizations which have particular management process, just like for profit. In this Digital era, the basic elements of this process, planning, organization, leadership and effective and efficient management of control systems in libraries contain important functions. The role of library leaders involves motivating and inspiring people to achieve the organizational objectives. Since new technologies are exploring day by day, there are significant changes occurring in libraries. However, the library retains its role as a repository of knowledge, organizing knowledge and providing access to it. Librarians as library leaders are supreme custodians of knowledge and partners to Learning and information resource, discovery and use. Librarians are crafting the path to idealize the vision, implement the mission, set strategic goals, and objectives to meet the effective Performance of the libraries. Effective leadership management depends on three basic personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual. This paper discusses about the characteristics of Library professional, skills needed for the Library leaders, various management techniques to be followed to achieve the objectives of Academic Libraries in the digital environment.

Key Words: *Academic Libraries, Leadership, Skills, Knowledge Management, Library Professional*

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Libraries are defined as non-profit service enterprise which has a particular management process, just like for profit. In this Digital era, the basic elements of this process, planning, organization, leadership and effective and efficient management of control systems in libraries contain important functions. The role of library leaders involves motivating and inspiring people to achieve the organizational objectives. Since new technologies are exploring day by day, there are significant changes occurring in libraries. However, the library retains its role as a repository of knowledge, and a means of organizing knowledge and providing access to it. Librarians as library leaders are supreme custodians of knowledge and partners to Learning and information resource, discovery and use. Effective leadership management depends on three basic personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual. Library leaders should be able to establish and communicate organizational vision, mission and customer-oriented strategies. The outcome of the leadership is the performance.

2. LIBRARY LEADERSHIP:

Librarians are crafting the path to idealize the vision, implement the mission, set strategic goals, and objectives to meet the Performance of the libraries which measures the performance of an organization in meeting and exceeding achievement of its goals and mission.[Figure 1].



Figure 1: Leadership Objectives

Peter Drucker Quotes leadership as “Management is doing things right; Leadership is doing the right things”

Newman (1998) defines library leader as the person who takes charge and guides the performance or activity, to lead others, to inspire others, or to direct others towards a specific set of goals and objectives of the library.

Weinberg, Lewis, Sherman, Zimmerman & Zulia's (2005) study on How can academic librarians create value? argue that academic librarians need to redefine their roles, manage complex governance networks, employ a strategic and public value framework to deal with change, and integrate performance measure. The study addresses statement made by McGregor (2000) that, like other public and nonprofit leaders, academic librarians face multiple challenges.

Lin (2001) reiterates that the academic librarian is now a manager and a leader, translating expectations associated with the scope and complexity of the task to include marketing, community outreach, consensus building, and fundraising activities.

Katz (1955) suggested that effective administration (i.e. leadership) depends on three basic personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual. Some classic article entitled Skills of an Effective Administrator published by Robert Katz in the Harvard Business Review in 1955, 1974 and 1986 addressed leadership as a set of developable skills.

3. LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

Technical Skill is the knowledge about and proficiency in a specific type of work or activity. It includes competencies in a specialized area, analytical ability, and the ability to use appropriate tools and techniques (Katz, 1955, 1974 and 1986). Technical skill is the most important skill at lower and middle levels of management and less important in upper management.

Human Skill is knowledge about the ability to work with people. Human skills are people skills and abilities that help a leader to work effectively with subordinates, peers, and superiors to accomplish the organization's goal. It creates an atmosphere of trust, employees feel comfortable, secure, participative in planning things. Human skills are important at all levels of management.

3.1. CONCEPTUAL SKILLS FOR LEADERSHIP:

Conceptual Skills are the ability to work and deal with ideas and concepts. A leader with conceptual skills is comfortable talking about the ideas that shape an organization and the complicated problems involved. Conceptual skills are central to creating a vision and strategic plan for an organization. This skill is the most important one at the top management levels and is becoming less important as it moves down to lower management level. [Table:1]

MANAGEMENT LEVEL	SKILLS NEEDED	IMPORTANCE
Top Level Management	Technical skills	Less important
	Human skills	Most important
	Conceptual skills	Most important
Middle Level Management	Technical skills	Most important
	Human skills	Most important
	Conceptual skills	Less important
Lower Level Management	Technical skills	Most important
	Human skills	Most important
	Conceptual skills	Less important

Table.1: Importance of skills for leadership management

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBRARY LEADERS:

A Successful leader of any academic library should have the following characteristics for providing effective Digital information services to the users in time and to manage the library functions efficiently:

A successful leader:

- Knows the job and the field thoroughly;
- Stays on top of current developments, trends, and theories;
- Knows her people including their strength and weaknesses, hopes & goals;
- Shares a vision of service, excellence, and achievement with others;
- Demonstrates by words and actions strength of character;
- Also a leader should be a good listener

Also the academic library leaders must have the following characteristics:

- ❖ Also the leader should be accessible at any time
- ❖ He / she should have the decision making powers
- ❖ A leader should be simple, gracious to all, optimistic, and enthusiastic.
- ❖ They should confront any problem and should speak directly.
- ❖ They should be ready to acknowledge their mistakes
- ❖ The attitude of the leaders must be positive.

Metz and Meringolo says that the strengths and skills developed as librarians are those that support them in their leadership roles outside of the library. Metz describes librarians as systems thinkers who are constantly learning and who understand the power of information; he argues that because many of the problems facing universities are systems problems, librarians are well positioned to be of value to the campus as problem solvers. Librarians are integrative thinkers whose world view includes learning and problem solving as integral parts of planning and providing services to meet the needs of their diverse clientele.

5. SKILLS NEEDED FOR DIGITAL LIBRARY LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT:

In this digital era, as higher education transforms and evolves in new ways, appropriate skills for library leaders are very much essential for managing and disseminating relevant and timely digital information to the users.

Joseph Branin is sharing his observations on the critical skills required for library leaders, such as

- ❖ building a shared vision for the library,
- ❖ managing and shaping change,
- ❖ functioning in a political environment,
- ❖ developing a campus visibility,
- ❖ and building consensus in carrying out strategic directions.

6. LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Branin also identified five skills in particular are needed for library leadership to achieve the goals of the academic institution in 2020, to cope up with the digital environment, which are

1. Having a collaborative mindset
2. Putting together teams
3. Tech savvy
4. Globally focused and culturally attuned
5. Future-focused

In examining these skills, considering the first one, collaborative mindset, and library profession has a tradition of engaging in collaborative partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders. We know that the success of library leadership depends on working together with the faculty and fellow academic support colleagues. Moving into the future, library leaders will need to demonstrate the ability to form radical collaborations with other libraries, for the sharing of both physical and human resources. Developing the ability to consult employees throughout the library organization is something good leaders can always learn to do better. [Bell, Steven]

Librarians are challenged with other areas, such as building teams, getting globally and culturally attuned, or being future focused, but these are areas where librarian leaders already demonstrate skill. The most important skills needed for library leadership management is vision building, future focused, having the ability to look ahead, to see the patterns, to connect the dots, and to make sense out of disparate matter.

7. COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR LIBRARY LEADERSHIP:

For Library leaders, Communication is the main skill needed very much within a working group of knowledge management system. The communication channel must be kept open always in order to react promptly to face problems due both to people and modern technology. Communication among members can be developed in many ways like, frequent meetings, shared documentation, pair programming etc. as follows:

- Actively listens
 - Effectively articulates ideas through verbal and written communication
 - Able to give and receive constructive feedback
 - Able to withhold judgment and not participate in gossip
 - Encourages an environment of active communication
- Interpersonal effectiveness includes six broad competencies describing leaders who can create a positive atmosphere centered on respect, responsibility, and motivation. [Figure 2]



Figure 2: Communication Skills

Sherman identifies interpersonal effectiveness as a key factor for success, and notes that “This skill includes the ability not only to communicate, listen, and facilitate conflict but also to be a visible presence for staff.’ . . . Staff wants to know that they can talk with their managers and feel that they are really being heard and known as individuals.

Excellent communication skills, accountability, cultural sensitivity, and effective team building are necessary for success. Jean Donham, college librarian at Warburg College, notes, that Library leaders have to be able to articulate what they mean to all the constituencies that they are involved with up and down.

McCauley and Hughes, name three particular competencies related to the interpersonal effectiveness meta-competency: leading subordinates by motivating subordinates, delegating to them, setting clear performance expectations; setting a developmental climate by encouraging growth, leading by example, providing challenge and opportunity; and developing team orientation by focusing on others to accomplish tasks, not being a loner.

8. LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES FOR LIBRARY PROFESSIONAL:

8.1. COGNITIVE ABILITY:

The Cognitive abilities needed for Library leadership management includes the following:

8.1.1. Problem-Solving

- Demonstrates the ability to actively and creatively solve problems
- Able to solve problems in a thorough, yet timely manner
- Able to step back from a situation in order to suggest an objective solution
- Fosters an environment that encourages others to create solutions for their own problems

8.1.2. Decision Making

- Assumes responsibility for making critical decisions
- Acts decisively, making sound and timely decisions
- Shows transparency in decision making

8.1.3. Reflective Thinking

- Demonstrates the ability to accurately assess shortcomings and assets of the organization
- Able to recognize and implement opportunities for continuous improvement
- The cognitive ability meta-competency includes problem solving, decision making, and reflective thinking.

Promis, in her discussion of emotional intelligence and what are sometimes termed soft skills, defines cognitive skills as higher order thinking skills such as creative thinking, critical and analytical thinking, data manipulation and synthesis, and decision-making.

For being a successful leader in our field, Losinski put the cognitive ability element in plain language as follows:

“Successful leaders are really smart and they consistently take time to not just announce decisions, but to explain the reasons for decisions. Beyond intelligence, the focus here is on the personal processes a leader undertakes when working through problems, making decisions, and assessing the institution as a whole. Whether addressing problems or making decisions, the ability to act decisively is vital to good leadership and is essential to the overall health and success of the organization”.

9. VISION OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES:

9.1. Global Thinking

- ❖ Exhibits the ability to think beyond the institution and current issues therein and considers the impact of the institution in the greater community and beyond

- ❖ Demonstrates the ability to consider ideas, environments, and technologies that impact communities and the institution on a broader scale
- ❖ Able to implement global ideas appropriately scaled for the organization
- ❖ Creative/Innovative
- ❖ Fosters creativity and innovation by encouraging inventive thoughts and experimentation
- ❖ Demonstrates the ability to think innovatively about the mission and goals of the organization
- ❖ Forward Thinking
- ❖ Shows foresight by anticipating problems as well as opportunities
- ❖ Exhibits the ability to envision both positive and negative consequences/outcomes
- ❖ Inspires others to think creatively about what might be, rather than just what is

Losinski also connects vision in his definition of leadership, noting, Leadership is establishing a vision and inspiring a group of people to obtain that vision. Similarly, the **Tufts** Leadership Competencies model suggests that communicating a compelling vision is not merely inspiring and motivating others, but —allowing others to take the lead in achieving that vision. [Figure 3]

9.2. Interpersonal Effectiveness

Culturally Competent

- Exhibits an awareness of and appreciation for diverse cultures and beliefs
- Fosters an environment where all cultures are respected and valued

Accountability

- Instills trust in others and self
- Leads by example
- Assumes responsibility for decisions made

Team Building

- Effectively builds relationships inside and outside the organization
- Actively promotes and encourages strategic teambuilding
- Fosters a culture that values innovation/creativity

Development

- Actively seeks ways to grow people and develop staff
- Views development of staff as an integral part in the growth of the organization
- Provides opportunities for development through training and mentoring

Inspirational/Motivational

- Inspires individuals to succeed
- Motivates individuals to actively contribute to the organization
- Creates an environment of trust and integrity
- Builds and provides ongoing support for staff
- Encourages a developmental climate

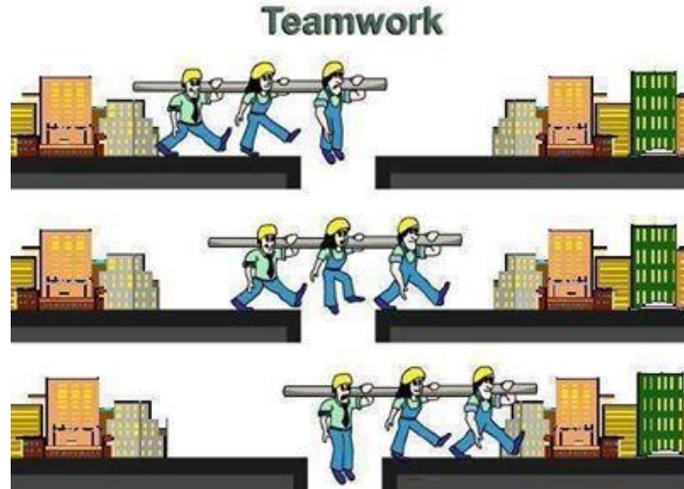


Figure 3: Team Building Leadership

10. LIBRARY LEADERSHIP- MANAGERIAL COMPETENCY

Following are some of the managerial competencies very much essential for Academic Library leadership management [Figure 4]:

10.1. Manage Change

- Able to build internal and external support for change
- Able to work with others to keep any transitions/changes running smoothly
- Demonstrates willingness to take calculated risks

10.2. Resource Management

- Demonstrates comprehension of cost efficiency and effectiveness
- Apportions and distributes resources equitably
- Able to teach others how to utilize resources in a proficient and useful manner
- Able to assign projects to colleagues and employees
- Acts with diligence and care

10.3. Strategic Planning

- Identifies clear, well-defined outcomes
- Exhibits short-term and long-term planning capabilities
- Able to drive results

10.4. Collaboration

- Able to build relationships with community groups and constituents
- Works with others where sharing resources would be appropriate

10.5. Flexibility/Adaptability

- Exhibits an open mind to new ideas
- Exhibits the ability to maintain a level head through difficult situations



Figure 4: Leadership competency

The managerial meta-competency includes the capacity to manage change, manage resources, plan for the future, collaborate with others, and have the ability to be flexible. These competencies encompass the concrete managerial aspects of leadership, as well as the ability to work effectively and interact with others. Although leaders are not always in management positions, this competency applies to everyone, as it involves managing oneself effectively in addition to others and the organization. McCauley and Hughes, in their identification of what incumbent human service administrators thought were the most important competencies of success in leadership positions, report that acting with flexibility or being able to behave in seemingly opposite ways, being tough and at the same time compassionate, leading and letting others lead, was at the top of their rank-ordered list of qualities identified by project respondents in their study.

11. META-LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR IT AND TECHNICAL LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS:

There are six emerging meta-leadership skills needed for Library professional for success:

1. **Manage alignment:** Align your work, culture, structure and internal politics, and keep them aligned as the world changes around you.
2. **Be an interpreter:** Listen to strategy and speaking tactics and vice-versa to keep the message aligned.
3. **Learn to innovate:** Discern when and how to bend the rules to pursue an innovative idea that is aligned to the overall business strategy and could move you forward.
4. **Think ahead — way ahead:** Think several moves ahead of your challenges, anticipating trends and how they might impact the business and the work.
5. **Leverage your networks:** Navigate the politics of the organization, understand the interactions, and win the hearts and minds of those enduring change.
6. **Making decisions (the *right*, right ones and quickly):** Analyze market drivers to help inform smart business decisions that make your strategy work

This is a great way to learn and master each element of leadership, but it falls short in preparing new leaders to blend multiple skills together to accomplish their work. It's time to start focusing on these six skills is the *first step* toward training the next generation of great leaders.

12. CONCLUSION:

Leadership is an essential reality of librarianship. All librarians who exercise leadership can provide tangible benefits to the institution and achieve personal and professional satisfaction. Academic librarians possess many of the capabilities required of excellent campus leaders. All aspiring library leaders should take time to look outside librarianship for inspiration and ideas. Academic librarians who want to lead should have a firm understanding of higher education, from the fundamentals to the latest trends. The most important skill needed for Library leaders to meet the future digital world is vision building and future-focused, having the ability to look ahead, to see the patterns, to connect the dots, and to make sense out of disparate matter. As campus leaders Library professional can better position the library within the larger campus agenda and as collaborators and valued contributors to the achievement of the institutional mission and goals.

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