Developing the concept of ‘leadership for all’ in library and information services: exploring the rationale and making it happen

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DEVELOPING THE CONCEPTS OF ‘LEADERSHIP FOR ALL’ IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES: EXPLORING THE RATIONALE AND MAKING IT HAPPEN

Dr Graham Walton

Service Development Manager
Library
Loughborough University
Loughborough
LE11 3TU
UK
00 44 (0) 1509 22 2355
j.g.walton@lboro.ac.uk
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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to look at the concept of leadership for all within both the wider management and library management arenas. The main driver for leadership for all is the rate and level of change in the 21st century. Having leadership skills across all employees in the organisation is seen to help sustainability. Apart from change, other theoretical perspectives will be examined which inform leadership for all. These include developmental leadership, transformational management vs. transactional management, vision, motivation and innovation. The ideas around leadership for all in libraries will then be described within the context of the wider perspectives. In terms of achieving leadership for all in libraries, the following strategies will be considered: sharing the vision, trust, action learning and managing communication

Introduction

Trying to produce a definitive breakdown of the skills and roles of the leader (never mind the library leader) is not straightforward. This is primarily because the views and definitions of what constitutes effective leadership skills changes with time. These views
and definitions will also vary across countries. In what can be seen as the first leadership manual, Machiavelli\(^1\) advocates that leaders should exercise brute power and rewards wherever appropriate to preserve the status quo. This may have worked in medieval Europe, but may not be entirely appropriate in the 21\(^{st}\) century. Metaphors to inform the role of the leader based on war, games/ sport, art, machines and religion/ spirituality abound.\(^2\) One metaphor recommends that the leader should take on the same role as that of the orchestral conductor. They should be at the front, deciding who is involved, when they are involved and what the score (agenda) should be. Another metaphor likens the leader to that of a midwife, facilitating the birth of change.

The purpose of this paper is to explore in detail the metaphor of the leader as ‘servant’, whose role it is to support employees developing leadership skills. There will be a discussion and analysis of the general theories that support leadership skills being present in all employees. This will be followed by reflection on the implications for the library manager. Developing leadership skills across library staff will then be discussed along with the barriers that may exist. Four practical library management scenarios will be identified to illustrate how leadership for all could be used to address them. It does not take too much historical insight to feel that Machiavelli would not have been comfortable with the leadership for all approach!

**Change, organisations and leadership for all**
The nature of change in the 21st Century is the overarching driver for leadership skills to be present across all staff. Theorists like Drucker have examined how change manifests itself in the current world. It is unpredictable, occurring all the time and is felt most acutely at the individual level. Smith and Sharma have proposed that with this rate of change in organisations there should be ‘every person exhibiting leadership not just the leaders’. They have also produced an alignment-autonomy framework to develop their perspective (Figure 1). Change as described above means that organisations should position themselves in the ‘innovative organisation’ and ‘collaborative culture’ quadrant. This position allows people to be responsible for their work and also ensures their actions are targeted to the overarching strategic direction of the organisation. The concept of leadership for all is entirely focussed on ensuring the top right quadrant in Figure 1 is achieved. Supporting a collaborative culture within an innovative organisation is achievable if leadership for all is present.

**Developmental leadership**

A related theory to leadership for all is the concept of developmental leadership. Van Nickerk and Wagh have argued that the concept of developmental (or servant) leadership is very important. There has to be a realisation by leaders that unless employees are prepared for lifelong learning, ready to take on challenges and more competition the organisation will be unable to renew itself. This means that managers must develop characteristics of ‘servantship’. This is interpreted as putting employees needs, growth and development above their own. Managers must also be able to engender
trust through their own actions, beliefs and values. Further examples of developmental leadership practice are provided by Wallington. Much value is attached to finding, recognizing and nurturing leadership across the organisation. Included in these approaches are encouraging participation, soliciting views, never being disparaging, letting others lead and using failure to teach.

**Transformational management vs. transactional management**

Related to the ideas around developmental leadership are those to do with the concepts of transformational management vs. transactional management. Within the whole development of leadership skills across employees, the transformational approach is proposed as being appropriate. The manager is aiming to empower staff to question old assumptions within the transformational framework. Their purpose is to allow other staff the opportunity to express themselves. Employees have to be helped to work towards the long term strategic goals of the organisation (rather than their own short term self interest). The focus is on allowing staff to acquire leadership skills previously seen as the prerequisites of the staff at the top of the hierarchy. In contrast, transactional management is assignment and task oriented. There are organisational rewards and punishment which are used to make sure staff comply and perform appropriately. Staff have to work to specified objectives they may not have been involved in formulating. Transactional management may have worked well in the past for libraries but this is no longer the case.
Vision

The concept of vision has also been seen as important in the debate on leadership for all. In the transactional management model, the vision is developed by a select few and handed down from on high to the rest of the staff for them to take forward. This way to develop the vision has been questioned by various authors considering leadership for all (6,7, 8). They argue that the emphasis should be on the organisation itself and the people that make up that organisation to develop the vision. Within the transformational model, importance is attached to people expressing themselves and developing their vision for themselves and the other organisational stakeholders. This means there has to be a process that facilitates not only the sharing of the vision but also to ensure it grows and develops. Smith⁹ argues that the vision is at its strongest when it results from the ‘sharing of individual yearnings of employees’.

Motivation

Another theoretical perspective that informs the discussion around leadership for all is the debates around motivation.¹⁰ People are motivated either intrinsically (outside in) or extrinsically (inside out). In management terms, this means that with extrinsic motivation people are supervised or managed and with intrinsic motivation they manage themselves. With extrinsic motivation, the push to work hard comes from earning rewards and avoiding punishment. In contrast, when intrinsic motivation is present people are
rewarded by the challenge of work and pride in their job. If just short term results are required, extrinsic motivation may be best. Again, the fast rate of change means that if sustainability is the aspiration, looking for employees who are intrinsically motivated is more likely to be successful. For sustainability, people need to be self-monitored, self-managed and self motivated. It is impossible to have employees who are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

People are either trusted or they are not trusted. The managers have to trust the workforce to be prepared to take on leadership skills so they can do their own jobs and create long term relationships with colleagues and customers. Where staff are extrinsically motivated, it is the managers who are trusted to verify results. In comparison, when intrinsic motivation is present the general workforce are trusted to assess their own results and performances by their own measures. The intrinsically motivated employee will be a major facet of the freedom-based workplace. In this workplace, the leadership function and re-mit is present in all staff.

Innovation

The development of the innovative work place is another driver to achieve leadership for all. The level and pace for change are also the main drivers for innovation. The European Commission\textsuperscript{11} concludes that innovation is to do with:

- renewal and enlargement of the range of products and services and the associated markets
establishment of news methods of production, supply and distribution

Most tellingly for leadership for all, innovation is also about changes in management, work organisation and the working conditions and skills of the workforce. If innovation is sought, managers\textsuperscript{12} have to be candid, highly communicative and open to participation by others in decision making (i.e. allow people to become leaders themselves). If the driving force of innovation is mobilized, then there will be positive outcomes\textsuperscript{6}.

Implications of leadership for all for library management

Very little has been written in the library management literature which explicitly advocates that leadership skills are generic and should be present in all staff. There is an acknowledgment by Stephens and Russell\textsuperscript{13} that there is pressure to look at this approach. When reviewing the recent ideas about leadership they found a focus on leadership development in all employees. Their support was less than fulsome when they advocated that ‘libraries should broaden their efforts to embrace experiments in the use of these newer approaches to leadership’. They did state that they were ‘intrigued by the work of several employers who view every employee as a leader (at one level or another, in various ways) and who recommend leadership training for everyone’. What does come through very clearly in the writings about library leadership is that previous approaches to leadership are not appropriate in times of massive change. One observer\textsuperscript{8} argues that between 1876 and the mid 1970s the leadership and managerial skills needed for libraries remained unchanged. The invention of the personal computer and the Internet alongside the development of digital resources has changed this stability. Libraries have gone
through the same level of continuous change as health care, telecommunications, insurance and advertising. With this rate of change, the library manager has to shepherd the service through tumultuous times whilst at the same time balancing change with continuity. The previous approaches of command and control are being jettisoned in favour of library managers into ensuring there is effective communication, people collaborate easily and have input to the decision making process. For library and information services in the commercial sector, the command and control principle was once seen as increasing competitiveness. This has now been disproved and there is a need for libraries need to move away from this. The library manager has to focus more on giving employees the flexibility to adapt to an environment where there is constant change.

This departure from command and control is directing library managers to become the facilitative leader. The essence of the facilitative leader has been well captured by Rees:

*The leader who can take the role of a facilitator blends his or her role of visionary decisive leader with that of listening and empowering leader. As a facilitative leader he or she involves followers as much as possible in creating the group’s vision and purpose, carrying out the vision and purpose and building a productive and cohesive team.*

Facilitation skills are becoming recognised as part of the repertoire of the new library managers. Moore argues that facilitative leadership fits well into libraries because it is compatible with other tools and principles in libraries. The manager’s role is to create the facilitative environment in the library where individuals at every level can:
• have some individuality of thought and actions
• set some standards to monitor their own performance
• be able to interpret events without fear of making mistakes
• respond to events without having to follow the rulebook all the time

The advantages that accrue from library managers showing facilitation skills is that people can do things that otherwise would not be possible. Common goals are more likely to be developed because people will understand each other more.

There are barriers to effective leadership for all in libraries. There may be some resistance from employees as they will have differences in how they wish to be treated. There are some library staff who would like top-down, directive leadership as they just like to be told what to do. Over the years, most libraries have developed very powerful hierarchies and also rigid traditions which do not allow the concept of leadership for all to flourish. If the hierarchy is very influential, there will be little room for development and creativity. The hierarchy forces people to create boundaries around their different needs and relationships.

As Shoaf also points out, ‘libraries seem to attract the risk averse’. The culture of leadership for all struggles to come through within this setting. If this culture does not change, employees will not think creatively or relish risk taking. Neither will they show enthusiasm or passion about their work and library.

**Developing leadership for all in the library**
Leadership for all as a principle will not develop organically in a library. There has to be various explicit commitments and strategies to allow it to flourish. Included in these are:

- **sharing the vision:** the importance of the shared vision has already been alluded to. The facilitative manager supports the library staff develop a single vision together. This does not happen easily as developing the vision takes more time this way and also it loses some of its crispness as there are always diverse interests in the library. The library manager has to be patient as the vision is identified, developed and refined. There is every likelihood that the sharing of the vision will produce the willingness to innovate as well as the enthusiasm and belief in the service that leadership for all is intended to achieve. There are some tensions here as the strong manager also should have a vision. This may (or may not) be the same as employees. The skills of negotiating and influencing then come to the fore as the manager tries to ensure there is consistency between their own vision and that of the rest of the library staff.

- **trust:** unless the manager trusts the library employee, leadership for all will never materialise. Libraries have traditionally found it difficult to allow their staff to be able to interpret events themselves and have individuality of thought and practice. After years of telling people what to do, library managers have to have a belief that their employees are responsible and committed. If the trust does not exist, any semblance of leadership for all will soon disappear.

- **Action learning:** when considering leadership for all, having action learning in place is seen as a very effective way to support its development. Action learning
as a concept developed on the UK as a way to improve coal production. The job
environment becomes the classroom where people learn through experience. The
process allows people to learn through their own personal reflection and also by
questioning fellow action learners. This approach encourages the enhancement of
traits of leadership and personal responsibility. In terms of leadership
development, action learning allows competencies such as ‘adaptive thinking,
building relations, inspiring trust, aligning the organisation, fostering open and
effective communication, demonstrating vision and focusing on quality and
continuous improvement’. For a library, a major strength of action learning is
that it does not require any special set of conditions, it works just as well in a
bureaucracy as it does in a flat organisation.

- **Making communication work**: libraries are organisations which employ social
animals (staff) who ensure the service is delivered. As social animals, interaction
and communication takes place all the time in formal or informal meetings.
These meetings are very important within the context of leadership for all. If
people are to be encouraged to work collaboratively, to communicate effectively
and agree on shared actions and visions they have to be able to function well in
meetings. If they do not have these skills, then there will be a lack of
comprehension and the quality of interactions will plummet. The library
manager has to therefore ensure employees have enhanced interpersonal and
communication skills. If they understand each other more and are comfortable in
opening up to their colleagues, the underpinning leadership for all should emerge.

**Practice implications of leadership for all**
This paper so far has taken a theoretical stance on exploring leadership for all within the library context. This section will consider how these concepts could apply in practice.

Four scenarios are given that describe practical management challenges in libraries where qualities of leadership are needed. Suggestions will be given on how these challenges could be addressed using the principles of leadership for all.

**Scenario 1:** the University Librarian is concerned that the Library web site looks tired, it neither conveys the required message or the range of services provided

- A recently appointed library assistant has come to the Librarian’s attention who has lots of ideas about how electronic services can be improved. This person is seconded as project manager to oversee the development and production of the new web pages.
- The brief drawn up for the project allows the library assistant to choose who to be on the project team and also makes it clear the high level of autonomy
- The Librarian volunteers to help by looking at the web metrics of the current site.
- Funding is released by the Librarian to send the library assistant on a project management course

**Scenario 2:** A city council authority has produced a work/life balance strategy that all sections of the council have to adopt and implement. This includes the public library service and the 12 libraries within that service.
• The City Librarian sets up a steering group to oversee the implementation of the work/life balance strategy. Representation include staff from each of the 12 libraries
• A member of staff recently returning from maternity leaves is asked to chair and oversee the steering group
• The City Librarian is not on the steering group but ensures regular meetings take place between themself and the steering group chair. The City Librarian also makes sure minutes from meetings are effectively distributed and that the steering group produce a regular news sheet
• An expert in work/life balance is brought in to advise the steering group on the relevant issues and approaches
• The City Librarian gives a clear steer that the recommendations from the steering group should be allocated to specific individuals in the public library system to implement

Scenario 3: A large hospital library has decided to move over completely to e-journals. This will mean that significant physical space will be freed up as the paper journals are discarded. The space will need to be used effectively to support future library service
• The Librarian arranges for library staff to visit other hospital libraries that have already moved in this direction to identify how space has been used
• After the visits, library staff are charged with collaborating and producing recommendations and timescales
• These recommendations are then given to a two library assistants to oversee and manage
• Regular progress reports take place between the Librarian and the library assistants on the development of the space

**Scenario 4:** The large public library authority is introducing Radio Frequency Identification (or Radio Frequency Identification) tags (RFID). This will vastly reduce the need for library staff to be involved in the issuing and discharge of books.

• An open meeting is held for all staff where the Librarian makes it clear from the outset that this will lead to opportunities for role development (as opposed to redundancy)
• An away day is then organised for the staff most likely to be effected by the introduction of the technology
• People at this meeting are split into three groups each charged with areas of responsibility: one will look at how other libraries have developed roles, the second will produce the RFID implementation plans and the other will establish and deliver the relevant training
• A convenor for each group is identified. These three people will oversee the implementation of RFID in the library

The intention of these library management scenarios have been to encapsulate the practical implications of leadership for all. The various situations do capture the
implications for the library manager if leadership for all is the aspiration. Managers have to recognise leadership skills in other and ensure they are nurtured. A facilitation role is necessary as they empower colleagues and also encourage people to express themselves. Effective communication channels need to be in place so library staff are informed and aware of recent developments. The library managers themselves also have to be prepared to take on visions that they may not have originated. Mutual trust has to be present between managers and other library staff. There is tension for the library manager in having a background profile whilst at the same time being highly sensitive and aware to what is currently happening. The major challenge for the library manager is the actions they need to take when trust or communication or intrinsic motivation etc is not present in the library.

Conclusion

A side effect of leadership for all in the library context is that it could address the issue of effective succession planning\(^\text{18}\). There is a concern that the ageing library workforce will mean that there will not be enough appropriate individuals in the future to take over the management roles. Leadership for all could be the way this possible problem is solved. It brings a level of sustainability that is often difficult to achieve otherwise.

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the concept of leadership for all within the library context. There are signs that having all staff demonstrate leadership skills
that were previously seen as being only needed by the few is becoming recognised as important in libraries. Moore\textsuperscript{15} outlines how the Wake Public Library system in the Unites States has trained 40 staff in leadership for all skills. Included in its achievements are:

- Helping people do things they could not do on their own
- Ensuring people understand each other better
- Allowing common goals to be established, agreed upon, committed to and reached
- Helping people reach better decisions, learn from their mistakes and engage in more meaningful conversations than before

The challenge for the library manager is to have the courage, the belief and the trust to take the principles of leadership for all and apply them to their own library.

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