Preparing Leaders for Canadian Libraries

Dr. Vicki Williamson
Dean, University Library
University of Saskatchewan

Abstract:

This paper covers two interrelated topics, namely, the preparation of Canadian library leaders (through the Library Leaders Institute - LLI) and the motivations of librarians who attend leadership programs. Through discussion of these topics, this paper addresses the theme 'Librarians of Tomorrow'.

The LLI was established in Canada in 2006 and the paper outlines the reasons for its establishment and provides background information about the content and structure of the institute. The question of what motivates library employees to attend leadership programs, such as the institute is also discussed. This discussion includes some preliminary research findings which speak to the topic of professional education and continuous career development.

Introduction

Leadership within the library and information services (LIS) profession is currently something of a hot topic. Interest in this topic at professional meetings and conferences is on the increase. Various aspects of leadership are being explored through online venues, such as the *Library Leaders' Network (LLN)* (http://lln.lyrasis.org), which are showcasing a growing range of commentaries on this topic. The range and diversity of leadership institutes and training programs is also expanding and the topic is gaining attention at special focus conferences.

We have the experience of the first international conference on the future of the academic librarian, which was held in Hong Kong in 2007. From this highly successful conference, a second conference has followed. Australian colleagues joined in with the inaugural national conference on the topic of *People in the Information Profession* (http://www.caval.edu.au/hrconference.html), which was held in held in Melbourne, Australia in 2009.

However, given all of this increasing global attention, Hernon and Schwartz (Hernon and Schwartz, 2007) pointed out a surprising observation: namely, 'despite widespread interest in leadership…the amount of research literature in LIS is sparse.'

This paper overviews a unique leadership program from Canada (The Library Leaders Institute - LLI) in the context of conference theme one: *Librarians of Tomorrow*. In addition, it reports preliminary research on the topic of what motivates librarians and information professionals to attend leadership programs, such as the LLI. The research, which was conducted with a very small group and largely to test some survey questions, has provided some preliminary data, which speaks to the conference topic of professional education and continuous career development.

Library Leaders Institute (LLI)

In 2006 the LLI was founded by Canadian librarian Vicki Whitmell. The idea for the institute came from the founder's personal need for a different kind of interaction, thinking, and learning about leadership, than what she had found at many general library conferences, professional development and training seminars. Whitmell conceptualized, developed and delivered the institute as a place for leaders and aspiring leaders to rejuvenate and to meet and talk confidentially with others facing similar circumstances and issues. The format of the institute allows time for in-depth discussions and conversations with others; not only to seek advice but to listen and to help each other as much as possible. Two institutes have been held, one in 2006 and one in 2009 (http://www.whitmell.com/conference/leaders/index.htm).

According to Whitmell, the institute has evolved and it has helped participants to explore their aspirations for leadership, to focus and strengthen their personal and career goals, and to develop concrete action plans to reach those goals. The result has been that a significant number of the institute participants have moved into leadership positions and/or have made significant workplace and life changes based on their work and discussions with others at the institute.

Whitmell felt that general library conferences rarely gave her what she really needed — the time to connect and talk directly with others facing similar work situations and problems. Therefore, she developed the idea for something more intimate and canvassed a group of library directors about it. Overall their response was very positive. What was needed, they said, was a gathering where individuals could reflect on questions such as:

- What keeps me awake at night?
- If I could solve only one problem at work, what would it be?
- If I could change one, and one thing only, what would it be and how would I do it?

Invitations to the first institute were sent to library directors in public, academic, college and special libraries across Canada as well as leaders of library associations. The size was limited in order to keep the group small and the conversation intimate. Participants were expected to come to the retreat prepared to discuss issues, questions and ideas with required openness and confidentiality.

Twenty-four people from areas such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom attended the first institute. They were all in various places within their respective careers. Many chose to attend because they found themselves at a crossroad.

Another fundamental premise of the planning for the first institute was that Whitmell believed that career development must be tied closely to personal development and this premise has contributed to another key feature of the institute – the inclusion of a psychotherapist as one of the institute's facilitator. Psychotherapists generally work with people as they make important work and life decisions. During the institutes program there was time available for the psychotherapist to meet individually with participants one-on-one and in small groups to focus on personal change.

While no formal assessment of how participation in the first institute impacted on participants, Whitmell estimates that approximately 25% of participants made career changes soon after attending the institute.

A second institute was held in 2009 and the institute concept evolved further. While originally conceived as a type of retreat for senior library managers and directors, the institute through its second iteration, has found its home as a mid-career leadership development program.

Building on the success of the inaugural institute and with encouragement from professional colleagues, Whitmell held the second institute in 2009. Like its predecessor program, most of the participants were at or reaching a crossroad in their career. The involvement and role of the psychotherapist was retained. In addition, a role for an invited experienced librarian as a resource person (or senior practitioner "in residence") was added. I was fortunately to be invited to fulfill that role.

The role of the senior practitioner "in residence" was initially somewhat undefined but it did 'find its place' during the various activities of the second institute. I liken it to something akin to being the 'old person' at the back of the room, listening in on the conversations and chipping in with comments and reflections from time to time. On other occasions, participants would sit and chat and sometime ask amazing questions or proposition interesting professional approaches and models to kick off a conversation. It was a role I thoroughly enjoyed more so than I have ever expected.

For the second institute participants were asked to work through the program using the book, *Becoming a Resonant Leader* (Boyatzis *et al.,* 2008) as their guide. This publication promises to develop your emotional intelligence; renew your relationships; and sustain your effectiveness. It is an unusual publication in that the book is crafted as "a tool for personal and professional growth" and it sets out some tips for getting the most from the book.

Readers, or more accurately, users of the book are encouraged to:

- Do the exercises and write in the book
- Take time to reflect
- Think and feel as you go
- Consider working with a partner
- Don't be in a rush

- Realize that people are different
- Pay attention to how, when, and where you use this book.

Above all this book promotes leadership as a journey – that is, you commence at the beginning and move forward to your destination by progressively traveling systemically and logically from point to point.

Participants were also asked to complete an assessment questionnaire prior to their arrival at the institute and to be prepared to share their results and learning from that assessment tool with other participants. The InQ assesses your thinking profile and is a self-help guide to understanding the way you think. This tool claims that how you think affects everything you do:

- How you look at life
- How you interact with others
- How you approach challenges
- How you make decisions
- How you ask questions
- What you say and how you say it

Like the inaugural institute, much of the work and conversations at this second institute took place in small groups and one-on-one. However, this group bonded together so quickly that it continued to meet together at regular intervals since the initial 2009 institute experience. They have in-person network gatherings, and using LinkedIn software, a professional networking tool, have established an active electronic professional network for sharing thoughts, reflections, professional reading and general information. There has already been success, with some participants having made career changes taking on increased leadership responsibility.

Plans have not yet been made for a third institute, but it will continue as a place for participants to meet and discuss their desires, wants, and needs openly with others, to get and give advice, and to concentrate on their personal and professional development.

Leadership and the Broader Canadian Context

Over recent years, the question — "Where will the future leaders of Canada's libraries come from?" has continued as a topic of professional discussion and debate, especially following the release of groundbreaking research on *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries - the 8Rs Study* (Ingles, E.B. *et al.,* 2005), which revealed some interesting findings about meeting the management, leadership and business skill demands in libraries. The topic of leadership was also discussed at length at the invitation-only *National Summit on Library Human Resources* (The Intersol Group, 2009), held in Ottawa in October 2008.

In the academic library sector in Canada (and North America more generally) there is strong anecdotal evidence, reinforced by some research, that there is something of a crisis in library leadership. The 8Rs study found, among other things, that the possession of management skills and leadership potential are two of the most

important and difficult to fulfill competencies. Further, when senior librarians retire, leadership skills were more difficult to replace than general skills and knowledge. An even greater concern is expressed over the ability to replace leadership skills in the future.

Motivations to Attend a Leadership Program

Given the national context and the experiences of some individual libraries, the interesting question is: What motivates a library employee to participate in a leadership development program.

Through personal involvement, observation and experience with the LLI and the Library Leadership Development Program (LLDP) at the University Library at the University of Saskatchewan, and preliminary research, I have been exploring the answer to this question. In a recent paper (Williamson, 2009) I outlined some of the institutional imperatives and motivation for one research library to invest in the development and delivery of an in-house leadership program for its library employees. In the final section of this paper, preliminary data on the motivation of LLI participants is reported. While further work is needed to refine the survey questions before any broader application, the preliminary data from this survey with LLI participants highlights some interesting motivations.

In 2009, the eight participants in the second LLI willingly acted as a test group to assist me with some research design work. They completed a short survey about their motivations for attending a leadership program like the one they just completed. The small scale survey assisted in the refining of the survey questions, while the survey results provide some insight into what librarians are looking for in leadership training as well as their motivation to develop their existing leadership skills.

The following is a summary of the results of my research along with some demographic data on the librarians who participated in the second institute.

The first part of the survey looked at the specific motivational factors of the LLI-II participants. The seven participants who answered the question regarding their motivation for attending a leadership program completely agreed that they were internally and personally motivated to attend. When asked to mark their primary motivation to attend the program on a continuum from "Completely self-motivated" to "Completely externally motivated," four respondents marked that they were completely self-motivated, and three marked the box one level below completely self-motivated.

The participants were then asked if they were internally motivated to participate in the leadership program. Seven responded yes with one participant not answering the question.

For the participants who answered "yes" to the question about internal motivation, they then selected from a list, a series of reasons why they were internally motivated to attend. Of the responses, the participants all marked "to improve and develop my leadership skills," "for lifelong learning," and "to be a better learner" as reasons why

they were motivated to participate. Five of the respondents chose "to prepare for future promotions" and "to learn about myself," with four selecting "to develop for a current role" and "to add to current well-developed skills." Other responses chosen by one to three of the participants were "to broaden skills generally" (3), "to increase teamwork" (1), "to consider a career change" (2), "recently became aware of leadership potential" (1), "encouraged by others to attend" (1), "to increase productivity" (2) and "other" (2).

The participants were then asked to say in their own words why they decided to attend a leadership development program. An emphasis was placed on building upon existing leadership skills to become better leaders and for possible career advancement. Several candidates were interested in the group aspect of the program, wanting to learn from others in their field and discuss with them leadership amongst librarians. One respondent was curious about the program and was excited to find a leadership program tailored to his or her role as a librarian. All participants seemed keen to learn *new* strategies that would translate to their current positions.

On a scale from "not at all" to "completely," participants were asked whether they were engaged in their leadership development. Two respondents answered "completely" with the other five selecting one level down on the continuum.

When asked about the influence of the program, respondents had to decide on a continuum of "regressed" to "been significantly changed" what result the program had on their leadership development. One person said their leadership development had "been significantly advanced," three responded that their leadership development had "improved a lot" and the remaining three participants said their leadership development had "somewhat changed."

Participants were then asked to state their level of agreement with the statement – "Overall, I would rate my leadership development experience as outstanding" – on a continuum from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." Four of the participants completely agreed with the statement and three agreed with the statement.

Looking at the demographics of the group, four of the participants were female, and three were male. When asked how many years it had been since they graduated from a library science/techniques program, the responses varied from 1 to 24 years with most participants falling between 10 and 20 years.

The next question asked how long they were in a position where they were responsible for managing a library service, including supervising others. The responses fell between 1 and 19 years with one participant having no experience managing a library service. The answers fit into two ranges of 1 to 4 years and 12 to 19 years, illustrating the group's diverse experiences in library leadership.

Finally, the participants were asked to state the type of library in which they had spent most of their time in leadership roles. Five of the respondents worked in special libraries, one worked in an academic or research library and one worked in another unspecified type of library.

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to suggest any changes they would make to the survey. Four responded to the question. One prevailing concern was with the wording and meaning of the second and third questions on self-/internal/external motivations. One of the participants was unclear as to the distinction between self- and internal motivation. Another suggested that such terms be defined to provide clarification. It was also suggested that the third question – Were you internally motivated to participate in a leadership program? – was redundant and answered in the previous two questions.

The respondents also suggested additions to the survey. One wanted to learn about other leadership activities respondents have used such as readings, webinars, professional groups, and courses. On a similar topic, another participant wanted to know the number of leadership activities respondents had done in the past 12 or 24 months.

Looking to the Future

In the LLI we have a unique response to answering the challenge of where might the next generation of library leaders in Canada come from. This is not to suggest the LLI is the only response; nor the only program for leadership that is available. Many individual institutions (including the library at the University of Saskatchewan) and other established programs (such a Northern Exposure) are also building the knowledge, skills and abilities of librarian, who might fill leadership roles in the future.

There is also emerging international practice, which is being informed by a growing interest and discourse not only about leadership but about questions related to the broader topic of people in the LIS. There does seem to be an opportunity for research to inform the planning and development of leadership programs, if we have a better idea of what motives librarians to undertake leadership programs.

Hopefully going forward, more focused research work around the question of 'what motivates library employees to participate in leadership programs' will emerge to inform the development and delivery of such programs, which hold the key to the identification of future library leaders, who are critical to the on-going development and evolution of the LIS profession..

References

Boyatzis, R., Johnson, F. & McKee, A. (2008), *Becoming a Resonant Leader: develop your emotional intelligence, renew your relationships, sustain your effectiveness,* Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

Hernon, P. & Schwartz, C. (2008), "Leadership: Developing a Research Agenda for Academic Libraries", *Library & Information Science Research*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 243-249.

Ingles, E.B., 8Rs Canadian Library Human Resource Study (2005), *The Future of Human*
       Resources in Canadian Libraries, 8R's Canadian Library Human Resource Study, Edmonton, Alberta.

InQ (2001), *InQ: Assessing Your Thinking Profile*, InQ Educational Materials, Inc., Oakland, California.

The Intersol Group (2009), *National Summit on Library Human Resources,* Canadian Library Association, Ottawa, Ontario.

Williamson, Vicki (2009). Developing leadership to transform our library: the Library Leadership Development Program (LLDP) at the University of Saskatchewan [Presentation]. Available electronically from http://hdl.handle.net/10388/286.